

Dr Edmund TSE Sze-Wing, GBS

Doctor of Business Administration *honoris causa*

Citation

With his ancestral root in Toi Shan, Dr Edmund TSE Sze-Wing is a third generation local born Chinese. Having received his primary and secondary education from the Chinese school Pui Ching Middle School, he was nurtured with all-round extra-curricular activities that fostered in him the faith that “It is more blessed to give than to receive”. He was admitted into The University of Hong Kong in 1957 and graduated in 1960 with a Bachelor of Arts degree. He majored in Mathematics which taught him to apply logical thinking in his favourite game: bridge. In fact, he became an accomplished bridge player, representing Hong Kong in many regional and world championships. As an outstanding Mathematics graduate, Dr Tse was referred by his professor and started his career as an actuarial trainee at AIA in 1961. Over the past 57 years, Dr Tse has been serving the same company AIA in various capacities. He is now the Non-Executive Chairman of AIA Group Limited, the largest independent publicly listed pan-Asian life insurance group.

An industry veteran, Dr Tse was named President and CEO of AIA in 1983, and Chairman and CEO in 2000. Throughout the period, AIA was a member company of the New-York-based American International Group, Inc (AIG), a world leader in insurance and financial services. In 2003, he was inducted into the Insurance Hall of Fame, the most prestigious award in the insurance industry, in recognition of his exceptional contributions to the advancement of the insurance field and innovation in the development of insurance benefits for society. Dr Tse was the first Chinese person to be awarded this prestigious award. Dr Tse has always been regarded as the principal architect of AIG’s global life insurance platform, and credited for introducing the agency system, now a dominant distribution channel in the industry, to Taiwan in 1970, and to China in 1992.

In Taiwan, for instance, the traditional approach was selling insurance products to relatives and friends. Dr Tse built up a new agency approach, involved cold-calls to reach specific targets, and offered innovative insurance products catering to varying needs for protection. The new agency system bore fruit as its total premium income increased 20-fold in the ten years following 1970. Today the business he found is the second largest life insurance company in Taiwan.

In China, Dr Tse introduced the agency concept and system when AIA was granted a license to operate in Shanghai in 1992. Today, the agency system remains the core distribution channel and accounts for 70% of AIA Group’s new business value. AIA remains the only 100% foreign-owned life insurance company in China.

Excellent as a leader, Dr Tse is full of vision and passion for his business. “Insurance is good” and that is why he is passionate about it. He shared a strong view on the importance of insurance with Winston CHURCHILL who remarked that *“If I had my way, I would write the word ‘insure’ upon the door of every cottage...., because I am convinced, for sacrifices so small, families and estates can be protected against catastrophes which would otherwise smash them up forever”*. As Dr Tse rose progressively through the corporate hierarchy until he reached the power pinnacle as AIG’s Senior Vice Chairman in 2001 and Co-Chief Operating Officer in 2002, his responsibilities included overseeing the Group’s global life insurance operations covering over 130 countries and jurisdictions. Until his retirement from AIG in 2009, Dr Tse was instrumental in building up market-leading franchises across Asia and other emerging markets. He may thus be recognised as living up to his ideal of helping to make the world a safer place for all.

Dr Tse's career model bears eloquent witness to the dynamic capabilities of the Hong Kong professionals to take lead in the competitive environment of transnational businesses, a leadership ability that spearheads the dynamic growth of Hong Kong in its recent history. At AIA, this ability exemplified in form of an ability to "work with people" whereby all available options were opened for discussion among the involved in each country market before arriving at a consensus for effective implementation. Dr Tse played a key role in strategy formulation by making sure the objectives being set were not only realistic and achievable but stretchable and challenging enough to ensure more than 20% growth each year. The buy-in, trust and commitment from below accounts for market leader status in the Asia-Pacific (ex-Japan) region based on life insurance premiums. As Dr Tse helped to build AIA into the largest life insurance company in the world, his working colleagues have stood to benefit substantially. AIA has been the multinational company with the largest number of Million Dollar Round Table (MDRT) members in the world for four consecutive years since 2015. The company has a particularly high percentage of the long-serving staff and agents who are its most valuable asset. Dr Tse has shown a strong sense of belonging to the company and takes pride in flourishing AIA's unique family culture. The company provides care of family especially for those under difficult times and life crisis, and hence motivates its sales force to work hard for the greater good.

Dr Tse's dedication extends beyond his own company to the community of insurance professionals. He was the longest-serving member on the Insurance Advisory Committee to the Hong Kong Government where he provided his professional recommendations to promote the insurance industry. In strengthening the insurance sector, Dr Tse contributes to the interest of building up Hong Kong as an international financial centre. Dr Tse also worked closely with many local governments and communities to promote the industry's development, advising on regulations and operations. In recognition of his outstanding contributions, Dr Tse received numerous awards including the Gold Bauhinia Star issued to him by the HKSAR Government in 2001. He was made an honorary fellow and an honour degree of Doctor of Social Science from his alma mater The University of Hong Kong in 1998 and 2002 respectively. In 2003, he was inducted into the prestigious Insurance Hall of Fame. Finally he was awarded the first ever Lifetime Achievement Award at the Pacific Insurance Conference in 2017.

In 2011, following the independent listing of AIA on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange, Dr Tse assumed the role of Non-Executive Chairman. While continuing his stewardship of the company, Dr Tse now devotes more time to philanthropic programmes. As Chairman of the AIA Foundation and Edmund & Peggy Tse Foundation, he oversees the Foundation's allocation of large amounts of money to a variety of programmes relating to education, community and medical institutions.

Honourable Chancellor, in recognition of his professional success, exceptional contributions to insurance industry, and benevolent contributions to the economic, social and cultural well-beings of Hong Kong, China and across Asia, may I present to you Dr Edmund TSE Sze-Wing for conferment of the degree of Doctor of Business Administration *honoris causa*.

Citation written and delivered by Professor Esther LI