Professor Lap-Chee TSUI

Citation

The burgeoning world of genomics that has flourished since the successful completion of the 13-year US$3 billion Human Genome Project in 2003 offers hope for millions: cancer sufferers through better identification of tumors and appropriate treatments; doctors in prescribing the most efficacious drugs for each patient; and individuals worldwide through fast DNA analysis to identify gene mutations and disorders. For this bold and rapidly advancing area of medical discovery, we today celebrate the catalytic scientific contribution of Professor Lap-Chee Tsui, world-renowned molecular biologist and former Vice-Chancellor and President of the University of Hong Kong.

Professor Tsui was born in Shanghai and raised in Hong Kong. He is an alumnus of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and PhD graduate of the University of Pittsburgh in the United States. From 2000 to 2002, he served as President of the Human Genome Organization, the international group of scientists involved in the global genome endeavor. But 15 years earlier, he and his researchers at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, Canada, had already started to pioneer the way forward through insight, experimental genius and advanced technologies.

In 1985, Professor Tsui and his team found the first DNA marker linked to cystic fibrosis, a common and deadly inherited disease affecting one in every 2,500 to 3,500 births in Caucasian populations. In 1989, he and his collaborators discovered the defective gene on Chromosome 7 causing cystic fibrosis. To do so, they used positional cloning strategies, opening up fresh pathways to other disorders. From this huge breakthrough, and the intensive labor and time it required, came the call in the United States to launch the Human Genome Project to speed up similar findings. Professor Tsui also made notable contributions to mapping and identification of other diseases on Chromosome 7.

Professor Tsui's initial move into his field was serendipitous, but extremely fortunate for the rest of us. He loved both nature and drawing, a combination that saw him do exceptionally well in his undergraduate entrance examination in biology. While studies involving rote learning and memorization had always been a challenge, he proved a natural at newer realms such as molecular biology, with its emphasis on reasoning, deduction and observation.

Contribution as well as curiosity drove Professor Tsui onward. Coming from a modest background, he had to earn and learn during his college years. Yet he still found time to volunteer. He did not do so to score additional credits or with thought of

with thought of future reward, but simply because it seemed right to share what he had with others. The pursuit of knowledge to assist people, openness through publication, and public service became his own "DNA markers" throughout his career.

While based in Canada, at both the Hospital for Sick Children and the University of Toronto, Professor Tsui remained attached to Hong Kong. He provided his expertise to the Research Grants Council for many years, including chairing the Biology and Medicine subject panel. In 2002, he returned more permanently to head the University of Hong Kong. Over his 12-year vice-chancellorship, he was a staunch advocate for academic freedom and transparency. He also revamped older institutional systems, introducing the university's first strategic plan; spurred local community support for higher education fund-raising; and encouraged the university's major research contribution during SARS in 2003.

To Professor Tsui, successful leadership is in fact all about teamwork: the building and supporting of a highly capable and cohesive group of people in pursuit of shared goals. The diverse and profound achievements inspired by this approach are clear from his long, long list of recognitions. These encompass over 70 prestigious awards and a host of professional honors, including a Gold Bauhinia Star from the Hong Kong SAR Government in 2011, induction into the Canadian Medical Hall of Fame in 2012, and Fellowships of the Royal Society of Canada, Royal Society of London and Academia Sinica.

Today, he guides Hong Kong's forward momentum and future generations as a Director of Hong Kong Science & Technology Parks Corporation, President of the Victor and William Fung Foundation, and through his own remarkable role model as a person who has continued to be unassuming and willing to give after so dramatically advancing our world.

Mr Council Chairman, on behalf of the Council of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, I have the high honor of presenting to you, Professor Lap-Chee Tsui, GBS, JP, world-acclaimed molecular biologist, for the award of Doctor of Science *honoris causa*.