

Honorary Fellow

Ms Marina Wong Yu-pok

Citation written and delivered by Professor Christian Wagner

Pro-Chancellor, Council Chairman and President:

A Professional Life in Hong Kong and China

“Stay calm, stay the course … cycles are inevitable”. Ms Wong shared with me this valuable motto promoting patience and steadiness. “For China I am very patient,” she says. “You need to look at the big picture, and the history of the last 100 years.” It is therefore not surprising that China’s success has also strongly shaped Ms Wong’s life success.

Joining the Hong Kong Technical College in 1965 on a three-year accountancy course, the chance for this young college student to eventually become a senior executive at a leading international accounting firm were minute, and yet Ms Wong became Coopers and Lybrand’s first female partner in Asia. “I finished my professional exams at 20, but needed to wait until age 21 before I had three years practical experience so as to become a qualified accountant,” she explained.

In her 36 years with Coopers and Lybrand, later PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), Ms Wong’s focus always remained on China, specialising in China tax and business advisory services. In 1978, shortly after Deng Xiaoping came to power, she visited the Ministry of Finance and started to build strong relationships for the firm. “The officials at the Ministry were wonderful,” she explained. “They were knowledgeable and nice. Yet because of the Cultural Revolution they were lacking international input, and thus they were very keen to learn international practices.”

She started the first office for the firm in Guangzhou in 1979. In Shanghai, the firm’s business registration No. 001 was obtained in 1981, the first foreign company registration. Yet these were challenging times. With little revenue to be obtained, budgets were tight, and the work was hard. “For the first three years, I worked Sunday to Wednesday in Hong Kong, and then Thursday to Saturday in China.” Only after two years, the office in Guangzhou was able to hire staff to be resident there.

In 1978, Senior Partner Mr Sanford Yung made her a Principal. The firm had a rule that only those who were chartered accountants could become partners. Yet on an auspicious date, 8 August 1988, this rule was changed, enabling Ms Wong to obtain Partner status at that time.

Balancing Work and Life

A tireless worker, Ms Wong still has time to balance work and life. While others may go on holidays, she engages herself in community service. “Once I was more established professionally,” she explains, “opportunities for community service increased.” How did she manage these increased demands? “You have to squeeze time and be efficient.” Ms Wong says.

Life balance in the early years meant not listening to Elvis Presley or the Beatles, but mingling with friends and trying to understand what was happening in the mainland. She also involved herself in the publication of a journal, “烈焰” the *Hot Flame*, from 1967 to 1972.

Helping Women – Helping Children

Her business acumen and standing helped Ms Wong in one of her important community services, helping other women. In 1980, she joined ZONTA, a women’s service organisation. “At the time, Hong Kong was still quite men centred” and thus the ZONTA became a wonderful fellowship to share ideas of interest with professional women”, she said. She was able to provide her business expertise, and her China expertise as well. Ms Wong thus was able to help other women achieve success in China. In 1996 she became the founding president of the Hong Kong Women Professionals & Entrepreneurs Association. Later she was also appointed to become the HKSAR’s representative to the All China Women’s Federation, and accepted the Vice-chairmanship of the Hong Kong Federation of Women.

Her concerns for the welfare of children, led Ms Wong to accept other responsibilities, such as becoming an executive member of the Matilda Child Development Centre, Director of the China Tibetan Children Health and Education Fund, and member of the School Management Committee of the Chinese Foundation Secondary School.

Other Civic Duties

It was in the nineties that Ms Wong started to engage in Government appointed advisory activities. “It was a great opportunity to learn how government works and to learn about other sectors.” She became a Director of the Applied Research Council, and was member of the Consumer Council, the Social Welfare Advisory Committee and the Operation Review Committee, Independent Commission Against Corruption of the HKSAR. She is also executive committee member of the All China Federation of Industries and Commerce.

Relationship with CityU

“I received a call from the Education and Manpower Bureau”, is how Ms Wong describes the beginning of her relationship with CityU. She started her six-year term as Council member in 1999 and also served on several of the Council’s committees, such as the Finance Committee, the Audit Committee, and later also the Management Board of the Community College of City University. It is in the committees, Ms Wong notes, where one learns about the university’s operations. “This is a young university, a very big university, and it has done really well in adding value,” she points out. Ms Wong described how touched she was by the notion that more than 90% of CityU students are first generation students. “We may not have the ranking of some of the older universities, and students may join with a different profile. But when they leave the university they are offered jobs on the same terms. This is a great success. Plus we have several outstanding niche areas within the university.”

Accomplishments

With such a successful career and civic life, what does Ms Wong point out as her biggest accomplishments? “Friendships gained and trust earned. Through friendship and trust we can touch other people.” She described a recent breakfast meeting where she was reunited with a co-worker from 20 years ago, who vividly detailed the advice she had given him, and how it had affected his professional development.

Recent Activities

After leaving PwC in 2004, Ms Wong joined Tricor Services Limited as Director until February 2006. Having fewer professional responsibilities hardly leaves Ms Wong idle. She is maintaining an ever growing number of civic responsibilities. “I just do things,” she humbly states. “I rarely think about the

past or the future, but try to do things well, and be useful now.” In 2004 she was appointed Justice of the Peace. In 2005, she became a member of the Broadcasting Authority and in 2007 a member of the Advisory Committee on Post Service Employment of Civil Servants.

What other advice can Ms Wong share with us? “You must have passion, must act from your heart.” We thank Ms Wong for her great passion, her heart, and her great contributions for CityU and the community.

In recognition of Ms Marina Wong’s many accomplishments and contributions to the development of the University, Mr Pro-Chancellor, Mr Council Chairman and Mr President, I have the great honour to call upon you to confer on her the award of the title of Honorary Fellow.