

## **The Hon Wong Yan-lung *GBM, SC***

DOCTOR OF LAWS *honoris causa*

### **Citation**

Mr Wong Yan-lung was born in Hong Kong in 1963 and grew up in the Wanchai District. As a boy, Mr Wong already excelled at his studies. He attended Queen's College where he distinguished himself for his all-around performance. His outstanding academic record at secondary school qualified him for a Prince Phillip Scholarship to the University of Cambridge, where he matriculated in 1983. At Magdalene College, Mr Wong was taught by many of the great minds of English jurisprudence, including one truly memorable mentor—R W M Dias.

Mr Wong graduated from Cambridge in 1986 with a BA in Law, and was later conferred an MA in Law. In 1987, he was called to the Bar in England & Wales. In that same year, he was also called to the Hong Kong Bar. He was appointed Senior Counsel in 2002 and then a Justice of the Peace in 2005. He was elected a Master of the Bench of Middle Temple in October 2007, and was conferred an Honorary Fellowship by Magdalene College in 2009.

Mr Wong sat as a Deputy High Court Judge of the Court of First Instance in July and August 2003, and served as a Council member of the Hong Kong Bar Association from 1989 to 1990, from 1997 to 2002 and from 2003 to 2005. He was Chairman of the Special Committee on Legal Education of the Association from 2003 to 2005.

Mr Wong has also served as Chairman of the Buildings Appeal Tribunal, the Criminal and Law Enforcement Injuries Compensation Boards, and the Non-local Higher and Professional Education Appeal Board. He has also served as Vice Chairman of the CEDAR Fund and a member of the Steering Committee and volunteer of the Christian Concern for the Homeless Association in Hong Kong.

In October 2005, Mr Wong was appointed Secretary for Justice and served in that position until 30 June 2012. Throughout his life and career, he has demonstrated great

integrity, as evidenced both in his professional and personal life. As only the second Secretary for Justice to serve in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Mr Wong has a keen understanding of his role in upholding the rule of law in Hong Kong.

In the most recent address to newly appointed Senior Counsel, Mr Wong stated, “What makes Hong Kong unique as a city in China and in the world, what enables Hong Kong not to be marginalised against the massive economic growth in the mainland, is the law and the uncompromising standards of the law.” He further emphasised the importance of the integrity of the law: the role of any lawyer was not just about winning cases or advancing one’s career, but rather “to signify the continuation of the Common Law tradition, the adherence to the rule of law and proper administration of justice, despite rapid changes in the macro-political and economic landscape, and rising above different political beliefs or personal ambitions.”

This basic principle of the rule of law as expressed by A V Dicey is simply that law serves to bind all persons equally. In Dicey’s words, the rule of law carries “the absolute supremacy or predominance of regular as opposed to the influence of arbitrary power, and excludes the existence of arbitrariness, of prerogative, or even of wide discretionary authority on the part of government.”

During his tenure as Secretary for Justice, Mr Wong consistently recognised the need and worked to preserve Hong Kong’s unique constitutional arrangement based upon the principle of “one country, two systems.” In addition, he has sought to further enhance Hong Kong’s position as a centre for international dispute resolution by revamping the Arbitration Ordinance and attracting top overseas international arbitration bodies to establish a presence here. He has also worked tirelessly to promote the use of mediation in Hong Kong, including chairing a cross-sector task force and enacting the Mediation Ordinance.

A corresponding attribute of deep personal integrity is also evident in Mr Wong’s personal life, as shown through his on-going commitment to charitable organisations such as the Christian Concern for the Homeless Association (which is very much in keeping with Lingnan’s motto of “Education for Service”). The Association displays

genuine concern for homeless people by responding to their physical, psychological and spiritual needs. These efforts were further demonstrated by his lead in establishing a cross-bureau task force to tackle the problem of youth drug abuse. As a result of this initiative, the community has become better informed about this issue, and young people today are better protected.

Mr Chairman, for his distinguished service to the Hong Kong SAR Government and to the wider community, may I present Mr Wong Yan-lung to you for conferment of the degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*.

