

The Hon WONG Yan Lung

Citation

When you have moved from pushing an ice-cream trolley from Causeway Bay to the Central Peak Tram station to help your father with his work as a street vendor to being the second person to hold the crucial HKSAR government position of Secretary for Justice, it would appear you have done well in life.

But Wong Yan Lung, outstanding former government minister, successful barrister, empathetic community volunteer, loyal eldest son, and dedicated father, has done much more. He has stayed out in front in who he is as well as his outward achievements. HKUST is not the only institution to recognize his many accomplishments recently and, characteristically, he has said that in accepting these honors, he does so not for himself but for the Department of Justice and colleagues in recognition of their work.

Thinking of others has been a theme throughout Mr Wong's impactful life.

A member of the 1960s generation, Mr Wong grew up in a postwar sub-divided tenement in Wanchai, and later in public housing at Wah Fu Estate, near Aberdeen. Busy assisting his father from Primary Two onward, he quickly learned to use his restricted time to study effectively, securing a secondary school place at prestigious Queen's College. There, he soon became first in his form and a stalwart of the school's winning debate team. Later, as head prefect, he would

discuss school regulations with teachers, sparking an initial interest in rules and behavior. Bright, a skilled communicator, and intrigued by the administration of governance, undergraduate study and a career in law beckoned.

In the early 1980s, he took his first plane ride, heading to the UK and Magdalene College at the University of Cambridge after winning a Prince Philip Scholarship, an award scheme for talented local young people set up by Friends of Cambridge University in Hong Kong. The initially daunting encounter with a new culture and study environment was made more testing for Mr Wong when he was knocked down on his bicycle near the beginning of his stay, putting all 10 fingers out of action for five weeks. This baptism by fire was met by typical enterprise and endeavor by recording his supervisions and lectures, working extra hard over the Christmas term break, and eventually being in the happy position to lend out his very tidy and substantial collection of notes to less organized classmates.

Called to the Bar in England & Wales and in Hong Kong in 1987, Mr Wong rapidly built a successful practice as a barrister following his return to the city, specializing in constitutional, administrative, property and civil law. He was appointed a Senior Counsel in 2002. Over the years, he has also brought his diligence, focus, training and integrity to many public service offices for the legal profession and the community.

His appreciation of the opportunities he received from the community while growing up and Hong Kong's unique post-handover position made serving as Secretary for Justice from 2005 to 2012 a willing responsibility.

The rule of law is far more than a system of governance or regulation of people's behavior, according to Mr Wong, but an attitude, a cherished norm in a community, one that is embraced not because you are being watched, but because you believe and accept the system as a core value, and will abide by it even when not being watched.

Assisting the constitutional development of the Basic Law and one country, two systems, and advancing Hong Kong as a sophisticated, truly cosmopolitan international city, was a challenging but immensely satisfying undertaking, he has said. The invaluable part he has played in this regard was recognized in 2012 by a Grand Bauhinia Medal, Hong Kong's highest honor. His citation noted his "significant contribution in upholding the rule of law and in safeguarding the public interest".

As a father of three young daughters as well as a core member of Hong Kong's "can-do" society, he also sees belief and action in a good cause as important for positive development.

With a deep understanding of poverty from his childhood days, a strong Christian faith, and a drive to do more than simply accumulate money, in the 1990s Mr Wong became involved with the homeless as a frontline volunteer. Over many years, his Thursday evenings from 7pm to midnight would be spent buying rice boxes, referring welfare organizations, or simply

befriending those in need. He has served on the Steering Committee of the Hong Kong Christian Concern for the Homeless Association and as Vice-Chairman of the CEDAR Fund, a relief and development organization.

"From my experiences in the past, I believe if you start by helping out others, you end up a more fulfilled and happier person," he has said. We can all learn from such an attitude.

Mr Council Chairman, on behalf of the Council of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, I have the high honor of presenting to you, the Hon Wong Yan Lung, GBM, SC, and former Secretary for Justice for the HKSAR Government, for the award of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*.