

# A lifetime serving the community

One day in August, 1983, school principal Yeung Po-kwan was in his office at Ming Yin College in Shek Kip Mei when the telephone rang. Would he be free, the caller asked politely, to drop in to Government House the next morning to see Sir Edward Youde?

The educator was puzzled, flattered and somewhat embarrassed. As it happened, he was not free because he was one of the organisers of an important conference that day and he couldn't possibly break the date. But later in the afternoon, yes, certainly, he'd be there.

Yeung Po-kwan confesses he had no idea why the late Governor, a man whose style he had come greatly to admire but whom he had never met, wished to see him.

Could it be because of his background in education? Or, perhaps it was due to the fact that outside the classroom school teacher Yeung was Chief Superintendent Yeung of the Royal Hongkong Auxiliary Police?

On the way to Government House, he asked himself many times why he had been summoned. Sir Edward was a keen student of Chinese, so could it be that he wished to speak to Yeung about his activities as a member of the London-based Institute of Linguists?

As it turned out the Governor didn't want to discuss any of these subjects, although, doubtless, all had been considered by him and his advisors before the decision was made to ask Mr Yeung to drop by. Sir Edward was characteristically brief, polite and to the point.

Would Yeung Po-kwan consider being appointed a member of the Legislative Assembly to serve the community as a lawmaker?

"It was a surprise, absolutely," he recalls today. He had to think about it, he told the Governor, but there were a couple of problems. The first was that Yeung Po-kwan had already signed up and been accepted for a three months advanced course in Educational Management and Administration at the Moray House College of Education in Edinburgh, Scotland. Secondly, he felt he should seek approval from the Church of Christ in China, for whom he had worked all his career, before making any decision that would cut inevitably into his workload.

By all means do both, Sir Edward urged, even though his absence in Edinburgh meant that Yeung Po-kwan could not take his place on the Legco benches until three months into the session.

These days, after more than three years in the Chamber, Councillor Yeung is still a mite mystified about why he was chosen although he is now wiser in the ways of how appointed Legco members are selected.

Well, he accepted, went to Scotland, came back and was just beginning to learn the first basic details about what a Legco member did when he found out. The hard way.

He was at the Hongkong Island Police District Ball when the calls started coming in on Black Friday, January 13, 1984. First the Commissioner, Roy Henry, got a message, rose discretely, left quietly. Then the Deputy Commissioner, Li Kwan-ha, followed. Then came a message for Yeung Po-kwan. It was from his wife. He was needed urgently down at the Omelco office

in Swire House.

Hongkong's truculent taxi drivers, enraged by proposed new legislation, had stuck in their stubborn heels and gone on strike. Legco members, under the leadership of Dr Harry Fang, were huddled to consider the situation.

As a man who had spent more than 20 years as a volunteer policeman, Yeung Po-kwan saw the danger immediately.

"When you have got hundreds of taxis parked nose-to-tail down the streets in the middle of Kowloon, they are not taxis any more," he contends. "They are potential bombs."

The incident sparked minor rioting, quickly contained by police. Legco, police and Government finally managed to talk commonsense to the cabbies. The situation was defused. But only just.

Yeung Po-kwan went home very late the next morning feeling he had made a contribution.

Since then, in such diverse roles as a director of the MTR, on criminal and legal advisory boards, on educational bodies and charity boards, Yeung Po-kwan has been serving the community.

Service is something in which he has been interested all his life. Born in Hongkong in 1939, his father died when he was aged four. Raising four young children as a widow was a daunting challenge but his schoolteacher mother, Madame Ip Ki Chan struggled to instill in Po-kwan and his three brothers the idea of hard work, study and service.

She succeeded admirably; her children are all professionals who have done well in life.

After study at Diocesan Boys' School, where he was a contemporary of Secretary for Administrative Services James So and Trade Director K Y Yeung, he passed his university entrance exams and, partly on a scholarship, went to the University of Hong Kong. His chosen fields were history and English but Yeung Po-kwan was as active in campus life as he was in the classroom.

Debating, drama, clubs, discussions on life, society and how both could be improved...he was a busy young man.

