

Nicholas Tsui's Speech

Wah Yan College Hong Kong Speech Day on 12th November 2009

Fr. Chow, Mr. Tam, Honorable Guests, Parents, Teachers and fellow Wahyanites, a good and memorable afternoon to you all.

“Extending an invitation to an old boy to be the guest-speaker on Speech Day, is indeed a high honour. I feel I am not worthy, because it implies that you approve of me for what I am...” Those were the words of my father, Paul Tsui Ka Cheung, in 1966. He was a decorated war-hero and the first Chinese to become A.O. (Administrative Officer) in the Government of Hong Kong under British rule. Here I stand, 43 years later, on the same stage, finding it an impossible task to justify my presence with ‘worthiness’, be it social or academic. Thus, I will offer you, in a moment, words on a topic I know best...the Passion and Heart of the die-hard Wahyanite. (In Cantonese: 打不死的華仁仔)

It takes the school courage and innovation to ask an old boy who did not excel in school to address her students on Speech Day. Let it be known, that this is not to be taken as a sign that Wah Yan is compromising on her pursuit of academic excellence. This has to be said because we are not harvesting straight As in the public exams this year and our critics are still counting the number of As we are not getting, ignoring our higher aim to provide all round education.

On behalf of my wife and myself, I would like to express our sincere thanks to the School for having us as guests, on this very special Speech Day when Wah Yan is celebrating her 90th Anniversary. I believe that makes me your first 3rd generation speaker from the same family. I am sure my father and especially my grandfather would appreciate your remembering Wah Yan's past, a good 90 years after the foundation of the school.

My congratulations go to all the deserving winners of certificates and prizes here today.

To those of you who have done well: You have worked hard and opened up your first

door to success in life. There will be many other doors to open after you leave Wah Yan, but your proven success here today leaves no room for our doubting your ability to open them all. My compliments go to your parents and your teachers who have given you the keys with which to open these doors to your bright and colourful future. But don't forget, a word of *thanks* direct from you to your parents and teachers, is worth ten times more than what I say here.

To those who have not performed up to expectation (and that makes the majority of us): Do not be discouraged by the closing of one door. For if you raise your heads and look up, there are windows awaiting your exploration and opening. Beyond these windows the vista is just as bright and colourful. However, you may have to work harder, exercising your intellectual insights and, perhaps, your creativity, to build a step-ladder that will help you reach these windows. The ever increasing pace at which the world is changing will create more niches to harbour opportunities for persistent contenders with clear goals of their own. Working harder to follow your passion and heart is the way forward for you.

Having worked hard for a number of years as a webmaster for various non-profit organizations, I get to feel the pulse of these communities I serve reasonably well. Among them, Wah Yan old boys come through as the most volatile community in terms of emotionality. The 10 years I spent maintaining their website on a daily basis, have taught me that most Wah Yan old boys tend to sway back and forth, like a pendulum, between loving and hating to be Wah Yan old boys. Since you are all becoming old boys soon, allow me to tell you a bit more about old boys.

Yes! As old boys, you may find yourselves swaying between loving and hating to be Wahyanites at different times. Fluctuating emotions of old boys can be measured by a new measuring system that I have just invented. I call it the Old Boys pH-Level Scale. pH, in this case, stands for Passion and Heart, the Passion and Heart you have for your Alma Mater.

A high pH level of, say 8 (which, I am told, is equivalent to that of baking soda) is when Wah Yan is doing well and you feel like baking a cake to celebrate;

A pH level of 3 (equivalent to that of vinegar) is when you feel things are getting sluggish in school and you find yourselves feeling sour and talking bitter about it;

And, it is at times when you disagree with how the school is run and find yourselves emotionally charged up, screaming for the heads of those you think are responsible, that your pH level drops to 0 (equivalent to that of battery acid, which is erosive).

Indeed, I have seen old boys, as well as current students, making waves of emotional comments that ripple through the Internet. A recent example is on lunch policy for the higher forms. Believe me, there were much bigger ones prior to that.

So, am I suggesting that you should remain restrained and complacent?

The answer is of course 'No', because no matter how critical your comments may sound, they are founded on your passion and heart for your mother school. Thus, when the pendulum swings back, those of you who scream the loudest often become the ones who do the most for Wah Yan at the end of the day. For example: In 2007, the Jesuit Education Board decided not to have Wah Yan join the DSS (Direct Subsidy Scheme). As a member of the DSS Task Force, I heard strongly worded threats from old boys who believed that DSS was the only way to go to enhance academic excellence. But soon after that, the same old boys were raising funds to support the Small Class Teaching Programme, the option adopted to enhance academic excellence.

To the die-hard Wahyanites, the pendulum always swings back, submitting to the pull of gravity... which, in our case, is Jesuit Education, a blessing we inherited on the day when Wah Yan was handed over to the Society of Jesus, 77 years ago.

As the grandson of the founder, I have often been asked about the reason for the handing over. The reason is written in Fr. Thomas Morrissey's book *Jesuits in Hong Kong and*

Beyond, which I had the pleasure of helping to publish last year: “Mr. Tsui,” he wrote, “had founded the college in 1919. After only three years it was so efficiently run that it was admitted to the list of grant-in-aid schools by the government. By 1929 it was the biggest school for Chinese students in Hong Kong, consisting of 800 pupils and 30 teachers, and was receiving the highest grant. Then, Mr. Tsui’s partner, invested the reserve fund of the school unsuccessfully, and this was followed by the world economic recession, all of which resulted in a twenty per cent fall in student attendance and in the educational grant-in-aid. At the same time, the salaries of the staff were increasing. In order to secure the future of the school and of its teachers, Mr. Tsui decided, to hand the school over to the Jesuits”.

