

Honorary Doctor of Social Science

Dr CHOW Yei-ching

Citation written and delivered by Professor Roderick WONG Sue-cheun

Chancellor:

In the Chapter on the Duke Ling of Wei in *The Analects of Confucius*, the sage has this to say: “The gentleman has morality as his basic foundation and puts it into practice by being modest and trustworthy. Such is a gentleman indeed!” A person of cultivation is always modest and faithful and anchors his life and conduct in morality and treats people with consideration. In his leadership position and in the management of both his personal and public affairs, Dr Chow Yei-ching, the Chairman and Managing Director of the Chevalier Group, brings to life the teachings of the sage: benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, humility, trustworthiness and loyalty. On the basis of these attributes he has established a glorious enterprise and made significant contributions to society.

Dr Chow Yei-ching’s family hails from Zhoushan, near Ningbo, Zhejiang Province. He was born in Shanghai in 1935. In 1952, when he was 17, Dr Chow came to Hong Kong by himself to join his sister. Failing to fulfil the admission requirements, he missed the opportunity to attend the University of Hong Kong, the only university in Hong Kong at the time. But something lost is something gained. This temporary setback only brought him greater success. As it was his childhood ambition to join the air force, Dr Chow decided to follow the inspiring example of his brother-in-law who was then a fighter pilot in the air force. In the second year of his arrival in Hong Kong, Dr Chow entered the Republic of China Air Force Academy as an overseas student. His dream of flying was thus realised. In addition to enjoying the sensation of soaring in the sky, Dr Chow has always relished the excitement generated by speed. He also enjoys riding his Harley motorbike. At 67, in 2002, astride his Harley, Dr Chow sped his way from Hong Kong to Shanghai, covering the distance in nine days. His passion for adventure, clearly, does not seem to have diminished even a bit. Perhaps it is precisely this type of boldness and resolve of spirit that spurs Dr Chow on, enabling him to march towards his goal and become a top player in the business world.

Dr Chow later studied mechanical engineering at National Taiwan University. After leaving Taiwan, he returned to Hong Kong and worked in a Japanese company. In 1970, when he was barely 35 years old, he established the Chevalier Group, marking the end of his days of being just a name on the payroll. After more than 30 years of expansion, the Chevalier Group has now become an internationally famous transnational corporation, with business in Hong Kong, Macau, in the mainland of China, South East Asia, Australia, Europe, North America and the Middle East. The number of employees has increased from six in the initial stage of the Group to more than 7,000 today. The Group owns two Hong Kong-listed companies, with a diversified portfolio (including construction, civil engineering and environmental engineering, insurance, information technology, trading, lifestyle food and beverage, property development, and hotels).

Dr Chow has always regarded personal credibility as being of paramount importance in the business world. In the early stages of his career, Dr Chow was sometimes short of funds and had to seek help from friends. Yet his credibility enabled him to overcome hurdle after hurdle to establish the business group he has today. Each time he was granted a loan, he repaid it on time or even ahead of time. He strongly believes in credibility and trust — earning them and building them up — as the crucial key to success.

While he places high importance on his personal credibility, he is all the more concerned with that of his company. “My personal reputation and that of my company are one and the same,” he once said. He demands his employees deliver what they promise the clients. Dr Chow sets a good example for his employees. It is one of his proudest achievements that the Chevalier Group enjoys excellent credibility in Hong Kong, on the mainland and other places around the world.

Among the 7,000 employees in the Chevalier Group, there are quite a few who have stood side-by-side with Dr Chow for more than 20 years. Dr Chow knows exactly how best to put their talent to work. He respects and trusts his employees and cultivates among them a sense of belonging to the Group. The company therefore works together with a single mind, bringing to reality the company mission “to strive for customer satisfaction and quality excellence.” Dr Chow believes in the essential goodness of human nature. As long as one treats other people with sincerity and consideration, other people will reciprocate. For Dr Chow, the only criterion by which a leader should judge people working under

him is the latter's ability. If a colleague has shown himself over a period of time to have the right character and ability, Dr Chow will pay special attention to nurture him by giving him free rein. Dr Chow understands that nobody is perfect and that we are all liable to make mistakes. Knowing that he is no exception in this regard, he advocates tolerance in the flaws of others. As long as they commit no moral mistakes, they should be treated with forbearance.

