
Honorary Doctor of Social Science

Mr HU Fa-kuang

Citation written and delivered by Professor Roderick WONG Sue-cheun

Chancellor,

Mr Hu Fa-kuang, Honorary Chairman of Ryoden Development Ltd, is an exemplar of the saying “As you sow, so shall you reap”. Through diligence, open-mindedness and persistence, he has worked his way up from being a professional engineer to becoming the founder and chairman of a glorious enterprise, earning the title “Elevator King”.

Mr Hu’s upbringing instilled in him a passion for learning and a spirit of diligence. He was born in Shanghai in 1924 into a scholarly family that originally came from Wuxi in Jiangsu Province. His father was among the first group of Chinese students to study in the US and his mother graduated from a teacher training college. Mr Hu started primary school at the age of five and moved to secondary school at the age of ten. He graduated from the Department of Mechanical Engineering at Shanghai Jiao Tong University in 1944 at the age of 20 and later became a Chartered Engineer. He worked as a teacher for two years before starting his career as an engineer in the China Merchants Group and later at Jardines. After training for three years in the UK, he had to choose between returning to his hometown of Shanghai, going to Taiwan or trying Hong Kong. It was 1952 and the decision was made for him when he met Ms Young Sai-cheung during a brief stopover in Hong Kong. It was love at first sight, and he decided to stay in Hong Kong, marrying Ms Young nine months later. Thanks to Cupid’s Arrow, Mr Hu built his career and raised his family here.

A newcomer to Hong Kong, Mr Hu started from scratch. He began as an engineer and worked his way up through hard work and dedication. He was headhunted by China Engineers to head a machinery department, which he later discovered was actually a “one-man department”. Mr Hu seized the opportunity and built up the department, successfully bidding for contracts as an agent of famous foreign brands. In 1966, thanks to Mr Hu’s efforts, Mitsubishi Japan and China Engineers joined together to form Ryoden Electric Engineering Co. Ltd, in which Mr Hu had a 20%-share. This

marked the beginning of his celebrated business empire. Ryoden, under the leadership of Mr Hu, became a multinational conglomerate, engaged in diversified areas such as semi-conductors, building materials, household electronic appliances, electric power generation plants, industry automation, E&M engineering, property development, hotels, Chinese medicine, and fashion, with business interests in Hong Kong, mainland China and Southeast Asia.

Mr Hu is practical yet innovative. His new ideas have helped transform the industry. He proudly recalls that he was the first to introduce “after-sales services”, such as warranty and maintenance services, to the machinery industry in Hong Kong. While costly in the 1950s, this move has proven a win-win for both agents and customers. He also takes great pride in having set a record which remains unbroken: securing a 10-year lift contract from a private residential estate Mei Foo Sun Chuen, involving 396 sets of lifts. To avoid problems arising from fluctuating costs over a long period, he pioneered the inclusion of an escalation clause for the costs in the contract, too.

Quite a few employees have stood side-by-side with Mr Hu over the 40 years since Ryoden was established. He regards trust as the key to building a successful team, and over the years he has been guided by the rule: “Trust the people you employ and don’t employ people you distrust”. Mr Hu treats employees as family and hopes they will regard Ryoden as their second home, recognising that everyone has played a part in his success. He listens to his employees with concern and understanding, leading by example and never getting angry if mistakes are made. It is this intense human warmth that inspires a strong sense of belonging, which sometimes can be more powerful than monetary rewards in retaining staff.

Mr Hu has a passion for sports, in particular tennis. He began playing when he was nine years old. Despite his busy schedule, he always makes time for tennis. In fact, he has applied his innovative business acumen to promoting sports. During the Asian Tennis Game in 1972, he suggested pouring gasoline on a clay tennis court that was soaked in rain. By burning off the gasoline, the water evaporated and the match could resume on a dry court. Mr Hu has also made significant contributions to football, volleyball and cycling. He proudly recollects inviting Pele, one of the world’s greatest ever footballers, to play a game in Hong Kong in 1973. After almost 40 years, the game is still well remembered.

Mr Hu has lived in Hong Kong for over half a century, but he holds a strong affection for his hometown Shanghai. The development of the two places is close to his heart. In Hong Kong, he has taken part in government, social and sports services, making important contributions in the political, business, cultural and recreational arenas. Among his many contributions, he is particularly proud of taking up the challenge of acting as Chairman of the Special Committee on the Clearance of the Kowloon Walled City in 1987. His cross-departmental team handled the clearance and compensation for the inhabitants of the so-called “no man’s land”. He also takes pride in having been the first Chairman of the Land Development Corporation (now the Urban Renewal Authority), appointed in 1988 to promote the rebuilding of Hong Kong.

On the mainland, Mr Hu has invested in building the economy as well as funding scholarships and promoting sports at his alma mater, Shanghai Jiao Tong University. In the early 1980s, feeling the pulse of the reform era in China, Mr Hu pioneered investments in China purely out of love for his motherland. In the past two decades, Mr Hu devoted his efforts to facilitating the exchange and cooperation between Hong Kong and Shanghai. Through Hong Kong-Shanghai Economic Development Limited, Mr Hu assisted the Municipal Government of Shanghai in training the officials and management staff of many state-owned enterprises during their study tours in Hong Kong. From Shanghai to Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhongshan and Beijing, we can see a manifestation of his patriotism through his many investments in the machinery, hotel and property markets.

Mr Chancellor, in commendation of his admirable personality, distinguished career achievements, and impressive contributions to society, economy and sports, I respectfully present Mr Hu Fa-kuang to you for the award of Honorary Doctor of Social Science.