

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



**Dr Lui Che Woo, MBE, JP, LLD**

Arriving in Hong Kong by air, whether as a first-time visitor or as a home-coming citizen, one cannot help but be impressed by the magnificence of the International Airport at Chek Lap Kok. Leaving the airport and proceeding to the splendid Tsing Ma Bridge that spans the emerald sea, one's breath is further taken away by the immense developments of tower blocks that line the way to town. These sights inspire awe and elicit praise, for Hong Kong is indeed a great metropolis much frequented by the captains of commerce and industry. However, as Hong Kong continues to fascinate, few have given much thought to how the splendours have come about, and who are the unsung heroes that have laboured hard for this cause, quietly and behind the scenes. Dr Lui Che Woo, the renowned "King of the Quarry", is one of these remarkable personages whose devotion to Hong Kong is manifested through outstanding achievements and substantial contributions to the community. Dr Lui's K Wah Group was one of the builders of the Hong Kong International Airport, and the principal supplier of tar to the Tsing Ma Bridge. The concrete products of the K Wah Group have been extensively used in public- and private-sector building projects over the years, providing a firm foundation to the tower blocks that stand in every corner of Kowloon and Hong Kong.

Dr Lui Che Woo is an outstanding entrepreneur and a philanthropist of note. His family originated in Sanhui Prefecture in Guangdong, and his grandfather, having spent years in the United States, moved to Hong Kong and bought properties here. Dr Lui's father was a garment manufacturer and took his son, then aged four, to Hong Kong. Che Woo completed primary school here and then entered a grammar school, but his studies were interrupted by the Second World War and the Japanese occupation. A teenager at the time, Lui Che Woo learnt how to survive and indeed thrive in the face of adversity. Despite a raging war, rampant famine and wide devastation, he made good use of his exceptional talent and an acute business sense to exploit opportunities. Thus began a distinguished career in commerce. In his wartime achievements one may also see the beginnings of that remarkable commercial statesmanship with which he was to rule his immense business empire so effectively in the years to come.

Shortly after the Second World War Mr Lui was assisting his uncle in a car spare parts dealership. He soon acquired a thorough knowledge of the business and, with great diligence and excellent inter-personal skills, he took advantage of a timely opportunity for an important breakthrough in his career. It was the early 1950s, and he had learnt by chance that the Americans had left in Okinawa a large quantity of military supplies from the Korean War. By dint of courage and tact, Mr Lui successfully negotiated for these materials and, when he returned to Hong Kong, had with him a ship fully loaded with heavy military construction machinery. From then on in Hong Kong, manual quarrying gave way to excavation by heavy machinery.

Dr Lui Che Woo has an uncanny ability to discern the extraordinary amidst the ordinary,



and to recognize business opportunities which others do not recognize. What are rocks and stones to others are, to him, precious resources for urban development. He founded the K Wah Company in 1955, specializing in quarrying and the production of stone blocks, concrete and other construction materials. In those years of rapid urban expansion, as large scale building programmes took place to form the splendid conurbation that we know today, Mr Lui's group of companies made the most significant contributions.

The K Wah Group has come a long way since its foundation over four decades ago. It is now an international conglomerate with business interests in Hong Kong, Mainland China, the Asia-Pacific region as well as major cities in North America. Dr Lui Che Woo is the Chairman of the K Wah Group in Hong Kong, as well as subsidiary enterprises such as K Wah International Holdings Limited, K Wah Construction Materials Limited, K Wah Properties (Holdings) Limited and Stanford Hotels International. The K Wah Group is actively involved in construction materials, real estate and hotel businesses, with close to 10,000 employees engaged in more than 200 companies all over the world. This enormous business empire is diversified in its activities and yet well-knit and united under the command of Dr Lui in the pursuit of efficiency and excellence, thus ensuring its leadership position within the industry. A brief examination of Dr Lui's business philosophy and management concepts will shed light on how this has come about.

Despite the vast scope and diversity of his enterprises, Dr Lui believes in strategic, global planning and keeping all data and information at his fingertips, so that he can strike when opportunity calls. He also believes that all actions must stem from interest, and that nothing is impossible where interest is supported by the will to achieve, and by a fair amount of self-confidence. Dr Lui is also known for his creativity and entrepreneurial spirit, which have helped him to progress with the time, seeking diversification and making vital decisions amidst the myriad rapid mutations of modern society. Dr Lui has been remarkably successful in integrating the clearly defined management principles of the West with the traditional concept of loyalty much admired in the East. He chooses his employees wisely and delegates with trust. This fusion of the management philosophies of the East and the West has served him well. To Dr Lui, business management is both a science and an art, and those who practise advanced management must have cultural knowledge, the capacity to accommodate valid suggestions and proposals, and the willingness to constantly seek progress and renewal. In half a century of business achievements Dr Lui has applied these theories in the building of his immense empire, from the establishment of the quarrying business in the 1950s, through the practice of real estate since the 1960s, to investment ventures in the Mainland and the United States and the launch of American real estate and hotel projects in the 1980s, and investments in Macau from the 21<sup>st</sup> century on. And, over all these years, Dr Lui has indeed gone from strength to strength in the furtherance of his business activities.

