

THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

TWENTY-SEVENTH CONGREGATION

Conferment of the Degree of Doctor of Laws honoris causa

A Citation

The Honorable Mr. Justice T.L. Yang

The two pillars of traditional Chinese political philosophy were Confucianism which emphasised the importance of rites and education and Legalism which saw law and punishment as having more direct and definitive effects. In practice the statesman made use of both approaches to obtain a judicious mixture which would, ideally, elicit the best from both of them. While such a compromise avoided the pitfalls of the extremes, the two Schools in effect counteracted each other, thereby stultifying the free individual development of both. And this is still a problem with Chinese politics today. On the other hand, law and education are in the West conceptually associated with two separate and distinct ideals, namely justice and knowledge. Just as "render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God", so it was considered natural that legal and educational institutions should each develop in its own separate way without interfering with each other - so separate that, as a matter of fact, they often become divided from each other. This is indeed a fundamental difference between the thinking of China and that of the West. Nevertheless, Mr. T.L. Yang does in more than one sense cross that line: a prominent figure on the bench while at the same time also the key person responsible for bringing together the Government and universities, he nevertheless does not suffer from a conflict of roles or from the multifarious demands made on him. This surely speaks for the calibre of his intellect and the breadth of his learning which enable him to move from one culture to another with ease. It must only be a metropolis like Hong Kong which can produce Mr. Yang's breed, and it must be persons of Mr. Yang's versatility and learning who can bridge the gulf separating the East from the West.

Originally from Zhongshan County of Guangdong Province, Mr. Yang grew up in a Westernised family in Shanghai. Having studied law in Suzhou University, the Hong Kong University and also University College, London, he earned his Bachelor of Law from London University and was called to the Bar at Gray's Inn in 1953. Returning to Hong Kong in 1956, he joined the Judiciary and made steady progress in a distinguished legal career in which his talents have been well recognised: having served as Magistrate, Senior Magistrate and then District Court Judge, he was made a High Court Judge in 1975 and then a Justice of Appeal in 1980, when he barely turned 50, that is, at the age when one begins to realise one's own destiny.

Apart from work on the bench, Mr. Yang has chaired a number of commissions of public inquiry investigating highly publicised and controversial cases like the 1972 rainstorm disasters, the 1976 Leung Wing Sang case and the 1980 MacLennan case, admirably acquitting himself in these tasks with coolness and aplomb despite the heat and heavy pressure which must have come to bear on him. Outside of the forbidding judicial chamber Mr. Yang is a concerned community leader and has devoted considerable effort to various community work such as assistance to discharged prisoners, the prevention of child abuse, and the Rotary and Boy Scouts movements, etc.

But his major service to the community has undoubtedly been made in the area of education. He has been active in the governing bodies of institutions of higher learning ever since 1970, having served on the Board of Governors of Baptist College, on the Board of Trustees of Chung Chi College of this University, first as a member and then as Vice-Chairman, and on the Council of this University. He has also served on the Court of Hong Kong University since 1979. In view of this experience and of the high esteem in which he is being held, he was invited by Government to serve on the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee, first as a member in 1978 and then as its Chairman in 1981. The past several years have seen many changes for higher education in Hong Kong: it has undergone two comprehensive reviews and then entered a period of rapid expansion, as evident from the establishment of the Hong Kong City Polytechnic, the institution of degree courses at the Hong Kong Polytechnic, the change in status of Baptist College into a subvented organization, the establishment of the Dental School at Hong Kong University and of the Medical Faculty as well as the Part-time Undergraduate Degree Programmes at this University, and also the hard-won recognition of the importance of academic research, for which the support level is being increased. It would be hard to imagine all these developments without seeing the moving spirit of Mr. Yang in them, and he surely should be remembered when present efforts to expand, diversify and modernise higher education of Hong Kong finally come to fruition some time in future.

In recognition of his distinguished service to the community, especially to higher education, Mr. Chancellor, may I request Your Excellency to confer upon Mr. T.L. Yang the Degree of Doctor of Laws honoris causa.

October 18, 1984.