

Conferment of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*  
A Citation

---

**The Honourable Anson Chan, GBM, CBE, JP**

For many people, both within the territory and beyond, Mrs Anson Chan Fang On-sang has stood for values that have made Hong Kong strong. She has been an unwavering advocate of an apolitical and impartial civil service and of the rule of law, which have been foundations of Hong Kong's remarkable economic success.

Mrs Chan is widely admired for her strength of purpose, her courage and integrity. As a public official she exemplified the traditional Confucian notion that it is by "德" or moral authority that administrations retain the essential trust of the people.

Mrs Chan's life helps the rest of us to understand the sources of moral authority in an exceptional individual. As she describes it herself, hers has been a fortunate and fulfilled life, a balanced life.

Mrs Chan was raised by capable women. From them she learned how to face adversity with courage and resourcefulness. She was born in Shanghai into an affluent family that moved to Hong Kong in 1948. Her father, a successful banker and businessman, a caring man, died suddenly in 1950, when she was ten. Her mother was faced with the task of bringing up eight children, the youngest of whom was two. Dauntless and resilient, she took the eldest boys off to England to oversee their education. The rest were left in the hands of another strong woman, Mrs Chan's paternal grandmother, and some uncles and aunts, who formed a close and loving extended family. Her grandmother received little formal education but was a wise, resourceful and strong woman who taught the children about duty to the family and about what was honourable and what was not. These were some of the values Mrs Chan has never ceased to live by.

Mrs Chan's education began at Sacred Heart Canossian College. Here too she was taught by strong and dedicated women. They were formed by a different tradition, but their values never seemed inconsistent with those of the home. Here she discovered a faith that was to be "an emotional anchor" for the rest of her life. She also discovered her lifelong passion for reading. When she entered The University of Hong Kong she chose to study English literature, a subject that has helped her to attain great powers of expression - to become, in fact, one of the most precise and articulate public speakers of the English language anywhere in the world. At university she met the man who was to become her husband, whose unfailing support has made her exceptional career possible.

Mrs Chan was fortunate to discover a vocation that enabled her to realize her outstanding capacities to the full. She loved the civil service from the beginning, and joined the administrative service at a time of great *esprit de corps*, when everyone was on first name terms. Contrary to myth, her rise in the service was steady but not rapid, and she learned to take the chancy business of promotion philosophically. But at some point in mid-career, she made the discovery from



which everything else followed. As she herself tells it: "I discovered who I am; who I want to be. "I discovered that I must live every day as honestly as I can, caring for those for whom I should care." Holding to this core of personal integrity meant release from excessive care about public opinion; finding peace within herself, not fretting in her conscience about decisions already taken, but being ready to move on to the next thing. It meant listening to those she knew would tell her the truth; and persuading those that disagreed with her rather than prevailing by force. It meant a willingness to exercise power, without which nothing can be achieved, but exercising it as judiciously and fairly as possible and accepting the responsibility that went with it. Finally it meant freedom from care about the outward trappings of power, so that she is now just as contented in retirement as she was in high office.

If Mrs Chan's rise in the service was not rapid, it reached new heights for a woman and for a Chinese. She became the first woman to head a government department, the first to head a policy branch and the first female civil servant to be appointed to the Legislative Council. In 1993 she became the first Chinese in 150 years of colonial history to be Chief Secretary and the first woman to do so.

Mrs Chan herself had fought for equality of opportunity for women. When she first joined the service in 1962, women were paid 75% of a man's salary at the same level. When they married women could be employed only on a temporary basis. She fought these inequalities as a founding member of a union for female government officials, which was to secure parity of pay in 1975 and parity of conditions in 1982.

Because of her achievements and her strong advocacy of gender parity, Mrs Chan is widely regarded as a role model for Hong Kong women, especially those who pursue careers. Her own view is that equality of opportunity should also involve the freedom to choose the vital roles of mother and wife. In her own case, she has been able to balance care for her family with her highly demanding positions. While her children were in primary school, she refused to employ a tutor and made it a practice to supervise their homework herself. Achieving the balance was never easy, but it would have been impossible without a husband who supported her all the way.

Among her many contributions to Hong Kong, there are two for which Mrs Chan will be long remembered. The first is the steady course she kept at the helm of the civil service before and after the reversion of sovereignty to China. This has done much to make "one country, two systems" a workable reality. The second is the setting in place of a far-sighted physical infrastructure programme that will be one of the cornerstones of Hong Kong's prosperity for years, perhaps generations, to come. This includes the airport core programme, the port extension programme and liberalization of the tele-communications market, which have helped Hong Kong enhance its place as a major transport and communication hub and a major centre of trade, finance and tourism in the Asia-Pacific region.

Mrs Chan's confidence in the future of Hong Kong is based on its people, their resilience, their capacity to innovate, to add creative value, to the products they produce and process. Hong



Kong's advantages also lie in the area of "soft infrastructure", in its heritage of the English language, its administrative framework, and above all in the rule of law. These she sees as assets more durable and precious than surpluses and even physical infrastructure.

Mrs Chan has received many honours. She was made Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire in 1992 and she received the Grand Bauhinia Medal in 1999. She has received honorary doctorates from Tufts University, USA (1995), the University of Liverpool, UK (1996), The University of Hong Kong (1996), and the Open University of Hong Kong (2000). She is also Honorary Director of the Tufts Institute for Leadership and International Perspectives, USA (1997) and Honorary Professor of Shanghai Jiao Tong University (1997). In 2000, she was made Honorary Fellow of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, UK.

A recent British Prime Minister said, "If you want anything said, ask a man. If you want anything done, ask a woman." In Mrs Chan's case, an account of her many deeds and achievements only tells part of the story. Described just before her retirement as one of the twenty most powerful women in the world, Mrs Chan is in high demand in many places as a speaker, lecturer and research consultant. Yet when she is in Hong Kong she sets aside half a day a week for Sacred Heart Canossian College, her alma mater, where she shares her experience with the girls. Mrs Anson Chan is a truly remarkable woman, and it is my honour to present her to you, Mr Vice-Chancellor, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.