

Conferment of the Degree of Doctor of Social Science, *honoris causa* A Citation

Mr. Alex K. Yasumoto

Mr. Alex Yasumoto left his native Japan for the first time at the age of 40 to expand his family's business. He quickly came to see that in other cultures people took quite different approaches to business and to life, and he soon discovered the benefits of alternative ways of thinking. The experience had a profound effect on Mr. Yasumoto. By crossing cultural boundaries, he learned something unexpected about others; he also learned something unexpected about himself. He came to see internationalization as a keystone of education.

In this he was partly following in the footsteps of his father, Kamenori Yasumoto. Born the second son to a Confucian scholar in Jeju Island, Korea, Kamenori Yasumoto made the challenging journey to Japan in 1927. There, at the age of 18, he had to negotiate cultural differences and overcome language difficulties. These early experiences were lessons that stayed with him. Once he had successfully transplanted himself, he first engaged in rubber production, then in property development and started to donate the profits of his companies to society. A firm believer in giving back to the community much of what the community had given to him, Mr. Yasumoto senior left a significant legacy to support youth education.

Alex Yasumoto continued his father's work, expanding the property business into Hong Kong and Australia. He also set up the Kamenori Foundation, following the terms of his father's will. The Foundation aims "to advance the mutual understanding and friendship between Japan and the countries of Asia and Oceania, particularly through the exchange of the younger generation." It supports Asian students for overseas exchange, as well as the teaching of Japanese language and culture. Mr. Yasumoto's own dream is to see closer relations between China and Japan as well as within the region, led by business cooperation of the kind that has produced peaceful economic partnerships in Western Europe.

Mr. Yasumoto is highly appreciative of the business system and culture in Hong Kong. He sees Hong Kong as a great model of an international city, whose destiny is to become not just the business and financial centre of China but of East Asia as a whole. Mr. Yasumoto's business has prospered here, and like his father he believes in giving back to the community much of what he has earned here.

At The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Mr. Yasumoto found an international ethos and aspirations that matched his own educational ideals. In 2005, he made a magnanimous donation to enhance opportunities for our students to undertake international academic and cultural exchanges. The Yasumoto International Exchange Scholarship Scheme is the largest ever established at the Chinese University. In the past

two academic years, more than 500 students of the University have been sponsored to study for up to a year at prestigious universities in 25 countries and regions around the world. The scheme will support generations of CUHK students in the years to come. It will be complemented by Yasumoto International Academic Park, which will provide an on-campus space where international and local students can congregate, bond and share their dreams and aspirations about the world of the future.

At the colourful Inaugural Ceremony for the Scholarship Scheme last June, Mr. Yasumoto explained how keen he was to provide students with opportunities of the kind he did not have himself until the age of 40. He inspired the gathering with his vision of an education without borders. "Internationalization," he said, "provides the stepping stones to understanding different cultures." It "means not just understanding others but also accepting others." It "means not just accepting others but also understanding oneself."

Mr. Yasumoto has a distinctive business philosophy, based on getting the best out of himself and his employees. His personal motto is, "Think positively." A critic of micromanagement and a fear-driven ethos, he believes in creating an affirming corporate environment in which employees are given freedom and scope to realize the goals of the business in their own way. In this way he builds on the strengths his staff possess, who in turn willingly work hard for him.

For his own part, Mr. Yasumoto would rather "work smart" than work too hard. When things do not work out as planned, he believes in what he calls "feedback to base", which means returning to basic principles, and especially to the question, "Why did I start the business?" With a renewed focus on his core vision, he is empowered to consider alternative approaches to the question in hand.

A believer in a balanced life, Mr. Yasumoto wants enough time to spend with his wife and young children, as well as his leisure interests. Although he could retire altogether, he believes in continuing to work partly because the business supports his staff as well as himself.

We too can learn from Mr. Yasumoto's approach to work, life and experience. We can learn from him that education has no borders. In fact sometimes the most valuable lessons come to us when we take the risk to cross borders. We can learn also that education does not end in the classroom; it is a lifelong process.

Mr. Chancellor, it is my honour to present to you Mr. Alex K. Yasumoto, entrepreneur, philanthropist and committed supporter of internationalization, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Social Science, *honoris causa*.

This citation is written by Professor David Parker