

Honorary Fellow A Citation

Mr LEE Chun-kee Charlie

The Chinese character for 'fly' is a pictogram depicting a bird spreading its wings and taking off, and its meaning is indeed the motion of a bird flapping its wings in the sky. *Shuowen Jiezi*, compiled by the Eastern Han scholar Xu Shen, defines the word to mean 'a bird soaring high'. Human beings cannot fly, but over the centuries, we have attached our hopes and aspirations to the idea of levitation. We dream of soaring above the clouds, flying unfettered as far as the eye can see, and bringing hope and happiness to our fellow human beings below.

Decades ago, people relied on ships or vehicles to travel long distances, and goods were mostly carried by land or sea freight forwarding. In the 1950s, with an acuity and determination to remain one step ahead of the times, Mr Charlie Lee founded his airfreight forwarder. With cargo flights connecting destinations across the globe, Mr Lee blazed a trail in Hong Kong's airfreight industry and made international trade much more convenient.

A native of the village of Xiaoyin, Zhangjiabian in Zhongshan city, Guangdong province, Mr Lee is the President and Chairman of the Board of the Hecny Group (Hecny). In the 1950s, Hong Kong's airfreight forwarding was limited to delivering small parcels. Anticipating a massive potential for growth in air cargo, Mr Lee founded Hecny in 1951 to take airfreight orders, pioneering changes in Hong Kong's airfreight industry with foresight and extraordinary vision. In 1956, Hecny made headlines in Hong Kong's airfreight industry by becoming one of the first International Air Transport Association (IATA) accredited agents in Hong Kong. Two years later, it made history again by becoming the first IATA registered consolidator in Hong Kong. In 1973, Hecny chartered the first Boeing 707 freighter departing from Hong Kong, and in 1974 the first DC-10 freighter departing from Hong Kong. In 1982, Hecny collaborated with British Airways to provide quality courier services between Hong Kong and London. Mr Lee's emphasis on building

a worldwide network bespeaks his farsightedness. Since the 1960s, when the concept of globalisation was still to bud, he had already begun setting up branch offices all over the world. Today, Hecny is a multinational group that employs 3,000 people in more than 70 offices across the world. Hecny's logo depicts a dragon flying imperially across the sky – symbolising not only Mr Lee's pioneering vision more than five decades ago, but also of his present-day leadership in the industry.

In addition to air freight forwarding, Mr Lee also set his sights on sea freight forwarding to meet the needs of the booming manufacturing industry since the 1960s. Today, Hecny has expanded to become a Non-vessel Operating Common Carrier (NVOCC) that handles over 5,000 Twenty-foot Equivalent Unit (TEU) containers in the worldwide each week in cooperation with major container shipping companies.

When he started Hecny, Mr Lee's office had only two desks and four employees. More than a half century later, it has developed into a leading corporation with global assets. Mr Lee built his success on diligence and a discerning eye. In the early 1950s, he had already taken many business trips to European and American countries, accumulating invaluable and extensive practical experience. He has described his business philosophy as the traditional one of 'developing steadily and moving one step at a time'. But being tradition doesn't mean not innovating. Having laid a solid foundation for Hecny, Mr Lee applied the advanced computer technology to cope with the industry's insatiable needs for information and new challenges. To cater for his air and sea freight forwarding businesses, Mr Lee aimed at building a worldwide logistics network which has handled 65,000 tonnes of air cargo, 300,000 standard containers and over 100 million courier parcels in 2018. Despite the colossal scale of his business, Mr Lee always resorts to simple principles and methods to address issues in the ever-changing global environment, thus

truly embodying the mission of Hecny: 'To provide simple solutions for a complex world'.

While he was going from strength to strength in business, Mr Lee has not forgotten his roots. His beneficence reached back to his hometown. In his father's name, he funded the Xiaoyin Li Songling School in the village of Xiaoyin and its Foundation Tower. He also made donations to Nanlang Yunqu Middle School, the alumni association and education fund of the No.1 Middle School of Zhongshan, and Qifa Middle School, as well as sponsoring the village's power station and hospital projects. In the 1970s, it has no electricity in the neighbourhood area of the village, so Mr Lee was the first one donated an electric generator to make the whole village brightened. In recognition of his benevolence and contributions, he was made an honorary citizen of Zhongshan. Mr Lee has also generously supported the development of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) with a great donation via The Charlie Lee Charitable Foundation in support of numerous research projects, enormously benefitting CUHK's education cause.

Mr Lee has operated in the freight forwarding business for over half a century, thriving expertly and profitably through his entrepreneurial spirit, and benefitting the industrial sector. His business presence soars across the world, but his heart is also set on enhancing his hometown's well-being and education. Over the years, he has been a role model and philanthropist, offering passionate support and generous donations to our University. Mr Chairman, it is my great pleasure to present to you Mr Lee Chun-kee Charlie for the award of an Honorary Fellowship of the University.