

## Honorary Doctor of Laws

### Dr Simon IP Sik-on, JP

Citation written and delivered by Professor WANG Guiguo

Pro-Chancellor:

“What goes around, comes around.” Immaculate in dress and elegant in speech, Dr Simon Ip Sik-on is a leader whose name evokes reverence in Hong Kong, especially in legal and educational circles. The bedrock of his fame is his integrity and his supreme ability to serve, both professionally and socially.

Dr Simon Ip, although born with a pedigree in teaching, chose Law as his career. Another who shared that pedigree, his grandmother’s brother, was the headmaster who discovered his grand-nephew’s tendency for truancy at primary school in Hong Kong, a discovery that had him dispatched to England to continue his education. There, a “lucky thing” happened to him—the first of many to follow. Simon maintains that he never set out on any consciously ambitious path. Ambition was in the heads of others, not his. Instead, he says, his achievements have resulted from nothing grander than a sequence of lucky breaks.

His good fortune started with his chemistry teacher at senior school in England. She recognised something special in her new free-spirited student from Hong Kong and took him under her wing. “She did far more than teach me chemistry,” said Dr Ip. She gave him advice and counselling; she helped him adjust and adapt and encouraged other teachers to do the same, to give him time and space to develop at his own pace. In passing his A levels, Simon won the school chemistry prize. They valued that achievement equally, Simon and his teacher, just as they did the lifelong friendship that was maintained until her passing. A single teacher, Simon can testify, can have a “very profound impact...on the life of an individual.”

His disillusion with teaching as a profession—based on his first experiences of classes that were too large and educators who encouraged uniformity not creativity and who too readily resorted to senseless discipline—were mitigated. But not enough for him to embark on a career in education. That, in an unusual and indirect fashion, would ‘come around’ many years later, in a variety of ways, as this citation will reveal.

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Dr Ip decided instead to take up Law, completing his studies during five years as an articled clerk in London's West End. By then it was 1971, he was 23, married and a father.

In 1972 he joined Messrs Johnson, Stokes & Master (JSM) in Hong Kong. There were other firms keen to hire him. That he chose JSM where he began to specialise in litigation proved to be more good fortune. "Little did I know," he would say, "that the three years of my first contract would become 32, from being the firm's most junior assistant solicitor to its chairman and senior partner— one job only in all that time."

By 1985, Dr Ip was one of the top litigation lawyers in Hong Kong. JSM was the largest and most prestigious firm in the territory. Dr Ip was given the responsibility of handling the most complex and difficult commercial disputes. He was a very, *very* busy lawyer.

It was not a convenient time for his phone to ring, for a senior voice he respected to request his immediate presence at a meeting of the Council of the Law Society which was then in progress. "What have I done?" he wondered as he hurried through the streets. Rather than being told by the august group of lawyers who confronted him that he was in trouble for some professional malpractice, they instead asked Simon, aged just 36, to be their next President.

Why him? He was not a serving member of the Council, from within whose ranks any succession might be expected. Yet suddenly the Council members wanted to recruit him, from outside their own ranks, to lead the profession. He was, as he aptly describes the sensation, being "parachuted in." It was an unusual, if not unprecedented, manoeuvre.

He was flattered. He was thrilled. He was worried.

The biggest challenge was the timing. It was not just that it was right after the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Question of Hong Kong, when this territory's future, cloaked in uncertainty without precedent, was due to be tested, no more so than in the area of the law. There was his litigation workload to consider. He would need time to scale it down, to concurrently slot himself into the responsibilities of the Law Society presidency.

Whatever Dr Ip had known as “responsibility” up to that point in his life, was magnified when in 1987 having completed two years as Vice-President of the Law Society, he was elected its President. He was 38 years old.

One of the countless tasks Dr Ip took on as President of the Hong Kong Law Society between 1987 and 1989, was to chair a Working Party on the drafting of the Basic Law. He was also a member of the Basic Law Consultation Committee set up by the Central Government. These roles involved his travelling often to Beijing for meetings with the drafters. Between 1991 and 1995 he served as a Legislative Councillor, representing the Legal Functional Constituency. As a LegCo member, one of the most important tasks he performed was to chair the Bills Committee which considered the vital bill for the establishment of Hong Kong’s Court of Final Appeal.

Dr Ip has also served as a Member of the Advisory Committee on Legal Education, of the Judicial Service Commission, of the Law Reform Commission and of the Standing Committee on Legal Aid, as well as being a Member of Court at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and a Honorary Research Fellow of the Faculty of Law at Tsinghua University, Beijing.

In 1993 Dr Ip was invited—again “unexpectedly”—to take on the pivotal task of being the founding chairman in the establishment of the Hong Kong Institute of Education, whose remit was the education and training of home-grown teachers to graduate level. Setting up the Hong Kong Institute of Education “to nurture the stimulation of young minds,” in his own words, recalling his own early school days, “was clearly central to the improvement of education as a whole.”

