

Honorary Fellow A Citation

Ms Chow Pei-fong, Therese

We are here today to honour the great generosity to this University of the distinguished lawyer Ms Therese Chow Pei-fong.

Ms Chow spent her early life in Shanghai, but then along with other members of her family she was in 1947 relocated to Hong Kong by her father, who was a renowned industrialist in this city, working with vitreous enameling technology and thermo flasks. As a self-taught man, he believed strongly in the value of a good education. He sent Therese to boarding school in the UK and advised her to train there for a profession of her choice. She spent several formative years acquiring a legal education and 10 years altogether in the UK, where she was admitted as a solicitor of the then Supreme Court of England.

She returned to practice in Hong Kong for three years, and then went to Toronto, where as an English solicitor she was able to article to a law firm on a transfer basis for a year. After six further months' study of Canadian law, she passed her bar examination and was called to the Bar as Solicitor and Barrister of the Law Society of Upper Canada in 1971.

This put Ms Chow in the rare position of having qualified as a lawyer in three different jurisdictions, thereby widening her professional experience.

She returned to Hong Kong to practice in 1972 and was appointed a notary public by the Archbishop of Canterbury. She has since spent the greater part of her career here, practicing in different areas of the law. Her successes included an appeal in the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London as an instructing solicitor in a seven-year-long banking case. The unanimous judgement in favour of Ms Chow's corporate client, by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council comprising five Law Lords, was subsequently followed by a case in the Canadian Supreme Court. In 1992, Ms Chow was made a China Appointed Attesting Officer by the Department of Justice in Beijing. She has now completed 50 years on the roll of solicitors of the Law Society of Hong Kong.

This is by any standards a most successful career. But it is our good fortune that Ms Chow's life has also been distinguished by generosity. Inspired partly by coming across some old records of her father's fund-raising appeal for educating the children of poor families, and remembering his kindness in helping his friends and relations to find employment, as well as his position as a director of the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals in 1948-49, Ms Chow decided to make a large donation in his memory, despite the decades since he passed away.

Ms Chow's donation is also made in recognition of the contributions and achievements in medical science and academic development of our own Vice-Chancellor, Professor Joseph Sung.

The result is the setting up of the Chow Yuk Ho Technology Centre for Innovative Medicine. This is a groundbreaking initiative designed to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration between the Faculties of Medicine and Engineering, leading to innovative research in biomedical engineering focusing on clinical applications. The Centre will focus on three research areas in biomedical engineering: robotics, imaging and biosensing. Within these broader fields the more specialised research areas will include nano-robotics, innovative neuro-imaging and non-invasive medical monitoring.

The University will undoubtedly benefit from this donation in both its research capacity and its international reputation. Thus Ms Chow's generosity has helped the academic world in Hong Kong and more widely. At the same time the creation of the Centre will lead to synergies between the public and private sectors, since the innovative tools and devices produced out of the research will be commercialised through collaborations with industrial partners. But even more importantly, the ultimate beneficiaries will be clinical practice and therefore patients.

But the story of Ms Chow's generosity does not even stop there. She has supported the establishment of a Research Centre for Prevention of Dementia at the Faculty of Medicine. This condition is a major threat to the quality of life in Hong Kong, with one in ten older people suffering from it. Indeed as the population ages it could be said to represent a genuine threat to the long-term economic prosperity of the city over the next 25 years. We urgently need more research on the risk and protective factors for this complex set of conditions; on the bio-markers for early detection; on potential effective interventions; and on public education regarding preventative measures. This is the work proposed to be carried out by the Therese Pei Fong Chow Research Centre for Prevention of Dementia.

As with the Technology Centre for Innovative Medicine, this proposed dementia research centre is a shining example of what philanthropy can achieve if it is intelligently conceived and directed. When that rare individual comes along who is both professionally accomplished and astute, and also raised within a family tradition of philanthropy, then we all benefit.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to present to you Ms Chow Pei-fong, Therese for the award of an Honorary Fellowship of the University.

This citation is written by Professor Simon Haines