HKU Foundation Stone

Kenneth Sit
Clerk of Convocation
(LIS 1980; POL1 1981)

T

he press started it, one can say. On December 15, 1905, the China Mail editorial argued that Hong Kong should set up a university to cater for the demand for higher education from all over China. The article aroused discussion in the press but the Governor, Matthew Nathan, dismissed the notion of a local university, saying that funding for it would be difficult. Following the change of the Governor to Frederick D Lugard in July 1907, China Mail renewed its argument for a local university. Lugard found the idea interesting and toyed with it. At a prize giving ceremony at St Stephen’s College in January 1908, he said that Hong Kong should be “the Oxford and Cambridge of the Far East”, suggesting a university to serve Hong Kong as well as Mainland China. Lugard was challenged to act on his ideals when, just days later, Hormoz Mody, a successful businessman who had been in Hong Kong for over 50 years, pledged HK$150,000 to the construction cost and HK$50,000 to the endowment fund for a university in Hong Kong.

Lugard took up the challenge with zest. He managed to persuade the College of Medicine to change its expansion plan to that of incorporation into the proposed university and commissioned an extensive fund raising drive in Hong Kong and Mainland China. A “Chinese Fund-Raising Sub-Committee” was formed under the chairmanship of Ho Kui, one of the founders of the College of Medicine, and this committee was instrumental to obtaining public support to the notion of a university in Hong Kong for principally Chinese students. Lugard also managed to secure official support from Mainland China. Apart from personal charm and reasons, he achieved this by repeatedly assuring that the proposed university would be free from politics – not antigovernment to the Qing Dynasty anyway. In the event, half of the initial endowment fund was subscribed to by Chinese donors.

Having secured sufficient donations for the initial endowment fund, a ceremony was held in the afternoon of March 16, 1910 at the site of the proposed university at the junction of Bonham Road and Peddledam Road. To the 1,300 people gathered under two large tents, Mody opened the ceremony by explaining what was behind his generous donation:

“IT was with the idea of in some measure providing for others what I myself desired.”

To enable the project to proceed in the best design, he had increased his donation for the university’s construction cost to HK$285,000, a remarkable sum even for an extremely wealthy man like him.

Speaking after Mody, Lugard set out his vision of the university:

“It is in my belief that the graduates of this University, its doctors of medicine, its scientific engineers, and its trained administrators, will exert an influence which will be unmeasurable in the future, among the 400 millions of China’s population. … I trust, with distorted conceptions and theories of government antagonistic to the established order of their country, but imbued with that genuine patriotism whose only aim is to make their country better and greater, and to share with others the benefits they have themselves received.”

Then he gave Mody a pleasant surprise by announcing that the King had just appointed Mody a Knight Bachelor.

For more than once, Mody had declared the wish to see the opening of the university soon. Perhaps this was why he readily agreed to increase his donation for the construction cost. However, he never lived to see the university’s opening day. He passed away in June 1910.

On the left wall in the north ground floor lobby of Lady Yew Hall is formed the Foundation Stone. With reference to one of the available copies of photographs of the ceremony on March 16, 1910, the framed stone is clearly smaller than the one used at the ceremony by 20 cm or so. The University Archives at HKU have documents showing that the framed stone had been there since the University opened but the wooden surroundings had to be replaced after World War II. Wonderers if the stone block used in the ceremony somehow went missing or was damaged beyond repair so that a replacement had to be made when the University opened in 1912.

By the way, the same HKU Archives records also show that the main doors to the lobby also date back to 1912, having somehow survived the bombings during World War II.

Next time when you visit Lady Yew Hall, look at the Foundation Stone. It’s the mark of HKU’s conception. And don’t forget the great doors while you’re at it.

ELECTION NOTICE

Election of Members to the Standing Committee

Nominations are hereby invited for the election of eight members to the Standing Committee at the coming Ordinary General Meeting 2008 on June 26, 2008. Each elected member will serve on the Standing Committee for a term of three years until the Ordinary General Meeting in 2011.

According to Paragraphs 26 and 28 of the Convocation Constitution, a person is eligible to be nominated for the election if he/she has been a member of Convocation for two years, and a retiring member is eligible for re-election. Paragraph 25(b) of the Convocation Constitution prohibits the Standing Committee from having more than four members who are also officers, teachers or staff of the University or who are also in receipt of any salary or stipend therefrom, excepting individuals occasionally appointed to ad hoc professional contracts. Of the current Standing Committee members whose terms of office will continue beyond the coming Ordinary General Meeting, three are in receipt of salaries from the University under employment contracts. Accordingly, at the coming Ordinary General Meeting, no more than one member within the definition of paragraph 25(b) may be elected.

Nomination Procedures

Paragraph 40 of the Convocation Rules requires that each candidate must be nominated in writing by at least ten members entitled to vote.

Nomination form can be downloaded from http://www.hku.hk/convocat/election/2008 or obtained from the Secretariat, c/o Development & Alumni Affairs Office, The University of Hong Kong (Tel: 2859 2603). All nominations shall be accompanied by a statement by the candidate that he/she is willing to stand for election.

Each candidate is requested to attach with the nominations a brief biography of himself/herself, in English, of not more than 200 words and a copy of his/her photograph for publication to members.

Nominations should reach the Clerk of Convocation, c/o Development & Alumni Affairs Office, 738, 7/F, Knowies Building, The University of Hong Kong before 5 pm, Monday, May 5, 2008. Fax is not a valid mode of delivery of nominations to the Clerk.

Validity of Nomination Forms

All nomination forms shall be clearly completed with the required information and bear the original signature of the nominators.

Ordinary General Meeting Notice and Election Information

Under Paragraphs 4 and 5 of the Convocation Rules, the notice of the Ordinary General Meeting and election information may be sent to members by electronic mail or by an advertisement placed in an English and a Chinese language newspaper authorised by the Government to carry official or legal advertisements in Hong Kong at least twenty-one days before the Ordinary General Meeting. For the convenience of members, the notice will also be put on the Convocation website (http://www.hku.hk/convocat). Members wishing to have prints of the notice and election information are welcome to contact the Secretariat.

Kenneth SIT
Clerk of Convocation

March 18, 2008

The University of Hong Kong Convocation (香港大學畢業生聯會) is a statutory body of the University of Hong Kong comprising all graduates and teachers.

http://www.hku.hk/convocat

Upon registration, members of Convocation may cast their votes electronically. If you have not registered, do so by May 19, 2008 in order to be able to cast your “e-vote” at the forthcoming Standing Committee election. Go visit: www.hku.hk/convocat/e-voting