

科大校長葉玉如教授於吳家瑋教授追思會致辭全文（只有英文）

HKUST President Prof. Nancy IP's speech at Prof. Chia-Wei WOO's memorial service (English version only)

Mrs Yvonne Woo and all members of Professor Woo's family who are here with us today, Council and Court members, Distinguished Guests, Friends, Colleagues, Students, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We gather today with heavy hearts, yet with profound gratitude, to honor and celebrate the life and legacy of President Prof Woo Chia-Wei, our founding president.

Prof Woo was a truly remarkable individual - a brilliant scientist, a highly respected educator, a masterful university administrator, an outstanding community leader, and the visionary behind Hong Kong's first research-focused, innovation-driven university – the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

Born in Shanghai in 1937, Prof. Woo's childhood was marked by wars, with his family moving between Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. He arrived in the United States in 1955, a stranger in a strange land. Through perseverance, he earned both MA and PhD degrees at Washington University in St Louis before pursuing postdoctoral studies at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD).

Prof. Woo began his academic career as an Assistant Professor at Northwestern University, initially envisioning a path solely as a college professor. However, his exceptional leadership and unique insights quickly distinguished him. Within just five years, he was promoted to full professor and appointed Department Head the following year, breaking through the "glass ceiling" in academia of that era. Concurrently, driven by his passion for education, he excelled as a university administrator, and in 1979, he was appointed Provost and Professor of Physics at the UCSD,. In 1983, at the age of only 45, he made history by becoming president of San Francisco State University, the first Chinese American to head a major US university.

But then in 1986, after more than three decades in the US and at the peak of his career, Prof Woo made a bold decision to return to Hong Kong. Inspired by the Hong Kong government's initiative to establish a new university, he joined the university's planning committee to bring this mission forward. He later revealed in his memoirs that none of his four children supported his decision to return to Hong Kong. His wife Yvonne asked him two critical questions - "Will HKUST find a more suitable Founding President than

you?” and “Will you regret giving up this opportunity 20 years later?” - The answers were clear.

Prof Woo envisioned a world-class research university that would ignite intellectual growth, drive innovation, and elevate Hong Kong’s standing on the global stage. Anyone would have thought this to be an impossible task. But Prof Woo was undeterred. With his unwavering determination and persuasive charm, he convinced some of the brightest minds in academia to join him.

Together, these founding members worked tirelessly to secure funding, forge partnerships with government organizations and business leaders, and recruit top talent. Driven by his mantra of ‘creating, not replicating’, Prof Woo meticulously planned every aspect of the institution from scratch, including the strategic direction, curriculum structure, emblem, campus facilities, and governance framework. He saw this as a rare opportunity to build a pioneering institution from the ground up, with an innovative curriculum and a forward-looking research agenda.

HKUST opened its doors in 1991, three years earlier than planned, with Prof Woo serving as the founding president. I joined the University in 1993 and had the privilege of working with him for eight years until his retirement in 2001. I was inspired by his courage and determination, and his passion for learning. He taught me a great deal about leadership and building institutional excellence. He was adamant about hiring only top-notch academic staff, insisting that only first-class faculty could cultivate first-class talent. This unwavering principle has been vital in propelling HKUST into a world-class university in just three decades.

As we built the foundations for academic and research excellence, Prof Woo expanded his vision to the Mainland. He saw HKUST not only as Hong Kong’s first research university, but also as a pioneering institute in China. Today, we are all familiar with the Greater Bay Area. But more than 30 years ago, Prof Woo had already envisioned a “Hong Kong Bay Area”. He championed cooperation between Hong Kong and Shenzhen and foresaw their greater integration.

His unparalleled vision led to the establishment of the PKU-HKUST Shenzhen-Hong Kong Institution in the Shenzhen Hi-Tech Zone in 1999, a remarkable partnership between HKUST, Peking University, and the Shenzhen Municipal government. This historic endeavor marked a breakthrough in collaborative ties between Hong Kong and the Mainland. In October 2000, I accompanied him on his visits to the University of California, San Francisco, and Washington University in St. Louis to gain valuable

insights for strategic planning of setting up a SHENZHEN-PKU-HKUST Medical Center Shenzhen and it became a reality the following year.

In my over three decades at HKUST, I've had the privilege to witness the profound impact of Professor Woo's foresight. He set the University on a trajectory that has led to its rapid development into an internationally recognized, top ranked, world-class university. As we mourn his passing, we can take comfort in knowing that his legacy will continue to flourish. His examples of service, perseverance, pursuit of excellence, and intellectual curiosity form the basis of our university core values. The culture he fostered continues to drive us forward, inspiring us to push boundaries, to innovate, and to strive for excellence in all that we do.

And as we celebrate his achievements, we also honor the man he was — a humanist, a man of integrity, a selfless soul who gave generously to others, an inspiring leader who empowered those around him, and above all, a devoted husband, father, and grandfather.

I have many fond memories of Prof Woo. A particularly cherished one is when he presented me the 30-year long service award at the presentation ceremony in April last year. The warmth of his smile and his heartfelt words were a reflection of the deep personal connection he shared with our university community. Prof Woo always maintained that people were the heart of our success and the University's greatest asset, and was dedicated to creating a vibrant environment where everyone could excel. This is a conviction I too hold dear.

Thank you, Prof Woo. We are profoundly grateful for your pioneering spirit, compassionate leadership, dedicated service, and transformative contributions. You will be deeply missed, but your legacy lives on in the very spirit of HKUST.

Mrs Woo asked me to convey her heartfelt gratitude to all of you for your outpour of love and support to the family during this very difficult time. On behalf of the entire HKUST community, I offer my heartfelt condolences to Prof Woo's family. We stand with you in this time of sorrow, offering our support and deepest sympathy. Thank you.