

Honorary Doctor of Social Science

Mr Ronald Joseph ARCULLI

Citation written and delivered by Professor Julia TAO LAI Po-wah

Pro-Chancellor:

Jean-Paul Sartre, the French existentialist philosopher, once wrote “Man makes himself; he is not found ready-made” (1946). Human beings have a responsibility to take charge of their destinies and to use their freedom to create meaning in their lives. This is also the personal conviction of Mr Ronald Joseph Arculli, a co-founder of the first political party in Hong Kong four years before Hong Kong’s return to Chinese rule under the “One Country, Two Systems” arrangement.

“I believe that Hong Kong will play a special role after 1997, with the greater degree of autonomy provided by the new Basic Law,” Mr Arculli said. “As Hong Kong citizens, we have a responsibility to make use of our greater autonomy to build a better society.”

Participation in Hong Kong’s governance to bring about more responsive public policy and law making is Mr Arculli’s major mission and his primary motivation for getting involved in politics. Founding a political party to promote citizen participation in politics in those days of political apathy required great leadership and commitment. As the first Vice-Chairman of his party, Mr Arculli was determined to make use of the higher degree of autonomy under the Basic Law to promote Hong Kong’s social and economic development, as well as to uphold rights and freedom.

Mr Arculli fully understands that freedom and autonomy are very high on our list of priorities. But without the necessary social and economic pre-conditions, these are empty words. He thinks that business people and professionals have a special responsibility to participate in, and to reciprocate with, society because they are the beneficiaries of society and have more resources.

His vision is to build a caring and prosperous society where people, including the disadvantaged, the underprivileged, the marginalized and minorities, are guaranteed a decent living and self respect. He supports a society in which legal institutions are characterized by justice and fairness, its social institutions promote

different sectors of life so that people can express their autonomy and develop their solidarity. To make bureaucrats more accountable, public policies more effective, the law more just and the social services more caring have since become his life long pursuits. “I hope to support diversity and community in our society,” he said.

Wilfred Owen, an English poet and soldier, once wrote that war was regrettable and inhumane because of “the pity of war, the pity war distilled” (1917). In similar ways, excessive competition in a capitalist society can create anonymity, erode solidarity, and distill pity as a human quality.

But fame and success in a competitive capitalist society have not turned Mr Arculli into a self-interested individualist. Neither have they diminished his sense of justice. What distinguishes Mr Arculli most in his distinguished career as a lawyer-politician, business leader and social advocate, is his strong solidarity with his community and his care for its people.

However Mr Arculli was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He grew up in a family of very limited means. His ethnic origin is not typical Hong Kong: his mother’s family came from mainland China and his father’s ancestors came from the Indian Sub-continent well over 100 years ago. His parents were divorced when he was three. His mother, a single parent, had to work very hard as a teacher to bring up Mr Arculli and his sister. At one time, they lived in a 100-square-foot cubicle in a flat in North Point which the family shared with several other families. Studying under these conditions was a real challenge. Mr Arculli had all the necessary ingredients for becoming a social failure and a misfit, but he took fate into his hands and authored his own personal history.

Part of his success he owes to his mother. Even under those harsh circumstances, she taught him to be himself, self reliant, fair, and caring. He learnt self respect from her love. He learnt integrity from her struggle. He learnt humbleness from her humanity. She taught him values which have made him the distinguished member of the community that he is today.

As Oscar Wilde, the Irish playwright, has reminded us, “We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars” (1892). Despite the harsh realities of his early life, Mr Arculli has always had his eyes on the stars. But he is a realist and a pragmatist, not a mere dreamer. He knows he has to work hard to make his

dreams come true and to constantly improve himself for survival and self fulfilment.

His background did not dampen his spirits. He studied hard and did not give up, even under the most challenging circumstances. With the support of his relatives, he left for England to study law after graduating with outstanding results from a secondary school in Hong Kong. He completed his legal studies within 18 months so that he could start working to support his family and to serve his community. He was called to the English and Hong Kong Bars in 1961 and was admitted as a solicitor in Hong Kong as well as a Barrister and Solicitor in Victoria, Australia.

