

**Professor Woo Chia-wei, GBS, CBE,
Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur
Doctor of Social Sciences *honoris causa***

Citation

A great leader of a society must have grand visions and strong capability of execution. Very few people have both and that is why we do not see many great leaders. Professor Woo Chia-wei possesses both. On the vision side, he was the first person to propose the Hong Kong Bay Area in the 1990s, a concept leading to the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) of today. On the execution side, he was the founding president of The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) and led the university to world-class caliber within a short period of time.

Professor Woo was born in Shanghai, grew up in Hong Kong, and received higher education in the US. He obtained his Bachelor of Science degree in Physics and Mathematics at Georgetown College in Kentucky. He received his Master of Arts and PhD degrees in Physics at Washington University, St Louis. He has taught at Northwestern University, University of Illinois, and University of California, San Diego. In 1979, he was appointed Provost of the Revelle College at University of California, San Diego, and in 1983, at the age of 45, he became President of San Francisco State University, the first ethnic Chinese to head a major university in the US.

Professor Woo has published many academic papers and books in various fields of Physics. He received many awards for his professional achievements, including Fellowship of the American Physical Society, Fellowship of the California Academy of Sciences, the Alfred P. Sloan Research Fellowship, and Honorary Professorships at Fudan University, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Shenzhen University, and Peking University. He also received many honours for his contributions to society, including the Eleanor Roosevelt Humanitarian Award from the United Nations Association, the Golden Key to the City from the mayor of San Francisco, Honorary Citizen from the Municipal Government of Shenzhen, an honorary Doctor of Science degree from Washington University, an honorary Doctor of Business Administration degree from HKUST, a Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (CBE) from Queen Elizabeth II, the Gold Bauhinia Star (GBS) from the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and the Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur (Knight of the Legion of Honour) award from the President of France.

In the mid-1980s, Professor Woo was given an impossible mission. He was invited to build a brand-new university, namely, the HKUST, in his home town. It was a time when many people were leaving or preparing to leave the city. He had to swim against the current. He also had to persuade many first-rate scholars from the US and other western countries to come to Hong Kong. And they knew they were not coming to

join a well-established university in a stable environment, but to build a university from scratch in an unstable environment in an unfamiliar city. However, owing to his passion and friendship, Professor Woo was able to convince many world-class scholars across the fields of science, engineering, and business to join him. He achieved the first part of the impossible mission.

Recruiting top talent is only a necessary but not a sufficient condition to building a high-quality university. Indeed, there were both challenges and opportunities. A brand-new university has no historical burden. HKUST was a blank canvas for Professor Woo and his colleagues to paint a colourful picture on. However, conflicts and difficulties were more apparent: nobody had heard of HKUST, faculty members came from different cultural backgrounds, the Hong Kong education system was very different from the American, with which most of the firstcomers were familiar, among others. Although nobody expected much, the truth is that HKUST skyrocketed into top positions in university rankings in many fields. In doing so, it captured the world's attention. It helped elevate the quality of higher education not only in Hong Kong, but also around Asia. That is how Professor Woo achieved the second part of the impossible mission.

Professor Woo's mission impossible can be understood in context. At the global level, China launched the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013. At the regional level, the Central Government of China announced the establishment of the GBA in 2017. The GBA includes Hong Kong, Macao and nine municipalities in Guangdong Province. Recall that about 30 years ago (in the early 1990s), Professor Woo had proposed the concept of the Hong Kong Bay Area as a driver of the economic development of the Pearl River Delta. This concept captured the attention of Shenzhen's leadership, and later inspired the Shenzhen-Hongkong Bay Area. Thus, Professor Woo is considered the "father" of the Shenzhen-Hongkong Bay Area, which is a shining pearl in the GBA.

Professor Woo continues to add to his legacy. He is thinking of making contributions to liberal arts education in China, which is in line with Lingnan University's mission. Mr Chairman, in recognition of his great contributions to society, especially to higher education in this region, I now present Professor Woo Chia-wei for the conferment of the degree of Doctor of Social Sciences *honoris causa*.

Citation written and delivered by Professor Larry Qiu Dongxiao