

DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION, *honoris causa*

Dr the Honourable Allan Zeman, GBM, GBS, JP

Mr Pro-Chancellor,

It was fifty years ago when Neil Armstrong and the crew of Apollo 11 embarked on the ambitious space mission to the Moon; millions watched with bated breath as he stepped out of the spacecraft and left the first human footprints in lunar soil. To Dr Allan Zeman, his decision to leave his life in Canada behind and move to Hong Kong was akin to flying to the Moon—an undertaking that most would consider unimaginable at that time. By virtue of his abiding hardiness, however, Dr Zeman was not run down by fear of the unknown, and instead stayed resilient and positive against all challenges throughout his subsequent professional and public life. Now a revered figure in the tourism and hospitality industry of Hong Kong and brand builder extraordinaire in Asia, the brave explorer has indubitably left his mark in the larger fabric of Hong Kong's history.

As a young man growing up in Montreal, Canada, Dr Zeman was already determined to cut a different path than his peers. Losing his father at seven, he entered the workforce at a very young age, starting out as a paper boy and restaurant waiter. Before turning 20, he had started his own fashion business and made his first million US dollars. With the boom in Hong Kong's manufacturing industry during the 1960s and '70s, his business had brought him to this city for the very first time. Despite the language barrier and cultural differences, Dr Zeman was captivated by the city's can-do spirit and vibrant energy. At the same time, he was quick to realise that Hong Kong would be the perfect gateway to expand the scope and international outreach of his business, as the low tax rate allowed him to keep the fortune he made. It was not long before he determined to leave Montreal and migrate to Hong Kong in 1975.

Owing partly to his early engagement in doing business, and partly to his exposure to the fast-paced world of fashion, Dr Zeman had developed not only an entrepreneurial spirit and keen eye for innovation, but also the courage to take risks and actualise what he envisions. In fact, when asked about his legacy, he often attributes his success to the ability to see things for not what they are, but what they could become. This mirrors the philosophy of our University, as we strive to provide students with transformative learning experiences through which their pursuit for knowledge would empower them to cross new thresholds and reach for greater heights. Where others may see a glass as half empty, Dr Zeman would always see it as half full, and what is more, all kinds of exciting possibilities for filling up the other half. The same perceptive and positive spirit that had motivated him to start a career in Hong Kong continues to act as a beacon in all his entrepreneurial endeavors. This is perhaps most evident in two of his best-known projects: Lan Kwai Fong and Ocean Park.

In early 1980s, Dr Zeman realised that Hong Kong was missing an entertainment and lifestyle hub, somewhere expatriates and businessmen such as himself could socialise with clients and meet for drinks. At that time, Lan Kwai Fong was but an unremarkable alley in Fringe Central, yet past the rundown backstreet populated with market stalls and refuse collection, Dr Zeman saw the multitude of opportunities that Lan Kwai Fong presented with its convenient location. This is why despite having zero experience in managing a restaurant under his belt, Dr Zeman opened California Restaurant in 1983, which marks a turning point for both Lan Kwai Fong's development as well as his own career path. He later bought California Entertainment Building and California Tower in 1988 and 1992 respectively. Today, Lan Kwai Fong is heralded as Hong Kong's nightlife and entertainment district par excellence, popular among local partygoers and tourists from around the world, while drawing in some of the city's hippest restaurants and bars. More than anything, he enjoys what he does—restoring life and energy to old buildings and transforming them into modern, pleasant premises with uniquely blended cultures and values. He sees the value of preserving heritage rather than tearing it down in the name of development. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the 'Father of Lan Kwai Fong' is indeed the 'Father of sustainable tourism in Hong Kong' as well. As Chairman of Lan Kwai Fong Group, he has successfully expanded his brand to various cities in Asia, including Chengdu, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, and Phuket.

While Lan Kwai Fong is testament to Dr Zeman's "out of the box" business approach, his hardiness and charisma as a leader truly shines through during his tenure as Chairman of Ocean Park. When the then Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa approached him with this offer in 2003, Hong Kong's economy was suffering from a severe setback, and the SARS pandemic had left a sense of trepidation and dread among all. At the same time, Hong Kong Disneyland was scheduled to open in 2005. Undaunted by these circumstances, Dr Zeman accepted the invitation to take over the helm as Chairman of Ocean Park. He launched the Master Redevelopment Project in 2005, introducing numerous long-term initiatives to reposition the Park as a world-class marine theme park with an added focus on edutainment and nature conservation, while dedicated to retaining the qualities that made the Park special to local visitors. More importantly, he became the face and brand celebrity for Ocean Park, spreading his positivity and fun-loving energy to visitors of the Park during a much needed time. During promotional events, he had even donned different costumes and appeared as various impressive characters, from a jellyfish or panda, to a Chinese vampire or Samba girl. Under his exceptional leadership and management, the number of attractions and retail and restaurant areas has increased exponentially, and visitor arrivals and revenues continued to see growth year by year despite the opening of Hong Kong Disneyland. In 2012, Ocean Park became the first theme park in Asia to receive the prestigious "Applause Award", the most significant recognition within the global attraction industry.

For all his fortune and status, Dr Zeman's accomplishments are never limited to the business sector, as he remains socially engaged, seeing Hong Kong's social issues often as his own. Sitting on the board and advisory committee of many local and regional organisations in the society, he is attentive to the fundamental problems faced by Hong Kong and is keen to unfold more opportunities for the new generations. Appointed Honorary Advisor of the Board of West Kowloon Cultural District Authority, he also serves as a member of the HKSAR Chief Executive's Council of Advisors on Innovation and Strategic Development, advising the government on the strategic positioning of Hong Kong in the global and regional contexts. In light of his numerous contributions to the city's cultural development and tourism industry, Dr Zeman has been a Justice of the Peace since 2001, and was recipient of the Gold Bauhinia Star and the Grand Bauhinia Medal in 2004 and 2011 respectively.

In many ways Dr Zeman epitomises our University's aspirations for its students. He has mentioned his appreciation for young people's creative and adventurous spirits. Knowing that the future rests on technology, which is constantly changing how business is run globally, he encourages today's youths to seek opportunities therein by intelligent risk-

taking and being innovative. He also emphasizes the importance of travelling, and how it has expanded his perspectives and provided inspirations for his business ventures. This aligns with what we hope to help students achieve through the Global Immersion Programme, as students would have the opportunity to enhance their perspectives beyond national and disciplinary boundaries, while acquiring the soft skills and experiences necessary to excel in this fast-evolving global business environment.

When asked why he chose to risk his life to travel to the Moon, Armstrong had famously said, "We're going to the moon because it's in the nature of the human being to face challenges. It's in the nature of his deep inner soul. We're required to do these things just as salmon swim upstream." Just as Armstrong who had propelled himself through the ether reaching for the Moon, or a salmon fighting its way against fast currents, Dr Zeman is never afraid to walk on a thorny path and has remained resilient at each turn of his life, confident in his ability to transform a difficult situation into an opportunity for growth. When talking about his philosophy of life, Dr Zeman described how positive energy travels and transforms those around you. It is my hope that his unfaltering positivity will find its way to our graduates' hearts, giving them the courage and confidence to face any challenges in their future endeavors.

Mr Pro-Chancellor, in recognition of his outstanding accomplishment in the cultural and tourism development of Hong Kong, and for the leadership and service he has contributed to our community, may I invite our President to present to you Dr Allan Zeman, for the conferment of the degree of Doctor of Business Administration, *honoris causa*.

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Citation written and to be delivered by Professor Alan Au Kai-ming