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Role of the Chinese Diaspora

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Welcome to the inaugural Michael Chan Memorial Lecture, which has been established for three reasons: firstly, to celebrate the life and work of Michael Chan, a great man and friend of both the Chinese and British and the first Chinese people's peer of the House of Lords; secondly, to allow us as Chinese and those who love Chinese culture in our adopted land of Britain to give an account, a state of the union or state of our present communities, and to take stock of how far we have progressed in this country; and thirdly, to allow people like me to give an independent take on constructive ways forward for our community in the near future. We are here today thanks to the London School of Economics and its Confucius Institute for Business London who have been so kind in providing this platform and for publicising this lecture.

And we are here today, and honoured to be in the presence of Lord Chan's widow and daughter, who graciously have allowed us to commemorate his work which I know has been such huge part of their lives as well. Behind every great man lies a great woman and family. I want to pay tribute to them and their commitment from which we have all benefitted. Thank you Lady Chan and thank you to the LSE Confucius Institute for Business London for hosting us. I look forward to many more such occasions when we can come together in this positive way in future. Michael Chan was a truly remarkable man and physician, who worked tirelessly for his patients and the health service, for his adopted country, Great Britain, and for Chinese in Britain and around the world.

Born in Singapore, the son of a headmaster, his career was distinguished, and included serving as a Consultant pediatrician and health researcher in Singapore, at Great Ormond Street, and at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. He was very prominent in the NHS, as its first and only director of ethnic health, and as the director of two health trusts. His interest in our community led him to contribute to better race relations, as an advisor to the Home Secretary, as a Commissioner for the Commission for Racial Equality, as part of the AFIYA Trust (which this April established an award in his name), as Chair of the Chinese in Britain Forum, which he co-founded, as a prominent supporter of charities for which he gained his MBE, and then as our first Chinese People's peer (which means he was a popular choice).

But these fine achievements are eclipsed by who he was as a man, and as a committed Christian with deep integrity and compassion. One who always just wanted to serve. My father knew him better than me, and I wish sometimes that our paths might have crossed more over the years so I

might have benefitted more from his wisdom. But what we know is that he was a tremendously hard worker and passionately committed to the improvement of health and development for especially the most vulnerable children.

Lord Chan travelled a lot in the third world countries and saw at first hand suffering which inspired him in his work and explains how he included and supported other ethnic minorities in his charitable and campaigning activities not just Chinese. But, he was never pushy or arrogant in any way. He was a self-effacing man who worked quietly behind the scenes. Through his wonderful efforts, he has paved the way for us to continue to build and create a stronger voice and presence for the British Chinese in Britain.

There is a quote in the Bible, which I will say in Cantonese, which for me speaks powerfully of Lord Chan's approach: "Those who are well, have no need of a doctor, but those who are sick." — Bible • Matthew 9:12 In a world where there is so much focus on celebrity and wealth, Lord Chan chose to be with the sick: the physically sick, the spiritually needy, and those in need of charity and assistance. Let us be inspired by his example and continue to further the good work which he began. It is my honour to give this first inaugural lecture, and I feel truly humbled in doing so.

In comparison to Lord Chan who achieved so much over many decades, I feel infinitely less qualified, less wise, and less able. By Chinese standards, I am young, not just because I am the youngest peer, but because one is considered young in China until one is fifty. I will hopefully be considered 'of age' in sixteen years time.

My shortcomings also include my lack of skills in speaking Mandarin although fortunately with the help of the Confucius Institute, this situation is improving. I also have limited resources personally (a feature which many Lords share) and cannot profess to be an expert in local Chinese matters. But what I can offer is a dream. A Chinese Dream. I spoke about this dream earlier this year at Tsinghua University, through a speech which you can find online, and my main points were as follows. In essence I said that the world in the 21st century is waiting eagerly for the Chinese Dream, to build on the British Dream of the 19th century, and the American Dream that so dominated the 20th century. That such a Chinese Dream could be about harnessing, as China develops, her wealth and influence as a force for good, through more sustainable business, philanthropy and social entrepreneurship, to help address the many social and economic problems we will face in the coming decades both as Chinese and non-Chinese.

A Dream that might enable Chinese people over time to peacefully win further trust and respect around the world. I also said that if we do not articulate such a Dream, that it would sadly not always be defined positively, especially in the West.

