

THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

THIRTY-SIXTH CONGREGATION

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

A Citation

Sir David Akers-Jones, KBE, CMG, MA, DCL (Kent), JP

When future historians come to write the history of Hong Kong in the last twenty-five years, from 1963 to 1988, they cannot but credit our city with the speed and magnitude of change over a time span which is no more than one generation. In these twenty-five years, we have grown from an entrepot to a manufacturing, business and financial centre, to the world's leading container port, and leading exporter of garments, toys and electronic goods. What impresses is not just the skyscrapers, first-class roads and magnificent shopping arcades, impressive as these may be. What also impresses is the phenomenal expansion in the provision for housing, hospital care, social welfare and of course, education. To give but one example, the quaint and cloistered setting that was Chung Chi College in 1963 has been transformed into the expansive and magnificent Chinese University campus you see today.

In a world given to euphemism, the term developing territory is often a misnomer. But in the case of Hong Kong, we are a developing territory in the true sense of the term and associated with many if not all of our breathtaking developments over the last twenty-five years is Sir David Akers-Jones, a well-known and much-respected figure in our community.

David Akers-Jones first set eyes on the Far East during the last world war as a young man of seventeen who was then serving in the merchant navy of the British India Steam Navigation Company. After the war, he entered Oxford and read English Language and Literature up to the death of Chaucer. One might perhaps assume from that that anything after *The Canterbury Tales* is too unexciting to be of interest to this undergraduate. It was at Oxford that he met and fell in love with a beautiful young actress who was appearing with the Liverpool Playhouse. This was Miss Jane Spickernell, daughter of Admiral Sir Frank Spickernell, now Lady Akers-Jones. Not long after, they married and the young David Akers-Jones joined the Foreign Office.

He was enrolled in the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London to learn Mandarin as it was called in those days, but after a year of hard work and having made some headway with the language, he was promptly despatched to Malaya where the ethnic Chinese spoke Hokkien. Barely four years later, just when he had mastered Hokkien, David Akers-Jones was, again, transferred to Hong Kong where the lingua franca of the local population was Cantonese.

In Hong Kong in 1957, his first posting was to the Department of Trade and

Industry where he was put in charge of Hong Kong's emergency rations. In those days, this consisted of 10,000 tons of firewood, 20,000 tons of soya beans, and 500 tons of corned beef - supposed to be sufficient for a city of nearly three million people for six weeks if the need ever arose. The use of firewood as fuel for our stoves may be unthinkable to some of our younger graduates today. But those of us who do remember do so with great relief. We have come a long way.

From Trade and Industry, David Akers-Jones moved on to become, successively and successfully, the District Officer of Tsuen Wan, the Islands and Yuen Long, then Deputy District Commissioner, District Commissioner, and Secretary for the New Territories. Except for a four year spell in the Lands Department, his career in the New Territories spanned some eighteen years. Finally, in 1981, the Government in its infinite wisdom decided to give him the freedom of the city as well. He became the first Secretary of the City and New Territories Administration, and in 1985 Chief Secretary. For his dedicated and distinguished service to the Crown and to Hong Kong, he was appointed a Justice of the Peace in 1958, made a Companion of the Most Excellent Order of St. Michael and St. George in 1978 and was knighted in 1985 shortly after becoming Chief Secretary.

Just when Sir David-Akers Jones was ready to serve out his last days in the Hong Kong civil service as Chief Secretary, a dramatic turn of events catapulted him into the highest office in the territory. The sudden death of Sir Edward Youde left Hong Kong bereaved and without a Governor. And so, from December 1986 and your own arrival in Hong Kong in April of last year, Mr. Chancellor, Sir David Akers-Jones was Hong Kong's Acting Governor for five months during which time he acted as a Governor should. He ensured that, in the words of the Hon. Lydia Dunn, then Senior Member of the Legislative Council, that there was "no slackening of the vigorous and progressive pace at which the government worked" and he delivered to you "a thriving, energetic and well-governed society".

Mr. Chancellor, the facility of Sir David Akers-Jones as a linguist is well-known. Besides Anglo-Saxon, Old English, Old French, Hindi and Malay, he also knows Hokkien, Chiu Chow, Hakka, Cantonese and lately Putonghua. His knowledge of the Chinese languages also extends to literature. For a man who is so well-versed in the language of the Chinese University, it is interesting that he should have chosen the following epigrammatic advice of Lao Tzu for the wall in his office. The passage from Chapter 60 of the *Tao Te Ching* reads:

" 治大國若烹小鮮 " (《 道德經 》 六十章)

"Governing a large state is like boiling a small fish."

Mr. Chancellor, I do not know how British people boil their small fish or if they boil them at all, but Professor D.C. Lau, in his translation of this passage of the *Tao Te Ching*, found it necessary to explain that "a small fish can be spoiled by being handled". Sir David Akers-Jones does not need to read this footnote. He understands the ethos and sensibility of the Chinese people and their *modus operandi*. Perhaps he knows that when

it comes to politics, Americans run for public office, Britons stand for election, but Chinese people wait to be drafted, or they engineer themselves into positions of influence.

With consummate skill and characteristic detachment, this master administrator went about building up the district administration scheme into a blue-print for representative government. At first the members of the District Boards were drafted. They were then persuaded to stand. Perhaps in 1991 some of these will get up and run. As the Chinese translation of Sir David's English name suggests in the Cantonese dialect - 鍾逸傑 - he was in the thick of things every day, initiating, persuading and orchestrating - all in the interests of Hong Kong, and always without losing sight of the ultimate objective. And at the end of the day, like a painter whose work is accomplished, he brings to mind this passage in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*:

"The artist, like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails."

We at the Chinese University remember Sir David Akers-Jones particularly fondly for his five month tenure as Chancellor during which time his single most important contribution was that he left us alone. As the Hon. Lydia Dunn said on another occasion in praise of the wisdom of letting things be, "Government should be given credit not only for what it does, but also for what it does not do". Receiving the honorary degree of Doctor of Civil Laws from the University of Kent in 1987, Sir David himself had this to say about the magic formula which has made Hong Kong successful,

"It is that the creative energy of its people is given full opportunity to flourish by pragmatic administrative policies which discourage unnecessary intrusion and interference in the management of human affairs."

At this our 25th anniversary, with the educational ideals and course structure of our university facing perhaps their most formidable challenge, I speak for many members of the University when I laud the wisdom of Lao Tzu and sing the praise of Sir David Akers-Jones for their profound knowledge of the art of government.

With these words, Mr. Chancellor, I present Sir David Akers-Jones, 鍾逸傑, the reclusive sage, a Knight of the realm, former Chief Secretary, Acting Governor, Advisor to the Governor, artist and architect of district administration and representative government, the man most responsible for the phenomenal development of the New Territories, now Chairman of the Housing Authority, painter and Hong Kong believer for the award of the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.

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