

# THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

## FIFTIETH CONGREGATION

### Conferment of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*

#### *A Citation*

#### Lord Wilson of Tillyorn, GCMG

The descent to Kai Tak on a clear night reveals displays, like jewellery, of growth and prosperity scintillating for all to see through the good offices of China Light and Power. It is entirely possible that Lord Wilson, in his present capacity as Chairman of the power company that serves an area a quarter the size of the United Kingdom and stretching from the Clyde estuary to the Western Isles of Scotland, has similar plans for the northern part of the Scottish night sky. If so the neon signs would doubtless be in English, Chinese, and Scots Gaelic. Another of his current jobs is to chair the Scottish Committee of the British Council. He is also the Chancellor's Assessor of the Court of the University of Aberdeen, which means he is the senior lay member of the University's governing body.

Our honorand's previous activities in Hong Kong's seat of power during five difficult years of crisis were in no small measure responsible for maintaining the well-being and prosperity of the territory, for he is certainly one of those who have laboured to make a small, unremarkable trading post into one of the world's great cities.

The winding trail from youthful obscurity to the privileges and difficulties of running Hong Kong is a remarkable one. Born at Alloa, Scotland, on St. Valentine's day in the mid-nineteen-thirties, David Clive Wilson attended Trinity College, Glenalmond, then won a scholarship in History to Keble College, Oxford. Before Oxford, though, he served as an officer in the Black Watch, otherwise known as "the ladies from hell" because soldiers of this regiment wore kilts in the trenches in the Great War, 1914-1918. After Oxford, yet another kind of education followed when in 1958 he joined the Foreign Office.

In 1960 another surprise on the trail: two years of Chinese language study at Hong Kong University, where he emerged as one of Professor Ma Meng's very brightest students. His next posting was Peking in 1963 at roughly the same time that our university was born. Many Hong Kong links had been made and the first steps taken on the unforeseen trail that led to Lord Wilson's gracious acceptance of the invitation to be here today.

After two years in Peking, he returned to the Foreign Office, Far East Department. Then Academia beckoned, he resigned from the diplomatic service, and became

Executive Editor of *The China Quarterly* in London University's Contemporary China Institute at the School of Oriental and African Studies. In 1973, he obtained a London Ph.D. for his work on British relations with the Kuomintang in the 1920s. During these years he had met D.C.Lau, then Professor of Chinese at SOAS, later Dean of Arts, and now Honorary Professor of the Institute of Chinese Studies at Chinese University.

A fluent speaker and reader of Chinese, with an enduring interest in contemporary China and Chinese culture, Dr. Wilson was now hiking steadily towards a distinguished academic career. Unexpectedly, he changed course again in 1974, rejoining the diplomatic service, a rare feat. Three years later he was back here as political adviser to the Hong Kong Government. After testing his mountaineering mettle as a member of the British expedition to Mount Kongur in China, he returned to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. When he was just forty-nine, he found himself participating in the negotiations over the future of Hong Kong and acting as senior representative for Britain on the Sino-British Joint Liaison Group.

He became a Knight Commander of the Order of St. Michael and St. George in January, 1987. On April 9th. he returned, taking up his duties here as Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Hong Kong. As a diplomat, he did not expect to be given this job. In theory the governor has enormous power; in practice power is used sparingly. Lord Wilson looks back on it all as the most fascinating job one could ever do. Among his most dramatic and testing moments must certainly have been that period of anguish and doubt unleashed by the events in Tiananmen Square, after which he had to re-build the territory's confidence.

In January 1991 he was made Knight Grand Cross of his order, and the following year, he was the first governor to be made a Life Peer while still in office, taking the title Lord Wilson of Tillyorn. His choice of title acknowledges the place where he has a cottage and also his enduring love of fantastic landscapes, perhaps gained as a young man when he led an expedition to Mount Roraima, the model for Conan Doyle's book, *The Lost World*.

As student of contemporary China and diplomat, Lord Wilson became one of Britain's best China experts, contributing significantly to the negotiations on the future of Hong Kong and the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984. As Governor, he had to keep three plates spinning on the end of bamboo poles: British, Hong Kong, and mainland Chinese dishes, with sometimes contrasting ingredients and of conflicting culinary interest. Despite inevitable wobbling, he maintained stability, a key factor in our prosperity here, launching far-sighted and far-reaching changes, such as the new airport project, more consultation and increased numbers of elected seats in the legislature, improved highways,

sewage treatment, care for the quality of the environment, and the very rapid expansion of tertiary education. We in the university strive to rise to the challenges he has set us.

As Chancellor of the university, Lord Wilson always encouraged our quest for excellence through teaching, research, and many international links. During his term we acquired the famed research magnet for Contemporary Chinese Studies, the Universities Service Centre, and we established the Hong Kong Institute of Biotechnology. He also helped foster our close and highly valued association with Yale University.

No account of him should omit the Wilson Trail from historic Stanley Gap to the beautiful Pat Sin Range, a symbol now of his affection for Hong Kong and its people, where, I am told, he would outpace even his bodyguards. On these cloudy peaks it is not too fanciful to see the Scottish landscape imaged fleetingly in Nature's mirror.

Mr. Chancellor, this is the last occasion in Hong Kong's history that a British Governor may confer on his predecessor an honorary degree. Lord Wilson is a man whose background as a diplomat and whose great knowledge of Chinese people and contemporary China helped him to keep the three plates spinning. That very demanding balancing act did not always make him popular, but he managed it without sacrificing his personal integrity in public service. It is my singular and happy duty to present David Clive Wilson for the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.

January 18, 1996