

# Honorary Fellow Mr Wong Cho-bau

*Citation written and delivered by Professor Wei Kwok-kee*

Pro-Chancellor, Chairman of the Council and President:

Mr Wong Cho-bau is a man of great stature in Hong Kong as well as in mainland China. His breadth of vision is matched only by the magnitude of his achievements.

Born in Chaoyang, Mr Wong came to Hong Kong when he was only three years old and, like many children in the 1960s, lived in a resettlement area. In those days, Hong Kong was only able to provide nine years' free schooling, leaving Mr Wong with no choice but to abandon formal education after his third year in junior secondary to enter the world of work. He applied himself with diligence to the task of earning a living, and at around the age of 26 he started a business in partnership with his elder brother.

This was the 1980s, a decade of boundless opportunity. The Hong Kong economy had begun to take off, while mainland China had embarked on its reform and opening-up policy under which a special economic zone was established in Shenzhen. In those days, quite a number of people in Hong Kong were unwilling to risk investing in Shenzhen, fearing that the reform and opening-up policy might not have been sustainable. Mr Wong, however, with great optimism and foresight, seized the opportunity to launch a business there in 1985. Speaking of this bold decision, Mr Wong says, "Having often returned to my hometown with my parents when I was a child, I have always maintained a deep emotional attachment to my motherland. Thus, when the opportunity presented itself to contribute to its economic development, I was naturally determined to take it. As my financial resources were limited at that time, it was clear that I would be unable to achieve a great deal in Hong Kong, whereas in Shenzhen I knew I could do much more. That is why, when the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone was established, I was among the first to respond to the call for investment."

Mr Wong's decision was justified fully by his commercial results. He went into the real estate and hotel business, establishing the Shenzhen East Pacific Group, which soon became the cornerstone of his interests.

In 2006, Mr Wong made another bold decision: to move into the aviation business. In terms of planning and management, it was vastly more challenging than real estate. Competition, on the other hand, was thin on the ground, affording him abundant scope for expansion. Once permission had been given by the mainland authorities for private enterprises to enter the aviation business, Mr Wong lost no time in establishing the freight transportation provider Donghai Airlines Company, the first private aviation enterprise in China. In recent years he has also established Donghai Jet Company for business clients. These two flourishing businesses are the most eloquent proof of Mr Wong's exceptional foresight.

Mr Wong's energies are not confined solely to business, however, but have been dedicated from the beginning to giving practical expression to his concerns for public welfare. For example, he is devoted to fostering relations between Hong Kong and Shenzhen that will enable both cities to prosper through mutual cooperation. For his work in this area he was appointed a Justice of the Peace by the HKSAR Government.

However, it is perhaps even more fitting for us, as educationalists, to focus on Mr Wong's considerable contributions to education. In response to a request from the Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers, Mr Wong donated generously to the establishment of Wong Cho Bau School and Wong Cho Bau Secondary School in Hong Kong. In addition, he established Donghai Primary School Attached to Shenzhen Foreign Languages School, whose aim is to improve students' English. At the same time, he has donated to numerous primary schools established under the Hope Project. All the schools which Mr Wong supports are richly endowed with student grants and scholarships because of his particular and very personal concern for the education of underprivileged children. His schools emphasise biliteracy and trilingualism so students can develop the international vision that he believes Chinese people need in a globalised world.

“Because of financial difficulties, I did not have the chance to finish secondary school,” says Mr Wong. “So I naturally want the younger generation to be better educated than I was.” While it is modest of Mr Wong to say so, he is in fact better read than most of us. For he reads the great book of society, which many people spend their whole lives scanning through without much comprehension.

Mr Pro-Chancellor, Mr Chairman of the Council and Mr President, Mr Wong Cho-bau exemplifies a daring entrepreneurial spirit, a deep concern for society, and generosity to education. It is with a great deal of pleasure that I present him to you for the conferment of an Honorary Fellowship.