

Beacon of positive energy

Out of the Box

Tony Chan Fan-cheong is president of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. He has spent his life pursuing his dreams relating to teaching and research, and has unique views on education, scientific and technological development, and nurturing the young.



I HAD the privilege to attend the inaugural award ceremony of the Lui Che Woo Prize for World Civilization last week. The LCW Prize recognizes contributions to world civilization in three categories: 1) Sustainable world development, 2) Betterment of welfare of mankind, and 3) Promotion of positive life attitude and enhancement of positive energy.

There are different areas of focus under each category each year and for 2016 they are: 1) world food supply, 2) control of epidemics, and 3) inspiring, energizing and giving hope to others. Many renowned people, both local and international, are involved in the management and selection mechanisms of the prize, such as former University of Hong Kong vice chancellor Tsui Lap-chee, MTRCL chairman Fred Ma, former chief executive Tung Chee-hwa, former US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice, former Chinese University of Hong Kong vice chancellor Lawrence Lau, and HKUST's Dean Nancy Ip. I was honored to be one of about 1,000 nominators.

Yuan Longping, revered agricultural scientist and educator who successfully developed the first hybrid rice in China in the 1970s, was the winner in the Sustainability category, and he delivered his acceptance speech in surprisingly fluent English at a mighty 86 years of age.

Medecins Sans Frontieres was the winner in the Welfare Betterment category, for its contributions to the treatment and control of the cholera outbreak in Haiti in 2010, and the Ebola epidemic in West Africa in 2014.

The president of MSF-Hong Kong, Chiels Liu Chen-kun, delivered a very powerful acceptance speech, in which he urged the world not to turn their backs away from the needed and the hurt in the face of challenge.

Former US president Jimmy Carter won in the Positive Energy category, but he could not attend as he has just recently recovered from melanoma. Known for his selflessness and devotion, Carter pledged to donate all his prize money to the Carter Center for its program expansion. All three winners are indeed well deserved.

Both my family and Lui's were originally from Xinhui, Guangdong and, coincidentally, while Lui started his very first business in quarries, I also grew up in a quarry, as my father was the chief engineer (the rock crushing machines in both cases were purchased from the US Army after the Korean War). I first met Lui in person after I took up HKUST's presidency at the July 1 flag-raising ceremony in 2010, and we subsequently also met at HKUST Court meetings as he is our Honorary Court member.

While the young in Hong Kong may only relate Lui and his conglomerate, K Wah Group, to their ventures in Macau, I have always thought of him as a pioneer who literally helped build the Hong Kong we know today – the “rocks” from his quarry were used in many infrastructures in Hong Kong during its growth years. In his address, Lui talked about his upbringing, and how he believes that the best way to solve the world's conflicts is by promoting harmony – as Confucius preached: “In practicing the rules of propriety, a natural ease is to be prized.”

The LCW Prize, he believes, would transcend all boundaries of nations, promote universal values, and sow seeds for the continuous development of a better and harmonious world, a philosophy he also expounded in his biography, which I have read.

I am very pleased to see the founding of such a generous and innovative prize by Lui. It has been said that giving away money can be harder than earning it. The categories and focus areas for the LCW Prize are quite broad, which may make it challenging to select winners from nominations from diverse fields. Moreover, should the awards be given to well-recognized names, or up-and-coming relative unknowns? The choice of the inaugural prize winners show it is off to an excellent start.

For 2017, the areas of focus are “Prevention of Climate Change” (Sustainability), “Alleviation of Poverty” (Welfare Betterment), and “Promotion of Harmony among Diverse Groups” (Positive Energy). All these are timely topics and should generate plenty of interest.

I hope the prize, and the winners, will help broaden the view and ambition of Hong Kong people in general. Hong Kong now risks increasingly looking inward, often overlooking that we are part of a global village with serious problems and challenges, and that Hong Kong should, and can, contribute to their solutions.

All the prize winners this year have dedicated significant parts of their lives to tackle their causes. I hope that they will inspire our fellow citizens, especially our young, to a broader understanding of the complexity, as well as the universality, of many of our local challenges in a broader global context.

Lui Che-woo

