

Ms Anna Wu Hung-yuk, GBS, JP

Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*

Citation

Ms Anna Wu Hung-yuk is widely acclaimed for her public service, with a record that spans four decades and eight administrations, beginning in the 1980s. She is perhaps best known for championing anti-discrimination legislation that helps protect the social goods of equality and inclusion in Hong Kong. As Chair of the Equal Opportunities Commission, which would not exist if it was not for her efforts, she took the Hong Kong Government to court for discrimination against girls in the high school admission system. To put it mildly, this was not well received within the government, especially when it lost the case in 2001. The case set a precedent: it showed that equality laws can be used to overturn systemic discriminatory practices in other spheres. It has also had a profound impact, helping to ensure gender equality in education.

Ms Wu has chaired many other public bodies over her long and distinguished career. As Chair of the Hong Kong Consumer Council in 1997, she introduced significant reforms to better protect consumers. As Chair of the Mandatory Provident Funds Schemes Authority (MPFA) from 2009 to 2015, she was able to reduce risk and cost for employees and to enhance choice. As founding Chair of the Competition Commission from 2013 to 2020, she was a trustbuster. During this time, significant legal precedents were established to protect freedom of the market, particularly through the prohibition of cartels.

Ms Wu has also held appointments in other public bodies including the Independent Commission Against Corruption, the Law Reform Commission, the Securities and Futures Commission and the Hospital Authority. She served as member of the Legislative Council from 1993 to 1995 and the Executive Council from 2009 to 2017. She is also a Justice of the Peace. She was awarded the Silver Bauhinia Star in 2000 and the Gold Bauhinia Star in 2011 in recognition of her outstanding public service.

Born to parents who fled to Hong Kong for refuge, she has always had a strong sense of empathy with the underprivileged. The social unrest of the 1960s was an education in inequality and deprivation. A nun in secondary school encouraged her to read the newspaper to understand the world but cautioned her “to rely on facts and facts alone.”

In 1975, she completed her law studies at the University of Hong Kong. Studying law was not her first choice but “the law,” she says, “found me.” Her passion for the law grew when she realised that she could use it to help the underprivileged exercise their rights. She recalls, for instance, helping a woman to renew a hawker’s license. The young lawyer felt great satisfaction at being able to help restore the woman’s ability to earn a living for herself and her family. She used this story to illustrate the point that law must safeguard individual rights and must matter not only in theory but also

to real people. In her professional life, she specialised in intellectual property law and corporate-commercial cases. She made senior partner at her firm by the age of 30 and was admitted to the Roll of Honour of the Law Society of Hong Kong.

On the Legislative Council, she lobbied the then colonial government to consider her Private Member's Bill on Equal Opportunities. This was the first time a lawmaker had presented a private member's bill that addressed a whole policy area. Her lobbying pressured the government into setting up the Equal Opportunities Commission and enacting the first anti-discrimination ordinances.

To Ms Wu, law is a tool for social change. "Law," she says, "leads to good practice and cultural change." To refine this tool, she leads research initiatives. She uses it to advocate for businesses and government bodies to put diversity into practice. In research and advocacy she harnesses the power of the public, by working with NGOs. She believes strongly that diversity is good for all stakeholders – for individuals, businesses, and the wider community. She points out that, statistically speaking, companies that adopt gender equality and ethnic diversity actually become more profitable.

Law is not just a tool for social change. Challenging stereotypes and biases is a long uphill battle to change mindsets that are deeply entrenched. In her many roles on different public bodies, she has faced criticism, opposition, threats and even organised protests, but she has never given up. What keeps Ms Wu going is her unyielding determination to stick to her principles and values.

Having devoted most of her professional life to championing equality, diversity and inclusion, Anna Wu's advice to us is: "to look beyond differences to free our minds from perceptual handicaps, of our own and of others." Looking back on a life marked by so many changes and challenges, she believes that it is her sense of mission, her determination and her willingness to engage with widely contested views that have enabled her to make it this far. She wants to share the following sentiment with the Lingnan community: "What shapes a person is her response to change. One must never be indifferent to change." Many people resist change, but Ms Wu has embraced it, doing all she can to ensure change is positive.

Mr Chairman, in recognition of her outstanding achievements in the advocacy and protection of equality and inclusion in Hong Kong, may I present Ms Anna Wu Hung-yuk for conferment of the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.

Citation written and delivered by Professor Lisa Leung Yuk-ming