*English citation written and delivered by Mr James Rice*

**The Hon Wong Yan-lung *GBM, SC***  
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**Address**

**Chancellor, Chairman, President, Council members, distinguished guests, faculty members and students:**

On behalf of all the honorary graduates, may I express our most sincere gratitude to the University for conferring upon us this exceptional honour and for your very kind words of citations.

I hope you would not find it amiss for me to begin with a children's story. To me, it contains gems of wisdom relevant to my previous experience in the administration of justice.

“Seven blind mice set out to investigate a creature. The first six each inspected only the part he first encountered. They saw respectively a pillar, a snake, a spear, a cliff, a fan and a rope. They disagreed among themselves and a big quarrel ensued. Having had the benefit of the others' findings, the last mouse examined the creature thoroughly, from one side to the other, and from top to bottom. At the end, he announced the creature had all the features described by the other six, but in sum it was an elephant.”

The unprecedented and successful “One Country Two Systems” principle has opened up uncharted territories in the law, with common law applied under Chinese sovereignty, international human rights covenants implemented through the Basic Law, and multiple lines of authorities from different common law jurisdictions converging in our courts.

Intricate and controversial issues abound during my tenure as Secretary for Justice. Many touched on the proper interpretation of the Basic Law, appertaining to constitutional development, relationship between the Executive and the Legislature, ordinary residence in the HKSAR, state immunity and foreign affairs, public order and fundamental freedoms, privacy and school drug test, and many more. Most are intertwined with significant public interests and some inevitably politicised.

On my visit to the House of Lords, Lord Geoffrey Howe gave me a word of advice: “Do not take opposing views negatively. You cannot always be right.” Indeed we are prone to put our ego ahead of the pursuit of truth. Hence the need to approach our tasks with a sense of meekness, which is a balanced attitude based upon a true estimate of what you know and what you don't know.

When you don't or cannot take anything for granted, you work hard to get it right. You embark on in-depth research and analysis, delve into comparative jurisprudence, and leave no stone unturned. But where, notwithstanding the due diligence, the area remains grey, you will have to grope as the blind mice did. Some basic tools will

come in handy, including an honesty to call a spade a spade, a sharp common sense, some innate principles of fairness, and an open mind ready for something new and unknown. They will operate like the paws of the mice, gaining dexterity with time and practice.

Never dread and downplay the different and opposing views expressed. For what have been advocated, though unpleasant or incomplete, may well be an integral feature of the entire truth.

Communication is key but must be genuine and with respect. In some variations of our blind mice story, the mice had the good sense to stop arguing and start listening to one another, so that the existence of the elephant was revealed through collaboration.

One should develop a resistance against any vain desire to win the case, against any actual or perceived pressure from any authority or the crowd, and against any temptation to take the easy or convenient way out. And more subtly, one needs to make conscious efforts to lay aside one's own preconceived views and prejudices. That's integrity, where applicable to judges is the well-known doctrine of judicial independence, which is of cardinal importance to the rule of law.

At the end of the day, it is substance plus sincerity that will prevail. How the last mouse won his brothers over is illuminating. He was not deterred by the other six holding wholly different views. After completing his own due diligence, though firmly believing he is right, he chose not to argue, but engaged his brothers by taking them on a guided tour of the entire body of the elephant, presenting them with hard evidence along the way.

For all the graduating students today, I hope the blind mice story can also offer some food for thought. Do not be satisfied with the first impression, the superficial or the hearsay. Discover the truth by doing your own search; test the propositions; go out and see the world for yourself, walk the thousand miles.

Your examination, however, should not be merely horizontal. It should also be from top to bottom. Set out to understand the community of which you form part, high and low. My involvement with the homeless and socially displaced in Hong Kong in the early 1990's helped prepare me to take up the challenge to serve as the law minister. The single most powerful motivation to "do something" is the exposure to others' needs. It pulls at your heart's string and compels you to move out of your own comfort zone.

Pope Paul VI said this, "Somebody should tell us, right at the start of our lives, that we are dying. Then we might live life to the limit, every minute of every day. Do it! I say. Whatever we want to do, do it now! There are only so many tomorrows."

This is of course not a call to indulge, to eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you die. This is an exhortation that we live every minute of our life to the full, enthusiastically and with a sense of purpose. Any wastage is criminal.

Thank you and we wish you all the best in your future pursuits.