1987 was the same year in which, coincidentally and providentially, the Department of Law was established at the City University of Hong Kong (CityU). It was an institution whose conception, birth and development Dr Ip would not just witness, it was one to which he would dedicate his services some 20 years later. While he was President of the Law Society, Dr Ip was also Chairman of its Committee on Legal Education, whose responsibilities included closely monitoring the establishment of Hong Kong’s second law school and setting the standards for new law graduates’ entry to the legal profession. Dr Ip’s association with the CityU’s law school in those early days could not have been closer. Like the greatest poet Li Bai once said “Today’s people did not see the past moon, yet today’s moon shone on the past people”.

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Twenty years ago, Dr Ip could not have imagined what is taking place at the CityU's School of Law. Today it has more than 1,000 students, to whom the School offers not only a comprehensive range of degree programmes but also the opportunity of legal placement in China—being the first law school in Hong Kong to provide such a programme, one that involves classes at Renmin University to study the Chinese legal system and includes the unique experience of working at the People's Court. The stretching of Dr Ip's imagination does not pause, however, at that point.

In 2007 the International Advisory Board was established at CityU's School of Law “to meet the challenges of globalisation.” The Board is made up of distinguished professors from Harvard, Yale, Oxford and other renowned universities plus “well-recognised legal practitioners” whose task is to advise the School. Dr Ip kindly agreed to serve as the Board's co-chairmen with Michael Reisman, an internationally renowned Professor of International Law at Yale.

Under his leadership, two exclusive agreements were concluded in February 2008 with the National Judges College of the Supreme People's Court of China to provide advanced legal education to serving Chinese judges.

This recognised the need for China to have a modernised judiciary with judges knowing, in addition to Chinese law, the essential principles and norms of common law and international law. Dr Ip has been a wholehearted advocate for this significant development, one he describes as being “of true historic significance”.

The first of the two agreements involves a “tripartite arrangement” between CityU's School of Law, the National Judges College in China and Columbia Law School. It has resulted in a one-year Master of Laws (LLM) Programme for Chinese Judges at City U's School of Law, supported by Columbia Law School which has “tailor-made” a one-month programme for the thirty students each year to study in New York and participate in field visits to US institutions such as the Supreme Court in Washington DC.

The second agreement has resulted in a one-month Advanced Programme for Chinese Senior Judges at the School of Law.

Such an epochal innovation appealed to a man of vision like Dr Ip. He at once whole-heartedly supported it, arranging for generous sponsorship via the Fu Tak

Iam Foundation, of which he is vice-chairman, and from his alma-mater legal firm JSM.

Dr Ip is a man of deeds. Whilst encouraging others to contribute to the endeavours for exchanges between the Chinese judiciary and that in Hong Kong and other jurisdictions, he himself first set examples. He made trips to Beijing talking to the leaders of the Supreme People's Court to learn their needs, personally interviewing those Chinese judges for admission into the LLM Programme at the School of Law. He also single-handedly raised funds for both Chinese judge programmes. As a result of his leadership, efforts and dedication, the one-year LLM Programme for serving Chinese judges and the one-month advanced programme for senior serving Chinese judges are a complete success, which has won the recognition and support from Hong Kong, the Chinese mainland and international community.

Education and law—they are the substance of this citation. Law came first for Dr Ip. Education followed. The two have merged into one and reached a new height with Dr Ip's participation in these revolutionary legal education programmes. Revolutionary, too, was China's "One Country, Two Systems" ideology of the late 1970s, which saw the setting up of Special Economic Zones on the borders of Hong Kong. The intention was, with the experience, technology and capital of Hong Kong and other territories, to modernise the country with a history of five thousand years. Having made great contributions toward the marketisation and rapid economic growth of China, Hong Kong is now in a position to assist the mainland in modernising its judiciary. Dr Ip, a man with a strong sense of responsibility, is again taking the lead.

"To dream is the first step to success," he said. What Dr Ip did dream of was to become somebody who in his life would make a contribution. Along the way he was determined to keep his head out of the clouds, his feet squarely on the ground and remain, to use another colloquialism, a "down to earth" sort of fellow. The areas in which he has made his contribution—Law and Education—are the essentials, the essence, the good earth, of civilisation. His dream to make his own contribution is a reality. The evidence reads like chapters in his life story—a story of unquestionable and unqualified success.

What goes around has indeed come around. For Simon Ip, with this wholly deserved recognition of his contribution to law and education, and especially to

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judicial education, the circle—one that he, and he alone, would call no more than “a lucky circle” —is complete.

Mr Pro-Chancellor, on behalf of City University of Hong Kong, I have the high honour of presenting to you Dr Simon Ip Sik-on, solicitor and notary public, for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.