Indeed, with concerns that rising unfettered materialism is harming traditional family and civic values, with continued questions both in the West and in China on the internet being asked about how those in authority should best treat fellow citizens and engage them in decision making, respecting differences of opinion whilst maintaining peace, and in which the government itself is concerned to increase its cultural soft power globally – this is a time for deep soul searching about how Chinese people want to act morally as China's economy and society matures and about how we want to be seen externally.

This led me on to say that there is an opportunity now for all Chinese to build together a positive Chinese Dream, not just one modeled on the 18th century and before – though we must never forget China's great history and civilisation – but one which expresses our current and future values in a 21st century way: ones that are about sustainability, about community, and about respect for differences in culture. Over time the symbols of this Dream will emerge both inside and outside China, just as white picket fences and coca cola did for the American Dream, and the Royal Family and red post boxes did for the British Dream.

Perhaps such symbols for the Chinese Dream might include some ultra affordable technology that changes the way we use resources? Or cooperative-based ways of sharing the task of caring for and empowering our elderly? Or a new global standard for currencies based on those of all nations rather than just one that is better able to flex to the needs of individual markets and territories? And I asserted that just as the overseas Chinese played such a significant role in moving China on one hundred years ago to effect change internally, today, as first, second and third generation Chinese and those who feel a part of China's story living overseas, we can help to develop and spread this new Chinese Dream, bridging between East and West and ultimately promoting peace and prosperity both in our own communities and in our adopted lands.

A question must now surely spring to mind: how can we in the UK see ourselves in this light, developing and spreading the Chinese Dream, helping ourselves and our fellow British neighbours, particularly when we already face so many challenges and obstacles as a community. Of course much has been achieved already as a Chinese community here: our parents settled here and survived over the last sixty or more years, we and our children have studied hard and achieved much, and Chinese in Britain are among the most law-abiding and young Chinese are among the best-integrated of groups in British society. More Chinese are voting than ever before and more want to enter politics. More Chinese businesses are investing in the UK than ever before. And there has not been as much interest in the Chinese and China in this country for perhaps three hundred or more years. But despite our strengths, alas, as a community, we are also fragmented, dispersed, not just culturally and ethnically "like sand" to use an image which Sun Yat Sen has famously coined of the Chinese people generally, but physically, by being spread all over the UK. We can be invisible – we don't trespass on other people's affairs and because we do not make a fuss, we sometimes are not heard when we need to be.

And despite the influx of new wealth coming in from mainland China, we are limited in terms of community resources, certainly compared to our sister communities in America and certainly compared to some of the challenges we face which I will go onto outline a little later.

Some of this is to be expected – it can be argued that the American Chinese, and other ethnic communities have been around longer, and have had more time to come together to collaborate, become more influential, and become more established. I have observed that the first generation of migrants tends to focus rightly on survival, then the second on education and professional achievement. Often it is only the third generation that feels the confidence in their adopted land to stretch their wings and pursue a less conventional path, whether in politics and diplomacy, or the arts and media, or in other areas of societal leadership.

My parents were professionals – they trained as teachers – which may be partly why my own path has been what it has been, and I foresee a day when many of our children and young people, mine and yours, will, whether we like it or not, go down unconventional paths as they make their way in their adopted land, and ultimately their efforts in doing so will benefit our community with the extra resources and influence and connectivity it needs beyond that which we now have. But given also our need to mind our own business and get on with surviving and pursuing our professional lives; given the fact that we Chinese are very pragmatic and do not have much time always for dreaming; and given that we have entered and are on the brink of perhaps the most severe depression the world has seen for seventy years, which may likely affect China as well – how on earth can we see ourselves as bringers of hope and as conduits for the Chinese Dream, helping ourselves as well as helping Britain.

There is a saying, and please forgive my poor pronunciation, in Hakka: 'When everyone collects firewood, the flames rise high.' There have been many more talented people than I who have tried to bring the Chinese Diaspora together as a whole for the betterment of our communities – some have succeeded and others less so. I do not purport to do so now. But the simple truth is that today each of us has something to bring, to offer, some firewood, which if combined with the that of a few others, can allow us, despite limited resources, I believe to not only tackle some of

the challenges we face, but also to contribute to addressing issues common to all who live in Britain. My generation, the British born Chinese, has professional skills and energy, if not always local knowledge or resources. Many of the mainland Chinese and their companies bring resources, but do not always have local knowledge or local skills. The first generation and many local Chinese groups have local knowledge, but could benefit from more resources and professional skills. A few coalitions of the willing, drawing in people from each side and more, from other British and minority groups, can I believe over time, with determination and vision tackle some of the most intractable issues we face.

