

Dr Alice Piera Lam Lee Kiu-yue GBS, JP

DOCTOR OF LAWS *honoris causa*

Citation

Dr Alice Piera Lam Lee Kiu-yue earned her first accolade in the banking and finance sector. She joined Hang Seng Bank Ltd in 1978, working her way up from junior positions. But her sharp acumen and industry won her recognition by management, and after a few promotions she became Director in 1989. She was appointed Deputy Chief Executive in 1993, and then from 1994 to 1996, served as Managing Director and Deputy Chief Executive. Carving out a successful career in the banking sector, which was predominantly a men's world then, was tough, especially for a wife and mother of three. As Dr Lam recalled, "It might sound a bit clichéd, but having to balance between work and family was quite hard for me, especially when there were few career women in those days you could look up to as role models." Her reputation and achievement in the banking sector also earned her a directorship at the Hong Kong Telephone Co. Ltd (1984-1995) and the position of co-chairman of Sotheby's Asia (1996-99). She is currently a non-executive director of a digital company.

It was determination, besides multiple talents, that helped Dr Lam realise and pursue her many dreams. Educated at Maryknoll Convent School, she later graduated with a BA in history from the University of Hong Kong in 1963. She then taught at St Stephen's Girls' College for nine years. During that time she discovered her interest in law, and pursued the Solicitors' Professional Course. Amidst the challenges in coping with work and studies, Dr Lam had to encounter one of the toughest blows in her life — the loss of her husband in 1975. Overcoming her own grief and helping her family cope with it, she persisted in her law studies, and attained the Solicitors' Practising Certificate in 1978.

But Dr Lam's biggest passion lies in education, where her contribution is perhaps most revered. She said, "I am passionate about young people's education. Watching students grow in intellect and maturity gives me the greatest joy. I hope I can be of help to them in their formative period." Because of her achievements in education, Dr Lam was appointed a member of the Council of various universities, including The Chinese University of Hong Kong and The Hong Kong University of Science & Technology.

One of the imperatives for the HKSAR government immediately following the handover was the stipulation of educational reforms in tertiary institutions to meet the challenges of the global knowledge-based economy. The University Grants Committee (UGC), as the body advising the Government on the funding and strategic development of higher education in Hong Kong, was charged with the challenging task of promoting excellence in higher education, with a view to establishing Hong Kong as the education hub of the region and nurturing high quality people to promote the economic and social development of Hong Kong. Dr Lam was appointed

Chairman of the UGC in 1999, and during her eight years of service she spearheaded landmark reviews and policies which are now implemented far and wide. These include the Higher Education Review, the IELTS, and the “334 Curriculum”. Dr Lam saw her mission in the UGC as the internationalisation of Hong Kong universities, as well as quality assurance. She said, “Hong Kong universities deserve world-class recognition, but to earn that we have to ensure quality in our teaching and research. Yardsticks have to be stipulated as recognisable standards of measurement. Universities should identify their areas of excellence and focus on developing those strengths. The outcome-based learning mechanism, meanwhile, can help universities align teaching with the missions and visions that they have set out to attain.” One of Dr Lam’s challenges at the UGC was to help universities adjust their strategic plans and engage faculty members to meet changes while coping with budget cuts. After her tenure as Chairman of the UGC, Dr Lam was appointed Chairman of the Quality Assurance Council in 2007, and at the same time Chairman of the Education Commission (from 2007-09), to continue her brilliant work in higher education.

Apart from her public offices, Dr Lam has constantly been invited to serve as a member of various trusts and foundations, including the Stephen Cheong Foundation (1993-2007) and Croucher Foundation (1994-2009). She is still Chairman of the Ma Chung Ho Kei Foundation. In 1992, she was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws degree by the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and in 2003, she was awarded the Gold Bauhinia Star by the HKSAR government for her outstanding contribution and service to the Hong Kong community.

Happily retired now, Dr Lam maintains an active life by catching up on interests and hobbies forgone in past years, including Chinese calligraphy and the arts. She remarked, “I believe in lifelong learning. Now I enjoy living an ordinary life, managing the home, and simple things that a woman and mother would do.” Looking back at a fruitful and accomplished life, Dr Lam has this to share: “I embrace challenges and give my utmost. Whatever comes my way, I embrace them all.”

Mr Chancellor, for her distinguished service to the higher education of Hong Kong, may I now present Dr Alice Piera Lam Lee Kiu-yue to you for the conferment of the degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*.

Written and delivered by Dr Lisa Leung