

**Senior Counsel Admission Ceremony – 16 May 2026**  
**Speech by Chairman of the Hong Kong Bar Association<sup>1</sup>**

1. Chief Justice, Secretary for Justice, President of the Law Society, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.
2. On behalf of the Bar, we would like to extend to you, Charles Chan, Eugene, Martin, Calvin, Bonnie and Charles Hollander our sincere and warmest congratulations on your appointment to the inner bar in Hong Kong.
3. I've mentioned these names in order of seniority at the Hong Kong Bar which is customary, and this is why Charles Hollander is named last, being for these purposes the most junior, although I know from the press release that he was called to the Bar in the same year Eugene was born.
4. Apart from Charles Hollander who was born and educated in England, all the other appointees were born in Hong Kong and received their schooling here, having completed their undergraduate legal studies in Hong Kong before going abroad for Master's Degrees in the UK and the USA. This is a testament to the strengths of our schools in Hong Kong and also our law faculties. All of them have at one stage or another studied at the University of Hong Kong (HKU).
5. HKU's Faculty of Law "traces its origins to 1969, when a Department of Law was established within the Faculty of Social Sciences. The department was Hong Kong's first law school, and its LLB and PCLL were the first local university qualifications to be recognised for admission to legal practice in Hong Kong."<sup>2</sup>
6. The University's Faculty of Law has achieved 15<sup>th</sup> place in the 2025 QS World University Rankings by Subject for "Law & Legal Studies". This is unsurprising.
7. Many of the reasons for its success are well known: a long tradition of excellence, world-class standards, institutional autonomy, a high degree of internationalism coupled with a strong commitment to the local community.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the text of the speech as drafted, which may differ from the delivered version.

<sup>2</sup> HKU, Faculty of Law website, About Us, History.

These qualities are also applicable to our legal system which is well respected at home and abroad.

### **An even deeper and richer pool of silks available**

8. The number of appointments this year is 6. After today's appointments, the number of practising senior counsel will stand at 109. The new appointees practise in the fields of criminal law, commercial law, public law, matrimonial law, construction law and medical negligence.
9. As members of the independent Bar, this will add to the existing very rich pool of talent which will be available to the litigants in Hong Kong and to assist our Courts in their discharge of their duties in the administration of justice.

### **Barristers have a unique role to play**

10. Last year, I highlighted the importance of the role of solicitors in the administration of justice and the fact that all solicitors enjoyed full rights of audience in the Magistrates Court, the District Court and in the High Court for matters heard in Chambers. In other words, solicitors have rights of audience in the overwhelming majority of cases heard before the Hong Kong Courts.
11. Solicitors with higher rights of audience can also appear in open court in the High Court and the Court of Final Appeal. The introduction of Solicitor Advocates was brought about by legislative changes in 2012. There has been, for understandable reasons, limited use of such rights of audience by Solicitor Advocates.
12. The current arrangements between solicitors and the Bar work for the benefit of the litigants.
13. The availability of a pool of self-employed barristers operating independently and subject to the cab rank rule under the Bar Code strongly contributes to the public interest of Hong Kong. It ensures all litigants have access to specialised and robustly objective legal advice and representation. It enables the Courts to obtain the assistance they require.

## **Barristers independent and completely free from pressures**

14. The unique position of barristers is explained in the Court of Appeal decision of Re Simpson QC.<sup>3</sup>

“1. ... the Bar remains a referral profession and a barrister is expected to be uncompromisingly independent ...”

“44. The higher level of independence of barristers significantly impacts on the access by the public to a wide pool of counsel from which real and meaningful choice of suitable counsel can be made and is extremely important to the administration of justice ...”

15. This all the more important in the day and age that we operate in. By practising only in Hong Kong as sole practitioners, this prevents situations where by reason of commercial, media or governmental pressure from here or elsewhere, litigants do not get representation or even get dropped.

16. The existence of a strong and independent local Bar, firmly embedded within the wider legal system, ensures that all litigants are guaranteed access to justice irrespective of external pressures coming from near or far. The strength of this guarantee stems not only from our traditions and the cab rank rule, but also from our status as self-employed, independent practitioners.

