

THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

FORTY-SECOND CONGREGATION

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

A Citation

Dr Edwin H C Tao, DEng

Dr Edwin H C Tao is typical of industrialists in Hong Kong, who, having come from the mainland, went on to receive their education in the West before launching into successful careers here. And yet Dr Tao is a unique case in terms of his personal achievements and his commitment to the community.

He was born in Beijing, and first went to school there. The Sino-Japanese War soon broke out and he was forced to continue his education in the southern part of China. He went to college, first in Shanghai, at St. John's University, and later in Kunming, at the National Southwest Associated University. Among other things, St. John's was known for its excellent English standard, something Dr Tao was later to put to good use. As the Japanese made an inroad into the coastal region in the south, Dr Tao moved to Kunming. While keeping up with his study in engineering, Dr Tao started a humble business, as it were, when he and two other college friends obtained some kind of franchise to supply subtitles for English films at a local cinema in Kunming. The extra income certainly made their life during the war slightly more tolerable. He has, in fact, since kept up his interest in languages. He is well versed in several Chinese dialects, including Putonghua, Shanghainese and the Yunnan dialect, not to mention Cantonese, which, from what I can determine, he speaks with hardly any accent at all. His knowledge of foreign languages is also considerable. He is quite at home in English - and occasionally offers advanced proficiency courses for his staff. He has also spent a number of years studying French.

But before he graduated, the situation further deteriorated and he went on to join the military service and taught in an engineering corp training school. Again, it was a straightforward job, for officer trainees at the school hardly had any knowledge about machines. After the war, he went back to college and obtained a degree in engineering from Qinghua University. For his further studies, Dr Tao chose the United States but he had yet to spend another year for his second honors degree from Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology. Dr Tao's Master's Degree was from Yale University and he also managed to gain some practical training before returning to Hong Kong in 1952. If the story sounds rather involved, it is precisely the kind of experience many Chinese intellectuals had to go through at that time.

If Dr Tao's early years have been turbulent ones, his engineering career since the fifties is marked by steady progress as well as many achievements and increasing involvement in the

improvement of Hong Kong's engineering industry and tertiary education. He served as Engineering Director of several engineering companies before being appointed General Manager and Managing Director of American Engineering Corp. In 1983, he began his career in consultancy and served as senior manager of Ryoden Engineering Co. Ltd. Currently, he is Director of Rankin & Hill (H.K.) Ltd., which is a full-capability international engineering consultancy firm with 25 offices located in various parts of the world. As a successful engineer, Dr Tao was a former President of the Hong Kong Institution of Engineers and the Hong Kong Engineering Society as well as senior or honorary fellow of various local, American and U.K. engineering bodies, including the Chartered Institute of Building Services Engineers, Institution of Mechanical Engineers (London), American Society of Mechanical Engineers, just to name a few of them.

Dr Tao is devoted to the achievement of engineering excellence in Hong Kong through close association with tertiary institutions, engineering institutions, government committees and industry in general. He is currently Chairman of the Advisory Board of the Industrial Centre as well as External Examiner for the Mechanical and Marine Engineering Department of the Hong Kong Polytechnic, and Chairman of the Vocational Training Council's Electrical Industry Training Board. But what is particularly noteworthy about Dr Tao is that he practices what he preaches. He has for many years devoted time and effort to supervising the training of young engineers for professional qualifications as well as teaching extramural and diploma courses on a regular basis. According to Dr Tao, the practice is not exclusively altruistic, for he firmly believes in "jiao xue xiang zhang" ("Teaching and learning go hand in hand"). It is particularly important in a field like engineering to keep an open mind and to remain in touch with the latest developments.

His association with The Chinese University of Hong Kong also dates back several decades, beginning from the early days when New Asia College was still at Farm Road. From 1978 to 1991, he graciously served as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the College and had made great contributions to the College's development. Currently, apart from his involvement at New Asia, he is also a member of the Chinese University Council and the University Campus Planning and Building Committee. Dr Tao also served on the Engineering Academic Advisory Committee to help the University establish a new Faculty of Engineering.

His commitment to education is, in fact, not restricted to Hong Kong. He spent years promoting engineering linkages between Hong Kong and institutions in the United Kingdom and the United States. Currently he is also engaged in drawing up recommendations for accreditation of engineering programmes and curricula for universities in China. He has also served in fields not directly connected with engineering. For instance, he was formerly chairman of the Rotary Club of Hong Kong Island East, Yale Club and the Qinghua Alumni Association, Hong Kong, and a member of the Basic Law Consultative Committee and the Executive Board of the Ocean Park Corporation. For his selfless devotion to the general well-being of the community and for his outstanding achievement in the field of engineering, he was awarded an honorary doctoral degree by Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, his alma mater in 1988.

Mr Chancellor, may I respectfully present a most successful industrialist and engineer, an able administrator and a selfless educator, Dr Edwin H C Tao, for the conferment of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.

24th October, 1991