

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

Eleanor Wong, OBE, JP

Three things mark Ms Eleanor Wong's contributions to Hong Kong: innovation, entrepreneurship and benevolence. Ms Wong was inspired by the examples before her as she was growing up. They were part of a family legacy that she is proud to have carried on.

Her grandfather, C Y Wong, was a pioneer of the textile-dyeing industry in China, setting up in Shanghai around the turn of the century. The second of his five sons was Eleanor's father, Wong Toong Yuen. Born in 1908, he was destined to take over the family business. He had the toughness and astuteness to guide it through difficult times in the 1930s and the late 1940s when the family left Shanghai for Hong Kong. He became one of the most dynamic and successful figures in the world of Hong Kong manufacturing.

Her father was undoubtedly the major inspiration in Eleanor Wong's life. In some ways the traditional Chinese father, he kept his thoughts and feelings to himself. To his daughter he was a model of quiet benevolence to those in need, preferring always to give anonymously through a third party. In other ways he was a man ahead of his time. He believed strongly that girls should be given the same opportunities as boys. Ms Wong and her two sisters, Sally Leung and Miranda Tang, were encouraged to take active roles in public life. One sister has dedicated herself to charity work in Hong Kong and the other has actively contributed to the governance of leading hospitals in New York.

Ms Wong herself was sent to the United States for her education. She graduated from Simmons College in Boston in 1955 with a B.Sc. in Accounting. After she left college she worked as a legal secretary in a lawyer's office in New York, where she became aware for the first time of cases of discrimination against Chinese. After twenty years in America, Ms Wong suddenly received a summons from her father to return to Hong Kong. But it was not a call to return to a life of luxury and leisure. T Y Wong had bought a textile-knitting factory. Being a shrewd judge of character, he wanted his daughter to run it. At the time she knew little of textile factories and nothing at all about running one.

This sudden immersion in the world of heavy responsibility was one of the turning points in Ms Wong's life. "All success," the saying goes, "comes from the right person being in the right place at the right time." In textile manufacturing in Hong Kong in the 70s and 80s, Ms Wong found her place and her moment. Through her capacity to innovate and to create new markets, she gave the business a truly global dimension. Hers is very much Hong Kong's success story in these years. She was one of those at the heart of the story; one of those that made it happen.

What Ms Wong made of the textile-factory, however, is only one side of the picture. The other side is what the factory made of her. Her thousand employees taught her about the working people of Hong Kong. After the affluent ease of America she was struck by the extraordinary



capacity for hard work of her employees, many of them recent refugees. She found herself inspired by their initiative and their hunger for self-betterment. After working a ten-hour day they would line up outside her door asking for overtime. From this Ms Wong caught a glimpse of what she saw as the potential greatness of Hong Kong, in the sheer industry and entrepreneurial spirit of the people. This experience helped to shape the commitment she was to bring to her leadership of some of Hong Kong's key trade and professional associations over many years -- organizations that have also played an important part in the story of Hong Kong's prosperity.

Her experience in manufacturing taught Ms Wong both pragmatism and vision. She learned about markets, to "start small" with products, not to over-extend, to be flexible and, above all, to face the need for change and innovation. In the early 90s Ms Wong herself realised that Hong Kong society and its economy were changing. The moment for large-scale textile manufacturing in Hong Kong had passed. She sold her textile factory. The future of Hong Kong, she believes, lies in ideas and education, especially in the area of new technology. This belief lies behind her keen support of innovation and entrepreneurship, for example in the scholarships her family has funded at this University to promote and encourage these very qualities. Her aspiration is "to build something new in Hong Kong" by bringing entrepreneurs together with young people and their ideas. Despite today's global uncertainties and local economic hardships, Ms Wong is optimistic about the long-term future of Hong Kong.

Ms Wong has generously served many worthy causes across a broad spectrum of activities. To name only a few: as a businesswoman, she has helped Hong Kong become a world-class textiles centre; she was a member of the Textiles Advisory Board for 12 years; she has chaired the Garment Advisory Committee of the Hong Kong Trade Development Council; she was on the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee from 1984 to 1987; she is a Life Member of the Society of the Academy of the Performing Arts; she has been a major benefactor of the Friends of the Prince of Wales Hospital; like her sister Miranda Tang she has been a member of the President's Council of the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York.

Ms Wong has been a great advocate and supporter of education for the least fortunate in mainland China, such as the children in an elementary school she visited that had mud floors and unrendered brick walls. She saw it as her responsibility to help these children make a start in life. This support is also evident in her work with her Shanghai high school alma mater. Together with several of her old classmates, Ms Wong helped to form an alumni association that funds secondary schooling for young girls from the remote rural areas of Jiangxi Province who would otherwise receive no education. 80% of these girls are now attending university. Ms Wong believes this kind of help may provide one of the best hopes for breaking the poverty cycle in these destitute regions of China.

Ms Wong and her family have also worked tirelessly to promote education within Hong Kong. Her emphasis has been on ensuring that the less gifted and most vulnerable teenagers are given schooling opportunities and the hope of a self-supporting career. For example, she has worked closely with and supported middle schools in the New Territories to make sure that such



youth are given technical or professional training.

Fortunate herself to be born into a family of great affluence, Ms Wong is moved to effective action by the needs of others. In the 70s she had the vision and the compassion to employ mentally and physically handicapped people in her textile factory. She was one of the first in Hong Kong to do so. She has been a major benefactor of various charities such as the Community Chest of Hong Kong, Save the Children Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Cancer Fund. In these situations, Ms Eleanor Wong has made a difference. She is, in the true sense of the word, a philanthropist - as well as an active supporter and patron of the performing arts, higher education and health care. I am privileged to present Ms Eleanor Wong to you, Mr Vice-Chancellor, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Social Science, *honoris causa*.