

LIFELONG COMPANION TO LOVE AND TO SERVE



PROF. KWAN MING CHAN & MRS KAREN KUNG MEI CHAN LAK
1959 BSc Graduates, 1960 BSc(Special) Graduates, 1961 Dip Ed

As soon as Professor Kwan Ming CHAN and Mrs Karen Kung Mei Lak Chan came into the conference room, they exclaimed excitedly: “Such a huge change!” Indeed, their hands were quivering when they came back to HKU, where their dream, their commitment and their love story began.

The gracious couple were both graduates in the beginning of 1960s when Hong Kong was an immigrant city and some HKU students came from the mainland China, including Mrs Chan who spent her childhood in Jiangxi and Shanghai. They fell in love at the first sight and made a lifelong commitment with each other.

During their time, it was typical of students’ parents to get them an office job which was deemed highly valuable. However, neither of them chose this path. “University is a great platform for everyone to explore who they are and what they can dream. As long as we are not misled by the allure of money, we can easily figure out where we fit best. If we really followed the way of others, we would not have achieved what we did”, Professor Chan recalled in reminiscence.



Professor Chan said none of his achievements was built on pure luck but a Chinese adage he believed – “Diligence redeems stupidity 勤能補拙”. This could explain how he overcame his seasickness and spent 3 years on the boat as a research officer.

This motto also motivated him during his student life so that he could unprecedentedly finish his PhD thesis within 2 years at the University of Liverpool.

That was also a time when many university students sought for overseas opportunities.

Same for Professor Chan and Mrs Chan, they started their exotic adventure after Professor Chan had worked as a research officer at Hong Kong Fishery Department and Mrs Chan had taught at Queen Elizabeth School and New Asia College of CUHK. Getting married in England, driving from Italy all the way to Denmark, settling down in the U.S. (which was considered dangerous at that time because of the Vietnam War), it may seem adventurous or even crazy, after all these, Professor Chan felt there was always a root deep inside their heart – their home country.

Engaging themselves in “All China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese” (中國僑聯), they devoted decades in assisting overseas Chinese studying and living in the U.S., and ameliorating their living standards. Their concern about their home country led them all the way back to China. Even after retirement, they dedicated to spread knowledge and attend various seminars in China. They also gave precious suggestions to pollution control, industrial transformation and other societal issues there.

When being asked why he spent so many efforts in helping China or overseas Chinese even when they had migrated to the U.S., Professor Chan replied that “we are not only helping China, but also doing a favor to ourselves. It may be one of the greatest things in my life which has brought me a sense of self-fulfillment. We speak the same language and have been nourished by the same culture. Therefore, it has been absolutely natural and spontaneous that we gathered together and sometimes became really close friends.”

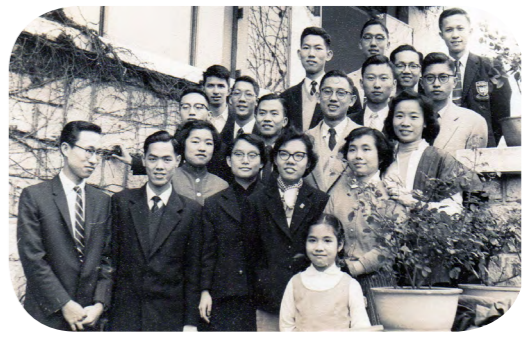


Photo taken by Dr Kwan Ming Chan on the Opening Day of Lady Ho Tung Hall in September 1956. First left in front row is Prof. S.C. Chan, who became a Dean of Science Faculty, HKU. First left in second row is Mrs Karen Chan. First left in the last row is Prof S W Tam, who became the President of the Open University of Hong Kong.

Their contentment did not derive from money or any other materialistic objects. “Though a basic amount of money is necessary for one to survive in this world, getting too rich will not bring you anything, unless you use your financial resource towards good causes.” Holding this belief, they made donation to the World War II Memorial of Chinese Americans in Monterey Park, California and other public welfare activities, which may inspire other scholars to contribute to the society as well. Recently, we also made a donation to HKU Faculty of Science for the celebration of Oak anniversary as a gesture of our appreciations.

Not getting enough after two hours of interview, the student reporter led them to the alumni bricks afterwards. Professor Chan and Mrs Chan held each other’s hand firmly as they walked. Suddenly, Professor Chan said with a tremulous voice: “See? I found it!” Followed by the brick engraved with their names, five characters came into the reporter’s sight. It read “為中國而立”. We stand for China.

STUDENT REPORTER

“I could not imagine interviewing such an outstanding couple until our Faculty gave me this precious chance and did not feel prepared until I saw them walking into the conference room with benign smiles on their faces. Teaching at a prestigious university, working for Boeing Corporation, there may be no need to mention other astonishing achievements of them, but what they inspired me most was something else – the passion to serve for our country. It has been a wonderful experience and I cannot wait to share it with all of you!”



Yoyo Li, BSc Student

“Diligence redeems stupidity 勤能補拙”