Paul M F Cheng has accomplished what many of us aspire to, but rarely achieve: a balanced life. In his remarkable business career, he has chaired and sat on the boards of several major Asian companies and chambers of commerce. His outstanding record of public service includes work as an advisor to Beijing on Hong Kong affairs, a legislator and, more recently, an adjunct professor here at The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. And in his private life, he has carved out time to be a devoted family man and a regular on the golf course and tennis court. Despite all the demands placed on him, he remains cheerful and relaxed, an inspiration to his wide circle of colleagues, employees, students and friends.

A self-described moderate, Mr Cheng has always sought to steer a middle course — to strike the right balance — whether in business or politics. Taking a neutral stance, listening to all sides of a debate and seeking a balanced view; these have been the hallmarks of his approach.

Mr Cheng spent many years in the business world both before and after his involvement in politics, fine-tuning his abilities to listen to and motivate others. His business skills run in the family — his grandfather developed the successful Amow Canning Company from a small soy sauce business in Fujian. Mr Cheng’s parents had aspirations of having a doctor in the family and Mr Cheng attended Lake Forest College in Illinois to prepare for medical school. But, recognizing where his true talents lay, he had a change of heart. With his family’s support, he enrolled in the Wharton Graduate School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania and earned an MBA.

From there, he carved out a fast-rising career. He moved to New York and worked for IBM and consumer group Richardson Vicks for four years, before deciding to return to Asia. Working initially from Singapore, he became manager of the Asian operations of pharmaceutical giant, Warner Lambert, and moved on to become head of regional operations with Spencer Stuart. A legendary chance meeting with the head of Incheape at a London cocktail party, and again on the subsequent flight home to Hong Kong, led to Mr Cheng joining the company and eventually becoming chairman of Incheape Pacific. He has also been chairman of bankers N M Rothschild and Sons (Hong Kong).

His work experiences in a wide range of industries clarified for him the qualities needed to lead people. Mr Cheng is a believer in being firm and fair, but not authoritarian. He listens to those around him before making a decision. And he lets his staff get on with their work. His role is to motivate and look after his team, so they can provide him with the best possible input.

These are also qualities demanded in the public arena. Hong Kong has been good to Mr Cheng and he has been keen...
to give back and help it succeed. In 1987 he became the first Chinese chairman of the American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong, and chaired the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce from 1992-94. He had the ear of Beijing in the 1990s and became an advisor on Hong Kong affairs. He served as a legislator both before and after 1997, and was a member of the Preparatory Committee that guided the handover. As a moderate, he has always sought to keep sight of the ideals but to take account of the practicalities. His bridge-building approach has also led him to be named a Justice of the Peace, a recipient of the Chevalier de l’ordre de la Couronne from the King of Belgium and an honorary citizen and economic advisor to the city of Nanjing.

Today Mr. Cheng leads a somewhat quieter life, in the belief that it is time for a younger generation of leaders to take up the reins. But the theme of balance continues to play out, through what he describes as the “three-legged stool” of family, business and public life. He continues to make time for his family and sport, and is a Steward of the Hong Kong Jockey Club. He remains busy at work, managing private investments and acting as an independent non-executive director of Esprit, Wharf, Sino Land, Kingboard Chemical Holdings and Hutchison Harbour Ring, in which capacity he is keen to promote good corporate governance. And he is continuing to give back to society, especially in the field of education.

Mr. Cheng is an advisor to Peking University’s China National Committee for Pacific Economic Co-operation and the China Center for Economic Research, as well as a member of the Executive Committee of the PRC-based All China Federation of Industry and Commerce. In Hong Kong, he sits on the Council of The Chinese University of Hong Kong and teaches here at The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, where he invites his high-powered friends to give lectures and says he enjoys learning from his students.

Undoubtedly, Mr. Cheng has much to teach his students about being pragmatic, sticking to your guns and staying positive — all qualities that have stood him well in his dealings in business and politics. He encourages young people to speak their minds and not be shy because the business world is always looking for new ideas. Mr. Cheng also likes to stress the importance of commitment, as well as qualifications, to young people. Because he practices what he preaches — by demonstrating a deep and serious commitment to everything he does and being open to new ideas — Hong Kong political and business life is much the richer.

Mr. Pro-Chancellor, I have the honor to present to you, on behalf of The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Mr. Paul M. F. Cheng, crusader for better corporate governance, for the award of Honorary Fellowship.

Mr. Cheng, in service at home and abroad, has also been an excellent public servant. He served as a legislator both before and after 1997, and was a member of the Preparatory Committee that guided the handover. As a moderate, he has always sought to keep sight of the ideals but to take account of the practicalities. His bridge-building approach has also led him to be named a Justice of the Peace, a recipient of the Chevalier de l’ordre de la Couronne from the King of Belgium and an honorary citizen and economic advisor to the city of Nanjing.

Today Mr. Cheng leads a somewhat quieter life, in the belief that it is time for a younger generation of leaders to take up the reins. But the theme of balance continues to play out, through what he describes as the “three-legged stool” of family, business and public life. He continues to make time for his family and sport, and is a Steward of the Hong Kong Jockey Club. He remains busy at work, managing private investments and acting as an independent non-executive director of Esprit, Wharf, Sino Land, Kingboard Chemical Holdings and Hutchison Harbour Ring, in which capacity he is keen to promote good corporate governance. And he is continuing to give back to society, especially in the field of education.

Mr. Cheng is an advisor to Peking University’s China National Committee for Pacific Economic Co-operation and the China Center for Economic Research, as well as a member of the Executive Committee of the PRC-based All China Federation of Industry and Commerce. In Hong Kong, he sits on the Council of The Chinese University of Hong Kong and teaches here at The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, where he invites his high-powered friends to give lectures and says he enjoys learning from his students.

Undoubtedly, Mr. Cheng has much to teach his students about being pragmatic, sticking to your guns and staying positive — all qualities that have stood him well in his dealings in business and politics. He encourages young people to speak their minds and not be shy because the business world is always looking for new ideas. Mr. Cheng also likes to stress the importance of commitment, as well as qualifications, to young people. Because he practices what he preaches — by demonstrating a deep and serious commitment to everything he does and being open to new ideas — Hong Kong political and business life is much the richer.

Mr. Cheng has earned the respect of those around him not only for his dedication to community service but also for his ability to bring people together. His approach to problem-solving is rooted in the belief that through cooperation and mutual understanding, solutions can be found to even the most challenging issues. He has been a driving force in bringing about positive change in his community, and his commitment to serving others is a testament to his character.

Mr. Cheng has played a significant role in advocating for the importance of education and the need to foster a culture of learning in Hong Kong. He has been instrumental in establishing partnerships between universities and local businesses, providing students with opportunities to gain practical experience and connecting the academic world with the real world of work.

In recognition of his contributions to the community and society, Mr. Cheng has received numerous awards and honors. His dedication to public service and his unwavering commitment to the betterment of Hong Kong have earned him the respect and admiration of all who know him.

There is no doubt that Mr. Cheng is a true leader and an inspiration to all those who have had the privilege of knowing him. His commitment to community service and his ability to bring people together are qualities that we should all strive to emulate. He is a true role model and his legacy will continue to inspire future generations.