What are these issues? Well, many here in this room will know better what are some of the needs we have as a community or communities. I and my team have spent the last six months listening and researching what the needs in the community are, and our exercise is by no means complete. We will always welcome any thoughts that you can add. What we have found is that despite the achievements we have made as British Chinese there remain a set of deep seated needs in terms of welfare – such as caring for our old and young and vulnerable, both directly and in terms of their access to public and other services in employment as the recession advances and has a knock on effect on the sustainability of our traditional community industries such as catering in leadership, both in seeing further progress in the advancement of Chinese in public life not just in politics but for example in the running of FTSE 100 public companies where we do not have a single CEO of Chinese origin, and other areas beyond academia and the professions where we are well represented in improving the perception of the British media and the general public not only of Chinese people in China but of Chinese living, working, or studying here in addressing the gap in the knowledge of British people generally and of opinion formers of China and of the Chinese people as shown by the fact that 120,000 Chinese come to study every year in the UK but only 4,000 from the UK go to study in China.

These five interrelated areas seem to me to be ones that need addressing most urgently, in ways that will not only benefit the Chinese community but also the wider British community as well, for example in developing sustainable jobs not just for our community, but for everyone; leaders who are not just British Chinese achievers, but bridges between East and West; welfare, which benefits our old and young and vulnerable but also those who are non-Chinese, and so on.

Leadership is undoubtedly a key starting point, because it can provide the impetus and vision for tackling every other issue. The right leaders will help to accelerate the involvement of the next generation, whose task it will be to form the kind of well resourced networks that we see among the many other ethnic communities here and among the Chinese in the US. We need young leaders whether they are mainland Chinese students or graduates here, or British Born Chinese, or others who have settled here to rise up and discover a sense of service to our community and Britain; those who truly understand what it is like to be a Chinese in this society and the pitfalls we face but who can potentially find good solutions to them. We want leaders who can help explain the issues to the problems we face and who can help discern potential solutions. With leaders in every field from politics to the media, sports and music, business to the arts, they can start to highlight the issues and challenges and bring about vital change to our community.

That is why today my team and I want to announce that I intend to develop a leadership programme to help attract our best and brightest young British Chinese and those interested in Chinese culture to be tomorrow's leaders by serving our community, by doing research and generating solutions for sustainable British Chinese led social change in this country for the benefit of all. Our young Chinese potential leaders will benefit from harnessing the resources, skills and knowledge of mainland Chinese, British born Chinese and the first generation Chinese, as well as of course non-Chinese and will benefit from access to leaders of British society who will mentor them to the top.

Together, with the help of influential partner organisations inside the Chinese community and from the wider mainstream British community, we will seek to put the spotlight on issues of common interest and recommend action in the form of policy, social ventures and campaigns to

bring about positive change. The aim throughout will not be to create yet another Chinese representative body but to facilitate collaboration around tangible actions and issues, to be self-sustaining as early as possible so as not to draw away resources from worthy Chinese local causes but to help bring in resources into the community from outside, in the form of funds, skills and networks. So that we can create jobs and bring in investment particularly from China for Chinese and non-Chinese; so we can build better trust and understanding in our media and entertainment industries; so we can find ways to address the imbalance of students and those who understand Western and Eastern cultures respectively; and so that our vulnerable, elderly and young are properly and sustainably looked after.

More details on this initiative will follow and I sincerely hope you all can be a part of shaping this and making it a reality. However, I am of course realistic and know that one cannot carry every grain of sand, only work with the little sand you can bring together and mix it in with other elements to make concrete. And indeed to make this a concrete reality, we are going to need help, sometimes from unexpected quarters. Firstly, I need your help. I am only one man, and the truth is, none of the above can be achieved alone but if we can do some of it together we may be able to become more than the sum of our parts.

Lord Chan almost single-handedly created an opening, through which we can now pass to gain further entry into society, so we can play our part. I, for example, have not got strengths in fundraising, lobbying or community politics but my strengths are in creating leaders who can deal with these areas, and in helping them develop ventures and initiatives in turn that can bring about change. Others may be able to lead in areas in which I am not strong, and I look forward to working with them for the benefit of us all. Secondly, we will need help from other ethnic groups, such as those who are from Indian, or Jewish, South American, or black communities. This leadership programme over time will develop strands for other ethnic participants as well to serve their communities in similar but tailored ways, whilst also allowing for us to learn from each other and to share resources. If this sounds alien, then let me ask you this: if anyone in the world can become an honorary American or Brit, and share in the American and British dream, how long before we make it possible for others to become honorary Chinese, and to share in and help shape and be part of the Chinese Dream – or is being Chinese only about the way we look, our blood, and our clan?