Apart from sustained growth in Hong Kong, the K Wah Group is proactively investing in the Mainland and Singapore, and K Wah Construction Materials Limited is one of the five major suppliers of building materials in Hong Kong, its principal markets being Hong Kong, Macau and the Mainland. In the United States the Lui family holds 17 five-star hotels which specialize in



accommodation for the business traveller and, in 1998, his company became the 12<sup>th</sup> largest hotel consortium in that country. Dr Lui is very fond of the hotel industry, for it is not a speculative business, but one in which progress is made steadily and on a sure footing, without empty slogans, but with flexibility exercised in a general atmosphere of prudence. These are, of course, very much in line with his own investment philosophy. Dr Lui is a staunch supporter of professional training for the hotel industry in Hong Kong, and an eminent backer of the Chinese University's plans for the establishment of its teaching hotel and the School of Hotel and Tourism Management. On various occasions he has repeatedly expressed in public his wish and enthusiasm for the development of Hong Kong as a centre of excellence in hotel management in Asia. Furthermore, Dr Lui is a participant in the development of advanced technology in Hong Kong, and since the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century his quarrying company has adopted advanced, ecologically friendly facilities to reduce dust, and special departments have been set up within the company to ensure environmental safety and employee health, the ultimate goal being the dual advantages of modern environmental protection: "to protect in the course of development" and "to develop in the course of protection". Dr Lui has a special concern for the future of Hong Kong, and has proposed on many public occasions that the business opportunities coming with China's entry into the World Trade Organization are too precious to be missed. In his view, Hong Kong should capitalize on the advantages it already possesses to become the leader in commerce, trading, as well as municipal development within the Pearl Delta, and then to scale new heights upon this basis. The foresight is particularly relevant at the present time as Hong Kong citizens are beginning to rebuild their confidence.

Despite a full business and public service schedule, Dr Lui has never failed to find time for charitable causes, to which he has contributed in very substantial amounts. Medical services and education in particular have benefited from his generosity. Take the Wuyi University in Jiangmen as an example, Dr Lui was the sole donor of the Great Hall and the Science and Technology Building. Apart from generous giving, he personally liaised with other Wuyi residents abroad, for their support and contribution to the development of the University. In addition, Dr Lui has contributed substantially to establish various educational funds which have facilitated the development of institutions ranging from the primary to the tertiary, and great are the numbers of those who have been assisted in various ways in their quest for education. Dr Lui Che Woo was appointed a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire in 1982 and a Non-Official Justice of the Peace in 1986. He was elected a Citizen of Honour of Guangzhou and Jiangmen in 1993, and of Nanjing in 1994. In appreciation of his outstanding contributions, the Purple Mountain Observatory in Nanjing named the asteroid 5538 in the international series the "Lui Che Woo Star" in 1995. In 1996 he was presented the "Outstanding Contribution Award" in Guangzhou. In 1997 he received the Award for Contribution in the *Zhenxingdaze* Series and an honorary doctorate in Laws from Victoria University in British Columbia in 2001.

The public offices that Dr Lui has held are too many to enumerate. The major appointments include membership at the Ninth National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, membership on the Selection Committee for the First Government of the Hong Kong



Special Administrative Region, Chairmanship of the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals in 1981/82, a directorship of the Hong Kong Tuberculosis, Chest and Heart Diseases Association, and the Chairmanship of the Federation of Hong Kong Hotel Owners and the China Association (HK) for Science and Society. He has also been the Founding President of the Hong Kong-Guangdong Economic Development Association, an Honorary President of the Hong Kong-Shanghai Economic Development Association, the Honorary Principal of Wuyi University, Jiangmen, a member of the Board of Directors of Fudan University in Shanghai, the Honorary Dean of Business Administration of Yangzhou University, and an Advisor to the Chinese Economic Research Centre at Peking University. Such is the renown and esteem in which he is held, and such the effect of his benevolence.

Dr Lui enjoys a very happy family life and celebrated the golden anniversary of his wedding not too long ago. The five children in the Lui family are all participating in the family business and creating their own success and achievements, abiding by their father's principles of self-reliance and unyielding diligence. Dr Lui himself is a modest, broad-minded man, and takes an interest in music and the arts. His residence is decorated with robust pine trees and pools of splendid *koi*, which are renowned among the stately homes in Hong Kong and reflective of the elegant taste of the owner.

Dr Lui Che Woo has always given his strong support to tertiary education in Hong Kong, and his munificence is particularly abundant at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. He has been on the Board of Trustees and the Endowment Fund Committee of United College since 1995, and has sponsored the University and the College with enormous amounts for various academic purposes, including the establishment of the Dr Lui Che Woo Scholarships to facilitate exchange programmes with Cornell University for students in the School of Hotel and Tourism Management. In recognition of the scale and range of his contribution to worthy causes in Hong Kong, the Mainland and abroad, and his outstanding achievements which directly bear on the prosperity of Hong Kong, Mr Chairman, I present to you Dr Lui Che Woo for the award of the degree of Doctor of Social Science, *honoris causa*.