17. Based on the statistics as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026, there are 928 law firms in Hong Kong, 45% are sole proprietorships and 44% are firms with 2 to 5 partners. The existence of a strong and independent referral Bar enhances the law firms' competitiveness and allows litigants a wide range of expertise irrespective of the law firm they instruct. The relationship between barristers and solicitors is a symbiotic one which works to the benefit of litigants and is beneficial to the two branches of the profession. In short, we need them, and they need us.

## **New appointees**

18. I will now say a few words about the 6 appointees.

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<sup>3</sup> Note: [2021] 1 HKLRD 715.

19. I can attest to the fact that they are all wonderful people. It was exceedingly difficult to get anyone to tell me something that was less than complimentary about them. I even tried a tactic familiar to criminal lawyers, I offered each appointee a 'plea bargain', promising to go light on them today if they gave me dirt on the others. Not one of them spilled the beans.
20. **Charles Chan** is well known and liked criminal practitioner. His manners are gentle, his tailoring superb and he is soft spoken. This is consistent with him spending much of time helping NGO's, sitting on statutory boards and assisting the Bar in many matters.
21. In his practice he has been involved in many landmark cases involving bribery and other white-collar offences, many in the Court of Final Appeal. He is someone who takes his work extremely seriously and is liked by the Courts.
22. I regret I was not able to find any stories about Charles to amuse the audience but the closest I got involved a trial where he acted as junior counsel. During the hearing, the noise of a photocopier could be heard being operated inside Court. It turns out it was Charles' diligent pupil who was making some copies. Charles is always the gentleman, very kindly but promptly brought the interruption to an end. Before the announcements came out for the appointment to Senior Counsel, Charles was in Singapore and in the hotel room as he opened the soap box saw the letters "SC" engraved on the soap bar. Charles didn't know whether it was a sign. He vowed not to wash his hands, and as they say the rest is history.
23. **Eugene** is a well-known matrimonial barrister. One silk who wrote to me described him as "a gentleman of ability, honour and fairness". He truly loves the Bar, Hong Kong and our legal system.
24. Eugene has achieved a considerable following. It is a well-known secret that many matrimonial solicitors have Eugene on their speed dial. I have some idea of how well he is doing, having been informed by one of his juniors that he is famous for forgetting to issue fee notes until many years after the event. In one case, the solicitor had to remind Eugene to issue his fee note after the client passed away!

25. Having worked with Eugene for the last 5 years on the Bar Council, I got to know a side of him that few people outside his pupils and close friends know. We both share a love of Hong Kong movies, music and plays. In duller moments we quiz each other on trivia and repeat lines from ‘classics’ such as “Cold War” 《寒戰》 of which we are both die-hard fans. It is little surprise that I found out we were both watching “Cold War 1994” 《寒戰 1994》 at 9 a.m. on the day it premiered in the same theatre.
26. **Martin** is very well liked and respected as a barrister. The jealous part of me thinks that it is down to his movie star good looks, Eurasian features and a well-groomed beard. On our many trips to other parts of the country, our host would assume he was Jose Maurellet and I was Martin Wong. I can reveal that he has featured in a TV ad in his student days (without the beard) for the promotion of a muscle pain relieving ointment. I will not advertise for that brand so you will have to ask him.
27. Jokes aside, Martin is one of the most charismatic and generous people at the Bar. He is unselfish to a fault and principled. He is possibly the only barrister I know who is superbly eloquent in English, Cantonese and Putonghua.
28. Despite all the above, he is consistently modest and affable. He is truly a role model for our younger generation.
29. In the film “Cold War 1994”, which I mentioned earlier, the story begins – small spoiler alert – with the retrieval of an old confidential file that serves as a segue into 1994. Similarly, I requested a ‘confidential’ file from the Bar’s physical archives from 2004 to solve a long-standing enigma: why, given his many qualities, Martin was not awarded the Bar Scholarship that year. I can now reveal the mystery. He failed to apply to the Scholarship Committee by the deadline.
30. **Calvin** I have known from his days as pupil. He is one of those who has not changed in two decades both in terms of his modesty and his youthful looks. He did brilliantly and achieved firsts at everything he put his mind to, architecture then law at HKU and then a BCL at Oxford.

