

THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

THIRTY-FOURTH CONGREGATION

Conferment of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa

A Citation

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Confucius might have said, "It is a foolish man who praises his old master in front of his new"; nevertheless, this is the task I am undertaking today, such is the lot of Public Orators. As a learned Sinologist, Mr. Chancellor, you will know that Confucius was too honourable a man to have proffered expedient advice of this kind; such Machiavellian pronouncements are more apt to have come from the brush of Han Fei Tzu. But Confucius did say this in The Doctrine of the Mean which the late Lord Fulton of Falmer used in his citation when presenting Dr. Ma Lin for the award of Doctor of Science, honoris causa, at the University of Sussex. Quoting Confucius, Lord Fulton said,

"The great exercise of righteousness is in honouring the worthy."
" 義者宜也。尊賢爲大。 " (《中庸》第二十章)

He was citing James Legge's translation of Confucius. My colleague Professor D.C. Lau renders it in a different way, thus: "To be right is to be fitting, and of things that are right, the most important is the exalting of superior talent."

As Professor Lau's publisher, I am bound to say that his is the more accurate rendering. But without wishing to be drawn into an academic argument over whether "賢" is better translated as "the worthy" or "superior talent", let me hasten to say that the man we are honouring today is both. Born into a family of classical Chinese scholars where "the fragrance of books lingers through many generations", Ma Lin is the fifth of six children of the late Professor Ma Jian who held the Chair of Chinese for many years at our sister university. Growing up under the tutelage of his scholarly father, Ma Lin had a studious childhood in a household where the great Chinese classics were a staple diet and great men of letters frequent visitors. He showed an early fondness for swashbuckling novels like The Romance of the Three Kingdoms, but unlike his father and elder brothers who had a literary bent, the young Ma Lin soon fell under the enchantment of the natural sciences, in particular, of Chemistry. And so it was natural for him to embark on the study of Chemistry when he attended the West China Union University during the latter half of the Second World War. Distinguishing himself as a young scientist of early promise, Ma Lin continued his good work at the University of Leeds after a spell of teaching at his alma mater and was awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in 1955. In the ten years between leaving Leeds and starting his teaching career at the University, the young Dr. Ma Lin did post-doctoral

research at the University College Hospital in London and St. James's Hospital at Leeds and later taught Clinical Chemistry at the University of Hong Kong.

The year 1964 marked the beginning of a long and mutually rewarding association between Dr. Ma and the University. On joining the University as Lecturer in that year, his talents were quickly recognized and he was promoted to Senior Lecturer in Biochemistry within a year. Numerous administrative duties followed and he served variously as Head of the Department of Chemistry, Head of the Department of Biochemistry, Associate Dean and then Dean of the Science Faculty. He was promoted Reader in Biochemistry in 1972 and became Professor of Biochemistry a year later. From 1973 to 1978, he was Chairman of the Senate Committee on Staff-Student Relations. Mr. Chancellor, when Professor Ma Lin became Vice-Chancellor in 1978, fourteen years after he started his career at the University, he was well equipped for the job, although his native modesty forbade him from asserting himself forcefully.

Those who know Professor Ma will probably agree that modesty and a certain tentativeness in demeanor are the hallmarks of the man as academic and administrator; but he can also be firm when the situation warrants, for it is difficult to imagine any Vice-Chancellor being able to achieve anything without taking authoritative action when the pros and cons are evenly balanced or when the ayes match almost exactly the nays. In fact, people who know Professor Ma Lin well will know that underneath the self-effacing modesty is a burning desire to enhance the good name of the University both at home and abroad. To this end Professor Ma devoted himself, sometimes at great personal sacrifice, and the result of nine years of dedicated endeavour is here for all to see. Mr. Chancellor, if the raison d'être of universities is the creation and dissemination of knowledge through research and teaching, and I for one can think of no more worthy end, then on both scores this University has made a significant contribution under the distinguished leadership of our former Vice-Chancellor.

As a scientist, Professor Ma brought to his office a logical mind with a penchant for rational arguments; at the same time, when all was said and done, he was fully capable of taking decisions with the wisdom of one who had had a Confucian upbringing. Above all, he was a Vice-Chancellor who allowed himself the benefit of wise counsel from the many men and women he had gathered around him, so that in matters of consequence concerning the University as a whole, the collective wisdom of our senior academics nearly always prevailed. In honouring its former Vice-Chancellor, therefore, the University is honouring itself and affirming its achievements under his stewardship. We also like to think of this as the crowning accolade and fitting tribute to a career that has already received recognition from many quarters, including the election to a fellowship of the Royal Society of Arts, elevation to the rank of Commander of the Order of the British Empire by Her Majesty the Queen, the conferment of the degree of Doctor of Science, honoris causa, by the University of Sussex and the degree of Doctor of Letters, honoris causa, by the University of East Asia, and last but not least, the award of the Order of the Rising Sun with Gold Rays by His Majesty the Emperor of Japan.

Mr. Chancellor, for twenty-four years now The Chinese University of Hong Kong has held steadfast to the original aims and mission of the founding fathers. We have also maintained a course structure which best enables us to

achieve those aims. During this time, we have been given, dare I say it, "a high degree of autonomy" under the concept of one city, two university systems. We have been fortunate in Vice-Chancellors who uphold academic freedom and Chancellors who respect it. And freedom is, in the words of T. E. Lawrence, "the seven-pillared worthy house" which makes every sacrifice worthwhile. Under such a liberal environment, the pursuit of knowledge which alone leads man in his ascent has been given free rein. On this happy and memorable occasion, with Vice-Chancellors past and present both on centre stage, let us express the hope that this great tradition which Professor Ma Lin cherished, defended and upheld will long endure.

With these words, Mr. Chancellor, I present to you Professor Ma Lin, Professor Emeritus, respected scientist, educationist, administrator, legislator, community leader and former Vice-Chancellor of the University for the award of the degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa.

October 15, 1987