

CJ's address at Ceremony for the Admission of the New Senior Counsel

The following is the full text of an address by the Honourable Chief Justice Geoffrey Ma Tao-li at the Ceremony for the Admission of the New Senior Counsel today (May 19):

My Lords, ladies and gentlemen, it is again that happy time of year when I can extend a warm welcome to all of you to celebrate the appointment of our Senior Counsel for Hong Kong. Today may not be the happiest day of their lives nor the most significant even, but I hope it will come close. All of us present in this courtroom congratulate you and your families.

A day like today is of course to be savoured and enjoyed by the new silks, their families and friends. It is also an important day for all of us on the Bench as we welcome four new Senior Counsel who will without doubt enrich the pool of able counsel assisting judges to fulfil their oath of administering justice according to the law. This is not possible in our system unless judges have the benefit of counsel's assistance. It is in particular to leading counsel on whom judges will rely in the many difficult cases, both private and public, that now confront the courts. It therefore comes as little surprise to know that the community looks very much to the ranks of senior counsel to help fill the ranks of the judiciary.

My predecessor, Chief Justice Li, often referred to the appointment as Senior Counsel as a badge of honour. This is an apt way of describing of course the prestige that taking silk means, but it is more than that. To me, it carries with it a public recognition of at least five characteristics which make a person suitable to become a Senior Counsel: integrity, honour, ability, industry and, above all, respect for the law. I mention deliberately "public recognition" for it is the public interest that provides the foundation in the appointment of Senior Counsel.

These characteristics are the very same qualities required of judges; they go to the very heart of the legal system which exists in Hong Kong and of the administration of justice here. We are all servants of the law and we all serve the public interest. The public interest consists of the respect for the law, its contents and, often just as important if not more so, its spirit.

The four new Senior Counsel today possess all these characteristics which I have mentioned. This represents the views of all those whom I have consulted - the judges, the Chairman of the Bar and the President of the Law Society. It also represents very much my own views, for I have had the pleasure of encountering all of them, both in my

judicial capacity and when I was still practicing at the Bar. I even had the privilege of having worked with two of them.

One of these is Mr C Y Li. When I think of him, the word "Pierre" springs to mind. It is a good name for him. In what was virtually my last case as counsel before joining the Bench, I had the pleasure of working with Mr Li. It was a gender discrimination case, not the usual property dispute that is Mr Li's regular staple in his practice. His industry was phenomenal and this is where "Pierre" comes in. As the French would say, "il laisse aucune pierre non-retourner" - he leaves no stone unturned.

Mr Robert Pang is a barrister who has always impressed the courts. For a senior barrister with a busy practice, he is a rarity in that he has a successful practice in both the civil and criminal law. In the words of one Senior Counsel who provided a reference for Mr Pang, he is "an honourable, conscientious and hard-working person who has reached the stage in his career where he can confidently assume the responsibilities of leading counsel". Another Senior Counsel who provided a reference said of him "it was obvious he was regarded by his peers (and for that matter, his juniors and seniors) as not only 'very good' but always courteous and helpful to friend and foe alike". These are the views shared by the Judiciary.

Mr Eugene Fung is the other person with whom I have had the privilege of working. His specialised areas are tax and trusts. His reputation is second to none. He is a person who has always placed integrity and professionalism as being of paramount importance in the practice of law. And with his appointment as Senior Counsel, given even the dizzy heights his practice has so far attained, I can see it will become even dizzier as he strives to reach the pinnacle of his career. Mr Fung is also the youngest of our silks today: to give you an idea of this, when he was born, Henry Litton (Mr Justice Litton NPJ) had already been a Queen's Counsel for a year.

Mr Charles Manzoni was an obvious choice for Senior Counsel - for me and for everyone whom I consulted. It is easy to see why - he has an extensive and successful practice in both Hong Kong and the United Kingdom (where he became a Queen's Counsel in 2009). He is a specialist in construction law, although his commercial practice is just as busy and equally successful. He is popular and successful among his peers - he wastes little time, gets to the point and genuinely assists the courts to arrive at the right decision.

Ladies and gentlemen, the presence of so many close relatives and close friends this morning is heart-warming. It is your presence today that really makes the day a special day for our four new Senior Counsel. The love and encouragement of those closest to you give you the impetus to succeed. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate in particular the parents of our Senior Counsel today, their brothers and sisters, and of

course their wives (Hong Li, Serene, Yvonne and Clare), and their children (Li Qi Yun, Li Zae Lo, Ricci Pang, Lillian Manzoni, Campbell Manzoni, Florence Manzoni and Scarlett Manzoni).

Today is 135 years to the day that the first Chinese, Mr Ng Choy, was called to the Hong Kong Bar. I hope today is as special for the four of you as it must have been for Mr Ng.

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