

THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

THIRTY-FIRST CONGREGATION

Conferment of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa

A Citation

The Hon Mr Justice Simon Fook-sean Li, LLB, Barrister-at-law

When the Qin Dynasty gave way to the Han Dynasty, men of talent and ambition rose to take advantage of the opportunities thus opened up and accomplished a great many monumental deeds. However, it was probably due to the methodical clerk Xiao He rather than anyone else that Han was able to unify China and bring peace to millions. Having shown no outstanding qualities nor performed heroic feats, Xiao nevertheless did appreciate well before all others the importance of gathering the maps, archives and census records of the previous Dynasty, and of understanding the woes and needs of the common man. He was thus able to smoothly usher in a new start for the country. Today, Hong Kong is also at a major turning point, and men of intelligence and drive are rising to the call of the times ready to make their mark. Taking a lesson from the past, do we not now also expect that the future peace and prosperity of this city will again depend on the incessant efforts of experienced men like Mr Justice Li who are working quietly behind the scene?

A native of Heshan of Guangdong Province, Mr Li grew up in Hong Kong and studied law in the University College of London University after the War, earning his LLB in 1950. He was called to the Bar at Lincoln's Inn in 1951 and took up an appointment in the Chancery Chambers during the following year. Returning to Hong Kong in 1953, he was appointed Crown Counsel and then Senior Crown Counsel in the Legal Department, crossed over to the Judiciary as a Judge of the District Court in 1962-71, was appointed a Judge of the High Court in 1971-80, elevated to Justice of Appeal in 1980 and four years later on account of his seniority was made Vice-President of the Court of Appeal, the highest position in the Judiciary ever held by a Hong Kong Chinese.

In 1982 China and the United Kingdom commenced talks on the future of Hong Kong, and two years later made a Joint Declaration announcing that Hong Kong would become a Special Administrative Region under Chinese sovereignty in 1997, and as such would be governed in accordance with principles laid down in the Joint Declaration and a set of Basic Law to be made according to these principles. Once announced the Joint Declaration drew strong and divided public response, and if the future of Hong Kong was to be decided as agreed upon then it became essential that local views be conveyed to the British Parliament in order that there would be a basis on which for it to ratify the agreement reached in the Joint Declaration. At this juncture Mr Li decided to accept appointment as a member of the Independent Monitoring Team on the Assessment Office testing the Acceptability of the Sino British Draft Agreement, and after months of dedicated work was able to

achieve his mission and made it possible for the Agreement to be signed by both sides on time. As soon as the Agreement came into effect, the drafting of the Basic Law became a pressing task if Hong Kong was to ensure future long-term stability. As a leading authority in the legal profession, Mr Li again accepted appointment as a member of the Drafting Committee for Basic Law and as the person in charge of the Working Group under the Committee on Inhabitants and Other Person's Rights, Freedom, Welfare and Duties, thus further increasing the heavy responsibilities he is shouldering on behalf of the people of Hong Kong. It is indeed fortunate that Mr Li comes from an established local family with many of its members taking key positions in business, industry, the professionals and the Government, and that Mr Li is himself a scholar steeped in the legal tradition of the West and most experienced in its practice. Clearly it would be propitious and reassuring to have a man of his background, training and attitude to participate in the deliberations on the Basic Law, and his contribution to this most important task can be expected to be substantial indeed.

In recognition of his distinguished service to the legal profession and of the many efforts he has made for securing the future of the Territory, Mr Chancellor, may I request Your Excellency to confer on Mr Justice Li the Degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa.

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