In 1974 he entered the financial sector and became involved in merchant banking. Two years later, he returned to legal practice. In 2000 he set up his own law firm with a partner based in Sydney specializing in telecommunications, technology, competition law and intellectual property in the Asia Pacific Region. In October 2005 his law firm merged with another local firm in association with a leading law firm in China. He is currently a non-executive director of the Hong Kong Mortgage Corporation, the Real Estate Developers Association of Hong Kong, a council member of the Hong Kong International Arbitration Centre, as well as Director of several major public and private listed companies in Hong Kong.

Mr Arculli has served on numerous government committees, statutory boards and advisory bodies, both locally and internationally, including the Town Planning Board, the Judicial Service Commission, the Securities and Futures Commission, the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation, and Chairman of the International Award Association of the Hong Kong Award for Young People.

He was a member of the Legislative Council of Hong Kong from 1988 to June 2000 and Chairman of the Finance Committee of the Council between 1997 and 2000. He was a member of the Provisional Legislative Council between 1996 and 1998 and oversaw Hong Kong's smooth transition to the "one country-two systems" regime. He became Chairman of the Hong Kong Jockey Club in 2002 and is currently a vice-president of the Equestrian Committee (Hong Kong) of the Beijing Olympic Games Organizing Committee, which has the responsibility of taking charge of the 2008 Olympic equestrian events in Hong Kong. Last month, he was appointed by the Chief Executive Donald Tsang to be a member of the Executive Council.

Mr Arculli takes pride in being the Chair of the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, which has donated more than HK\$10 billion—an average of a billion dollars a year—to hundreds of community projects. These projects go far beyond charity work, aiming to improve the quality of life for all people in society. A notable example is the 2003 decision to donate HK\$500 million towards the Centre for Health Protection after the outbreak of SARS in support of the global fight against communicable diseases.

Another important initiative of the Trust is funding a creative arts center in a former factory estate in Shek Kip Mei. The centre will form Hong Kong's first arts hub for local artists to promote local art and creativity.

Mr Arculli is also steering the Trust to take a more proactive approach to address pressing social needs and to work in closer partnership with local NGOs to benefit society. An innovative project is setting up a domestic violence prevention and service centre, called the Jockey Club Harmony Link, to offer help to victims of domestic violence, especially children.

Family values are very dear to his heart. Mr Arculli believes in the resilience of families and how they can hold and pull together to help one another, even though at times they may require some external support and assistance.

“My family background helped me appreciate the value of equal opportunity, a level playing field, supportive social services, and rule of law as the most important societal pre-conditions for those struggling hard to achieve something for themselves through individual efforts,” he said.

As a lawyer-politician, he is highly respected for his uncompromising principles and his defense of the rule of law and civil and political liberties in Hong Kong. As a business leader and social advocate, he is well known for his public service contributions to promote prosperity and a better quality of life for all.

Even though he is not a “gentleman” by birth, Mr Arculli is certainly a gentleman in character. According to the Confucian standard, to be “poor but not inferior; rich but not superior” is not good enough. A true gentleman is someone “who, even though poor, will delight in following principles; and who, even when rich, will be happily committed to observing propriety” (the *Analects* 1:15). Mr Arculli is an exemplar of the Confucian gentleman, the *junzi*.

His colleagues in the Legislative Council named him “the King of Bills,” because of the large number of bills he examined, the outstanding professionalism he demonstrated, and his commitment to improve law and public policy making. He has also been referred to as “the gentleman politician”, a tribute to his uncompromising principles and personal integrity.

In recognition of his outstanding contribution to the well being of society, I have the distinct pleasure of presenting Mr Ronald Joseph Arculli to you, Mr Pro-Chancellor, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Social Science, *honoris causa*.