31. A very attractive offer for a training contract was dangled in front of him, but he did not budge. In his statement for the Bar Scholarship interview (which was submitted on time by the way) he stated that the “Bar is a very fair profession. It is a fair game ... no client would ever risk a case by [instructing] some lawyers because of their parents. Therefore, if you are good and you are diligent, you do have a good chance to succeed”.
32. Calvin has indeed succeeded, and exemplifies that the Bar is a true meritocracy. He is an expert in construction law in particular and has co-written a book with Ian Pennicott SC which I have spent many hours studying in recent times entitled “Commissions on Inquiry in Hong Kong”.
33. Calvin’s pupils tell me that on occasions where he has to explain matters in conference to certain lay clients who shall we say are used to more direct and unparliamentary language, he can turn from Dr Jekyll to Mr Hyde to explain matters to them in a way they would understand, only to return to his true self immediately after the conference.
34. Calvin is a man of kindness, a quality reflected in the deep affection of his pupils. He is generous with his time and public spirited. I have no doubt he will continue to answer the call whenever his expertise is required, whether by our profession or the wider community. His only act of extravagance which was out of character was to buy a car in Oxford with funds which had been provided for another purpose so as to impress his classmates.
35. **Bonnie** has been a star from day one. She is popular with solicitors, fellow barristers and the bench alike. She is known to be trustworthy, measured, sensible and bright.
36. After HKU she earned her Masters’ Degree at an institution where 1/3 of all US Supreme Court Judges and our own Chief Justice call their alma mater, Harvard University.
37. My only regret is that in the decade since I took silk, every time a solicitor sought to instruct me to lead her, she was ‘too busy’. She has tried to console me by denying the possibility that she turned the work away because she preferred to work with more able leaders.

38. The strength of her application is unquestionable. As one of the many silks who endorsed her application mentioned, her application was probably the strongest ever, second only to his own and mine he claimed!
39. On a personal note, Bonnie is very devoted to her husband, Kevin and her dog, Pom Pom, although not necessarily in that order.
40. She remains extremely close to her extended family, including her aunts and uncles, who form what she affectionately calls her “village”. She works tirelessly to organise trips together. I should also mention one adopted member of that family village, and this is of course Stewart Wong SC who I can see is beaming today.
41. **Charles Hollander** is the fourth London silk to join our inner Bar. His appointment exemplifies the international nature of Hong Kong as a dispute resolution center.
42. He has been for many years a leading silk in London being appointed in 1991. Charles’s London base is the leading barristers’ chambers Brick Court, where our former CJ, Justice Ma, did part of his pupillage at around the same time. Lord Philips and Lord Hoffmann are door tenants of Brick Court amongst other luminaries of the legal world. For more information, you can read the book on the history of Brick Court Chambers written by none other than Charles himself.
43. In his time as head of Brick Court’s pupillage programme, Charles put a then 21-year-old Abraham Chan through advocacy exercises so rigorous, they left him traumatised for years. The tables turned, of course, when they appeared together, over 20 years later, in our Court of Final Appeal. This time, Abraham Chan SC ‘led’ Charles and deployed his learned ‘junior’ to argue the more ‘ambitious’ points of the case, an experience that has left both of them traumatised.
44. In addition to his other exalted positions, Charles holds what is his most taxing role: tennis convenor of the Maida Vale garden square. Given the scarcity of Sunday morning slots, this requires discernment and diplomacy of the highest level.

45. We are also delighted to welcome his wife and mother of their four children, Heather, who has made the journey from London to be with us today.
46. On behalf of the Bar, may I once again offer my warmest congratulations to the new silks and their families. I wish them every success in their paths in the years to come.

José Antonio Maurellet SC

Chairman  
Hong Kong Bar Association