

THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

TWENTY-THIRD CONGREGATION

Conferment of the Degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*

A Citation

Professor Yuet Wai KAN, F.R.S.

Like me, Dr. Y.W. Kan is a member of a family which has its roots firmly planted in Hong Kong, an alumnus of Wah Yan College and a graduate in medicine of the University of Hong Kong. Fortunate for Dr. Kan but unfortunate for me, the similarity ends there, for few could and would have chosen the career of scientific research which he took up after he left Hong Kong for the States soon after taking his degree in 1958, and fewer still could have achieved the many distinctions which have now crowned his career, including a fellowship of the Royal Society. Only just now I said that this fellowship is a signal honour for a scientist and only sparingly given. For Dr. Kan, it is an even greater honour because he is the first ever Chinese to be elected. It is not easy to explain in words of one syllable the work which Dr. Kan has done. To quote the citation by the Royal Society, Dr. Kan is distinguished for his analysis of globin gene polymorphism in human populations and of human disorders affecting haemoglobin synthesis. To translate, he has made many significant contributions to the science of molecular biology by studying the genetic aspect of hereditary blood disorders. I am not so sure this is an improvement but let me tell you that among other things he discovered that the early visitors from Europe to China, including Marco Polo and his gang and those who came after him, had left their marks on the genes of the indigenous population. But above all, he has developed a technique to detect certain blood-cell abnormalities at a very early stage in the foetus, so that it is now possible to plan the proper management of such cases. The title of his present appointment, at the University of California, San Francisco, Professor of Medicine, Biochemistry and Biophysics, is an indication of the versatility of both the man himself and his work. The Chinese University of Hong Kong has now a Faculty of Medicine, which is only months old. As we proceed to grow, we will honour distinguished medical men from time to time, and we cannot have a more distinguished candidate than Dr. Kan to decorate the list at its very top. I now ask you, Mr. Chancellor, to confer on Dr. Kan the degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*.

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