

Dr John CHEN Sau-Chung

Citation

When John Chen left Hong Kong for the United States in 1973, he did so as the product of a hard-working, but poor family; one of the many who struggled to make a life here after fleeing the disruption that shook Shanghai in the wake of the revolution. His English was shaky; but his determination to better himself was firm, as he was to prove, brushing aside hardships and discrimination on the way.

Today, the man we honor is known globally as a technology industry leader. He is Chairman, Chief Executive Officer and President of Sybase, one of the world's largest independent software vendors that, in the words of *Forbes* magazine, he "helped bring back from the dead". His tactical genius is well-proven as is his ability to combine technological know-how with management skills.

He is actively involved in efforts to improve Sino-US understanding and was among the first American business executives to argue in favor of normal trade relations. He sits as Vice Chairman on the Committee of 100, an organization founded by distinguished Chinese-Americans to strengthen ties between the two countries.

He is a board member of the US Chamber of Commerce, a member of the Listed Company Advisory Committee to the NYSE Board of Directors and, since 2004, has sat on the board of The Walt Disney Company.

John Chen was born in Hong Kong in 1955 and grew up in a one-bedroom apartment while his father worked two jobs at a time. At 18, he moved to the US, overcoming linguistic challenges to graduate from Brown University with a Bachelor of Science degree in electrical engineering with Magna Cum Laude honors. The

next year he completed his Master's in the same subject at the California Institute of Technology.

Fine achievements for a young man studying in a foreign language. However a greater achievement, perhaps, was to overcome the difficulty he faced in the early stages of his 13-year career with Unisys/Burroughs in Pasadena. He spent thousands of his own dollars on public speaking classes to nail the stereotype that Asians could not negotiate and interact at the higher levels of management. With that achieved, he went on to hold several key positions with the company.

John Chen's next stop was at the Pyramid Technology Corporation, which he joined in 1991 as Executive Vice President. Within two years he became President, Chief Operating Officer and a board member. When Siemens Nixdorf Informationssysteme took over the company, he joined its executive board of directors, being further elevated to President and CEO of its US\$3 billion Open Enterprise Computing Division, a job that took him to Munich, Germany.

Then, in 1997, came the challenge that defined his career. The 42-year-old John Chen was recruited as President and Chief Operating Officer of Sybase, a database software company in serious trouble with an annual loss tagged at US\$55 million.

John Chen was up to the challenge. The result: a dazzling turnaround that has seen profits restored, Sybase make major acquisitions including AvantGo and New Era of Networks, and launch successful subsidiaries such as iAnywhere that dominates unwired enterprise software, and Financial Fusion, a major facilitator of online banking.

He joined the Business Software Alliance's important lobbying efforts in Congress and worked hard to see China win World Trade Organization (WTO) membership. He is a member of the board of governors of the US Center for Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Council on Foreign Relations.

In October 2005, President George W Bush appointed John Chen to the President's Export Council (PEC), a bipartisan committee of prominent business leaders and politicians that advises the US Government on export and international trade policy.

His other good works include board membership of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, supporting the Watson Institute for International Studies, assisting poor and abused children, and playing a key role in the \$40 million campaign for the Chang-Lin Tien Center for East Asian Studies at UC Berkeley. He also supports the Dragon Fund, which raises money to improve education for women and girls in rural China, and was awarded an honorary professorship by Shanghai University.

The younger generation has responded to his example. While it is common to hear him praised by established sources, we prefer to record the reaction of one talented student who listened to him speak here two years ago. Boris Yim has just graduated from this institution and aspires to join a postgraduate program in the US. He said: "John Chen's success assures me that personal strengths, accompanied by a measure of luck, will help one weather challenges that seem insurmountable."

Mr Chancellor, I have the honor to present to you, on behalf of the University, Dr John Chen Sau-Chung, technology industry leader, facilitator of better relations between China and the US, and friend to aspiring Asian students, for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration *honoris causa*.