And so, it was a bad investment of school fund that changed the destiny of Wah Yan, fortunately that time, with the grace of God, in the direction of the Society of Jesus.

Now, is there a lesson to be learned from history?

Yes, there is. With the financial market just as turbulent today and our various Wah Yan funds snow-balling up to tenths of thousands of dollars, the danger of making another bad investment is real again. On the School Development Project Board, I make it my policy to oppose to making high-yield/quick-return investments with donation funds. I’d rather see our sweet dream of redevelopment last a bit longer, than to end as a nightmare.

Back from dreams to reality. You might ask: “How then can a young Wahyanite like me engage myself with Wah Yan after I leave school?”

My answer is: “There are 3 things you can do after you leave Wah Yan”.

- The first thing you can do is to become an active member of the PSA (Past Students Association) and help to make it strong, united and intelligent so that it can make effective contributions to the school through her seat in the SMC (School Management Committee). As the largest group of stake-holders in Wah Yan, the PSA’s voice will no doubt be heard.

Learning the following basics about the PSA may help as a start:

- The PSA has 5,109 registered members;
- Our official mailing list has 2,438 active addresses;
- 908 have uploaded data to our online search directory Find-a-Wahyanite (including one from Toronto this morning);
- Globally, we have 15 overseas chapters that hold International Conferences every other year;
- We host the Students of the Year Award and sponsor Students Ambassadors to visit our overseas chapters every year;
- Under the Timeless Bonding Scheme, we have no less than 10 interest groups and 3 professional fraternities, namely the Medical, Legal and Financial Fraternities;
- Our 31 Past Presidents are holding luncheon meetings every other month;
- The headlines of our official PSA website is updated on a daily basis, public holidays and speech days inclusive;
- Under the *wahyan.net* banner, we have connected over 100 Wah Yan related websites;
- We run a Mentorship Programme to help our young Wahyanites every year;
- Our General Fund supports all kinds of student activities;
- Throughout the year, we hold sports, social and fund-raising functions attended by hundreds;

As you can imagine, there is a lot of work to be done to organize and implement all the above activities. It relies heavily on the efforts of a handful of die-hard Wahyanites, found mostly in the PSA Council. They are contributing their time and expertise selflessly and would welcome your support and participation. Do not be shy to come forward and volunteer your services to the PSA, for we need young blood like you to replenish ancient dinosaurs like me. Do not use your lack of resources as the excuse for not helping. It is not your resources that count, it's your resourcefulness. Resources always have limitations. Resourcefulness does not.

- The second thing you can do after you leave Wah Yan is to become an informed and intelligent critic of Wah Yan who can make constructive comments relevant to the Vision and Mission of the school and in the context of the Jesuit Education she is providing.

As a quick reminder:

- The Vision is to provide a ‘holistic, liberating and transforming Catholic education’;
- The Mission is to make students strive for excellence and become responsible and compassionate citizens and caring leaders; and
- Jesuit Education is based on a teaching/learning mode called Jesuit Pedagogy (sometimes known as the Ignatian Pedagogy). It provides ample opportunities for the interplay of students in the context of Experience, Reflection and Action and aims to create Men For Others to serve God and society, not himself.
- The third thing you can do after you leave Wah Yan is to live the life of a good Wahyanite without deviating from the path paved by Jesuit Education. When Wah Yan celebrated her Golden Jubilee in 1969, my grandfather was invited back to address the school on Speech Day. He said, “I like you to remember that the school is only providing you with the knowledge of what is right and what is wrong and it is for you to decide which to follow...” His concern was well founded and is still valid today when human values and business ethics are wearing thin in society. It is unfortunate, that despite of all our efforts to promote basic human values and business ethics at the HKIIEEL and the AIBE*, we still receive the occasional bad news that a Wahyanite has gone astray.
*[Hong Kong International Institute of Educational Leadership 香港國際教賢學院 is run by Dr. Alfred Deignan S.J. in Hong Kong & Association for International Business Ethics 國際經濟倫理協會 is run by Dr. Stephan Rothlin S.J. in Beijing.]

Your might then ask: “How can I avoid going off that path paved by Jesuit Education?” My answer is: There is now a new tool that can help you to stay on the right path. It is the document the *Profile of the Jesuit Student at Graduation*. I recommend using it as your guide-book for self-examination and reflection. Use the 40 definitions grouped under the 5 profile categories** to check if you are living up to expectation as Jesuit graduates. I am sure Fr. Chow has already introduced this Profile to you. I have uploaded a copy of it to the PSA website. I suggest you download it to-night and use it to virus

scan your own life as often as you virus scan your PC computer.

**[5 categories of the Profile: Intellectually Competent, Loving as a Personal Orientation, Open to Life-Long Growth, Religious and Moral, and, Committed to Acting on Justice]

Looking into the future, there will be no hope of increasing the presence of Jesuit priests in Wah Yan. But, I am optimistic that with Jesuit Education methodology well implemented among teachers and students, and with the tripartite unity of School, PSA and PTA remaining strong, Wah Yan has a good chance of staying as a great Jesuit school. The deciding factor rests with the quality of the new generations of Wahyanites we are producing and how well their *Wahyaness* can sustain in society.

Yes, I am talking about you young gentlemen in this room. Wah Yan's future is in your hands. When you leave this room today, I ask that you remember to do three things:
One, elevate yourselves to become die-hard Wahyanites of the PSA;
Two, continue to care for Wah Yan as a life-long commitment; and
Three, stand up in society as *Men for Others* with moral values taught by Jesuit Education.

Now, do you think you can do that?

Thank You and God Bless You All.