

Opening Ceremony for the “Hotel Management Seminar and Management Training Program”

13 January 2001

Vice-Chancellor Arthur Li, Madam Selina Chow, dear guests and students:

It is a great honour for me to attend today’s opening ceremony for the “Hotel Management Seminar and Management Training Program” jointly hosted by the School of Hotel and Tourism Management of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (“CUHK”) and Cornell University, and to take this opportunity to share my views on the future development of Hong Kong’s hotel sector and the training of local hotel management professionals with academics, colleagues in the hotel industry and students in hotel management.

The booming development of Hong Kong’s hotel industry did not start until the 1970s. Prior to that, the hospitality sector of our city comprised largely old-style guesthouses that had little idea of scientific management. Despite its relatively short history, our hotel industry has grown into a specialised modern business with international repute in a short span of 20 to 30 years, thanks to the creativity and hard work of our fellow citizens.

For many years, tourism has been Hong Kong’s second largest contributor of foreign income, while the hotel sector is one of the main pillars of the tourism industry. Before the official opening of the CUHK School of Hotel and Tourism Management in 1999, hotel management programmes in Hong Kong were largely focused on vocational training for intermediary management personnel or front-desk staff in general. Currently, hotel management programmes are being offered at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (“PolyU”), Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (“IVE”) and Hong Kong Technical College, while the Chinese Culinary Institute also came into operation officially last month after years of preparation to provide aspiring parties with alternative options in the study of specialised hotel services, with a view to training top-calibre front-line personnel for our hotel industry.

CUHK’s proposal to establish a school of hotel management had initially been met with opposition from the government. Nevertheless, Vice-Chancellor Li continued to fight for it, while hotel investors also put in a lot of lobbying effort. Finally, the CUHK School of Hotel and Tourism Management was officially established about a year ago to offer Hong Kong’s first degree programme in hotel management. On behalf of the hotel industry, I must thank Vice-Chancellor Li for his contributions. As a result of strong government effort to promote tourism in acknowledgement of its importance to the local economy, as well as the favourable effect afforded by the building of the Disneyland, students are flocking in to apply for a place in

the hotel management degree programme, making it the most popular destination in last year's application cycle among over 200 academic departments of CUHK.

After the return to Chinese sovereignty, the Hong Kong Government started to draw up a strategy for the long-term development of the tourism and hotel industries. Vigorous measures have been adopted to assist the development of tourism-related sectors and improve relevant facilities, in order to attract more visiting tourists. Projects currently under implementation or active planning by the SAR Government include a world-class stadium, a large-scale exhibition venue, a theme park in Tsing Yi, an opera house equipped with advanced stage technologies and possibly a museum annex on a West Kowloon site to be developed into a top-notch complex for art and culture comparable to Broadway in New York and Soho in London, as well as the redevelopment of forlorn historical villages and cultural monuments in the territory.

Hotel management is in fact a very specialised and sophisticated branch of management studies. Apart from providing accommodation, a hotel must also attend to the everyday needs of people with diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds accustomed to very different daily routines. Attention to details is required for the arrangement and management of work at every stage. In the case of guests who are on business trips, requirements could be even more rigorous and diversified. The provision of high-standard services in relation to information, conferences, transportation, catering and secretarial support for senior executives from around the world requires much specialised knowledge in management. According to statistics published 3 or 4 years ago, many global hotel networks were operated and owned by Hong Kong groups. They included The Peninsula Hotels, Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group, New World Hotels, The Wharf, Lee Gardens Group, Regal Hotels Group, Marco Polo Hotels Group, Stanford Hotels International, Delta Hotels Limited, Ramada Hotel Group, Renaissance Hotel Group, Omni Hotel Group, and others. However, it has been reported that many Hong Kong operators have sold their hotels to foreign hotel groups, possibly because of the lack of top-calibre senior hotel management personnel in Hong Kong, which is a pity. As a matter of fact, most of the current members of the Hong Kong Hotel Association are expatriate senior hotel managers, suggesting the absence of locally trained personnel with comparable caliber and expertise.

In order to enhance the competitiveness of Hong Kong's hotel industry, we must train up high-calibre personnel. China's economy and its tourism industry are set for robust development following the nation's admission to World Trade Organization ("WTO"). Given the enormous domestic market and spending powers, we can expect pressing demands for high-calibre hotel management personnel. As a gateway to China, Hong Kong should tailor its hotel management programmes to meet the needs of the China market as well. More opportunities

for exchanges with our fellow hotel operators in Mainland China and the organisation of related programmes could only work to the mutual benefit of hoteliers on either side of the border. The international standing of Cornell University needs little introduction, and its School of Hotel Administration enjoys an exceptionally strong reputation. The hotel management programmes launched jointly by CUHK and Cornell University will go a long way enhancing the training of local talents for the industry. We sincerely hope that the joint endeavour of the two universities will nurture high-calibre people that meet the needs of the industry and serve to improve Hong Kong's hotel management standard, such that Hong Kong could develop into the hotel management centre of Asia.

Hotel management is a practical subject. An academic programme in hotel management must be closely associated with the real-life operation of hotels to ensure that learning and work are mutually complementary. Therefore I hope the CUHK Advisory Committee on Hotel and Tourism Management would comprise elite members of the hotel industry who are in a position to furnish pragmatic, well-informed views on the back of their experience in the industry. Information on the latest developments in the industry provided by them can also facilitate improvements in course contents. Currently, CUHK has confirmed that it would build a hotel with full-fledged facilities to provide a venue for student internship. This hotel would contribute significantly to the training of talents through internship.

I am sure the esteemed academics present today would continue to research, investigate and enhance the study of hotel management as a new discipline, while colleagues in the hotel industry and students in hotel management would continue to approach their work or studies with passion, dedication and commitment. Hence, I have no doubt the hotel industry of Hong Kong would continue to enjoy distinguished achievements with a bright future ahead.

Last but not least, may I wish you every success in the joint venture of CUHK and Cornell University. Thank you.