True to his aspiration to "take from society and give to society," Dr Chow Yei-ching remains active in philanthropic work and community affairs, despite the many things that require his attention. He has assumed many public offices, including serving as Vice Patron of The Community Chest of Hong Kong, President of The Japan Society of Hong Kong, Permanent Honorary President of the Hong Kong Alumni Association of National Taiwan University, President of the Hong Kong-Shanghai Economic Development Association, and President of the Ning Po Residents Association. In 1996, he was elected to the selection committee for the First Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. He once served as Director of the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals and Yan Chai Hospital, and was once a standing committee member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference of Shanghai.

Dr Chow spares no effort in his support of the development of education in Hong Kong and the mainland. Apart from sponsoring a wide range of education programmes to provide the younger generation with better educational opportunities, he also involves himself in various institutions of higher education in Hong Kong and the mainland by serving as an advisor and a member on their boards of trustees. He established the Chow Yei Ching Foundation and the Chevalier Culture and Education Foundation. Through his involvement in and organisation of events in areas of art, culture, education and philanthropy, these two foundations seek to promote cultural, scholarly, artistic and educational exchanges among the mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau. City University of Hong Kong is also fortunate enough to be a beneficiary of Dr Chow's largesse. In commendation of his contributions in advancing the education of our graduate students, the University has named its School of Graduate Studies "Chow Yei Ching School of Graduate Studies".

Dr Chow has received the highest praise from various quarters for his contributions to society and scholarly circles. In 2001, Dr Chow was appointed the Honorary Consul of the Kingdom of Bahrain in Hong Kong. He has also

received titles and decorations from the United Kingdom, Belgium, France and Japan. In 2004, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region awarded him the Gold Bauhinia Star. The University of Hong Kong named him an Honorary University Fellow in 1995 and conferred on him the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws in 1997. The Hong Kong Polytechnic University conferred on him the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Business Administration in 1995. In 1996, Dr Chow was invited by Nanjing University to be an Honorary Member of the Board of Directors. In addition, Dr Chow is also a Consultative Professor of Zhejiang University and a Lecture Professor of Sichuan Union University.

Dr Chow firmly believes that education lies at the centre of social development. The elites of society, be they political leaders, doctors, lawyers or engineers, have to be educated. More than just the transmission of knowledge and skills, the purpose of education is to develop sound character and a sense of social responsibility. Dr Chow believes the key to success is to be found in the overall emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge and the cultivation of personal character. Family education is also very important, working as it does in concert with formal schooling.

Dr Chow readily admits that he is very strict when it comes to family education. He has brought up seven children. All very accomplished, they have inherited Dr Chow's modest and kindly ways. Invoking the Cantonese adage about respect that "Through other people's generosity, we gain it; but with our follies, we lose it," Dr Chow often reminds his children of the virtue of self-respect and cautions them of the danger of self-importance. He instils in them strong discipline and teaches them to be serious and meticulous in handling their daily affairs. To get to the station three minutes late, he argues by way of an example, means not only missing the bus, but also the cost of the extra time it takes to get to where one wants to go. Similarly, by arriving at a meeting five minutes late, one is not only guilty of wasting other people's time, but failure to keep promises and disrespect for others.

What pleases Dr Chow most about his children is that they show little attachment to fame and wealth. He often teaches them that friendship is built on sincerity and not on materialistic rewards, and that money should be invested in things of lasting value. Under Dr Chow's favourable influence, his children delight in giving to charity and serving the public good. "It takes wisdom and ability to make money," he says, "but self-cultivation and virtue to spend it properly."

Lastly, a personal anecdote. There was a report on the television that many children in a village in Henan were abandoned because they were infected with AIDS from parents who themselves fell victim to the disease from selling blood in an unhygienic setting. When Dr Chow heard of the news, he got in touch with the television station and took his two daughters to visit the host of the programme to gain a better understanding of the situation before making a donation to help the children. Later, his daughters also went to visit the infected children in the village.

Confucius describes himself in the Shu Er Chapter of *The Analects* as follows: “I set my heart on the Way, base myself on virtue, lean upon benevolence for support and take my recreation in the arts!” Likewise, Dr Chow Yei-ching works tirelessly applying his professional knowledge and compassion to attain his accomplishments step-by-step.

Mr Chancellor, in commendation of his noble character and the outstanding contribution he makes to society and the economy, I respectfully present Dr Chow Yei-ching to you for the award of Honorary Doctor of Social Science.