Finally, we will need help from the world of business. I don't just mean for sponsorship. One lesson I think we can learn as Chinese from the West is that increasingly the worlds of social and charitable action and entrepreneurship are converging. Here we seek to make our charitable activity more sustainable through social enterprise and our business activity more socially responsible in the way we use it to minimise harm and maximise benefit to the planet, people and culture. My own life has involved a mix of business, charity, and both together and I will make no apology for seeking to bring both sides together. It is not wrong for a charity to make money to help it use its donations more effectively and be sustainable, as long as the profits are used to serve its mission. It is not wrong for those who do much for charity to make a living as well separately in business. It is not wrong for business to seek to improve its relationship with the community and its reputation to support society. By bringing together both business and charity in creative ways, we will be able to use the limited resources that we have to better harness the skills and distribution that businesses have, and to hopefully encourage better and more responsible business through the influence that charity can have on business practices and innovation.

We could spend the next few hours, days, months and years discussing what I have outlined in depth, as can be tempting when we come together and no doubt it is important to consult and discuss. However, I believe the time has come for us to act, because through action we build trust, momentum, and learning. Through action, we can refine and make progress in ways which can be difficult through consultation and talk alone. We could also spend a lot of time outlining our concerns and recommendations to government, whether national or local, and no doubt there is a

place for speaking out and engaging the political class in our issues though money is now tight as you know in government, which limits its ability to help.

But nothing speaks louder than action, and if we can develop credible leaders with a track record not only in academia, the professions, and self-employment but also in the key industries such as the media, public firms, and in politics and if we have well researched analyses and piloted solutions to offer, and if we have found ways to address many of our issues sustainably with non-governmental resources, then we will earn the right to speak and to be heard, on whatever issue we want to discuss. We could also spend a lot of time thinking about who should be credited with doing what, and also thinking about what is in it for us if we get involved. And of course altruism and self-interest can be a better motivator to action than altruism alone. But let us in this remember again Lord Chan, who did not do what he did to get an MBE, a peerage, or have a lecture established in his memory, but because there are people out there in need, who need our help including at various times our own selves. Ironically, if we help others and each other, we will help ourselves as society becomes more stable, more tolerant, more effective in using increasingly limited resources, and more attracted to the Chinese Dream for the benefit of all of us.

So now I call all the Chinese here in Britain and overseas, and all those who believe in our potential, to come forward and be part of the coalition of the willing. Let us help each other and our neighbours in this place we now call home and take hold of once more our historic role as overseas Chinese; let us support our young leaders and work with them to shape the solutions we and Britain will need in the 21st century; and let's take action now and not delay any further. There are several actions you can take today if you feel like being a part of this journey. First of all, you can sign up online at [facebook/lordwei](https://facebook.com/lordwei) and join the discussion about the issues we face, helping us to enrich our research and finding other ways to contribute on an issue by issue basis. Secondly, you could consider joining or help spread the word to people who might be interested in joining the leadership programme that we are planning to develop as a participant or partner and help us find creative solutions to the challenges we face as a community.

Sheela Mackintosh and Jackson Ng are here tonight; they will be helping to develop this initiative and I am sure they would love to discuss it with you. And thirdly, you can simply be proud of being a Chinese (or honorary Chinese) and help build the Chinese dream where you live or work using your skills or that of your organization, your resources and access to resources, and your local knowledge, with others – a website called the www.chinesedream.org has been developed with other experts on the Dream in China such as Peggy Liu and the US such as Helen Wang where you can find out more in time. I am going to finish with a final quote, this time from Sun Tzu, this time in Mandarin so again forgive my pronunciation: 'The general who advances without coveting fame, and retreats without fearing disgrace, whose only thought is to protect his country and do good service for his sovereign, is the jewel of the kingdom.' May we each be like this general, seeking to protect our country and our culture and values, both of the country which we have now adopted and in which we are citizens, as well as the country of our forefathers, and do good service, not just for our leaders in the UK, and China, but for more importantly the people, both Chinese and non-Chinese.

May we all live in our own way as Michael Chan did, as People's peers, as friends of the British and the Chinese, and help build on his heritage a British Chinese legacy to be proud of in the decades to come.

Thank you.

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