"Education is more than books," he stresses, a philosophy he has carried with him from his student days into a life as an educator. One must study, yes, indeed. But there are things that you learn outside the classroom, values he tries to pass on to the 1,000 students at Ming Yin College.

But being a teacher, finding a career in education, was not his first choice of a vocation. When he graduated in 1962, his ambition lay in a direction that was in those days so unusual for a promising young man with a university degree as to be considered

eccentric.

The old Chinese adage holds one does not use good steel to make nails, nor good men to be soldiers. By extension, in Hongkong this homily traditionally also applied to policemen. But for Yeung Po-kwan, there was a drive, an impulse, a calling, to spend his life in law enforcement.

The week he graduated, he went to police headquarters to apply to become a recruit into the ranks of the inspectorate.

Why would a young man with an expensive education obtained with great striving and sacrifice wish to don a uniform and become a policeman, especially in an era when the constabulary was widely held in suspicion and contempt by the public it sought to serve?

Yeung Po-kwan still finds it difficult to explain. "I just wanted to be a policeman," he says. "I've always felt an urging towards law and order and a stable society and in the back of my mind I felt that if I served for several years as a police officer I could then enter Cambridge to seriously study criminology."

At the bottom of his desire to be a policeman, there lay an urge to keep things safe, to protect the people. It is a feeling he finds hard to quantify.

Police headquarters snapped up eagerly the first HKU graduate to apply to join the force.

There were no special favours for him, however, out on the hot parade ground at the Police Training School at Chung Hom Kok. Along with other young policemen, both locals and expatriates, being hammered into shape, he sweated and toiled and marched and ran and studied. It was 12 hours a day, non-stop, on the double...he loved it.

Yeung Po-kwan swam through the professional exams. He was ready to be sworn in. Then came the final medical. His eyesight was not perfect.

"In those days, you had to have perfect eyesight," he sighs. "Not just good, not very good, but perfect." Doctors found slight short sightedness in his right eye. Desperate to keep a prime recruit in an era in which police hierarchy was striving to raise the quality of policemen, headquarters sent him back for another examination. The results were the same.

These days, police accept with speedy alacrity would-be recruits wearing glasses. Not so then. The young man who had done so well in barracks, square and squad room was washed out.

"I was very disappointed," he admits. But there was nothing he could do about it, so Yeung Po-kwan began to look about for another way to make a living. Like so many of the graduates of the University of Hong Kong in those days, he found the

answer in teaching.

Being a graduate, he did not have to go to teachers' college but could go straight to the head of the class and teach. Most teachers were making \$1,300 a month. But with a younger brother who had opted for architecture, the fatherless family needed more money so Yeung got a job as a teacher at Pooi Sun English College, a private school, that paid \$1,700.

Within a year, he was principal. "I was only a few years older than the students," he grins.

At the same time, he managed to turn his frustrated ambitions of being a law enforcer into reality. The regular force may have demanded people with the eyesight of eagles, but there was another body in Hongkong where those with minor failings such as mild myopia were welcomed.

In 1963, he signed up for training as a constable in the auxiliary police. He was joining a body with a proud tradition of service because virtually throughout the history of Hongkong — and the police were established within months of the Un-

ion Jack being raised in 1841 — there had existed in conjunction with the regulars groups of enthusiastic part-time policemen dedicated to helping protect the community.

Principal by day, teaching his students history and civics, by night PC Yeung patrolled the world of Suzie Wong as a constable attached to Wan Chai.

As a young volunteer policeman, he felt he was contributing his bit to society on the streets. And still he harboured the notion that a life on the right side of the law was what he wanted; he thought that after a few years as a teacher, his brother safely through architectural school, he would be able to study law. It was not to be.

For Yeung Po-kwan, his two careers proceeded apace. As a policeman, he rose through the ranks; corporal, sergeant, inspector up to his present senior rank that sees him head of the Royal Hongkong Auxiliary Police on Hongkong Island.

Meanwhile, as a teacher, the Church of Christ in China asked him in 1971 to take over the reins of one of their troubled institutions. Running 22 secondary and 40 primary schools, the "CCC" is one of the most vital private educational bodies in Hongkong. Its institutions are regarded as being sound and solid places of learning.

But in 1971, Kung Lee College in Tai Hang Road was ailing. Only 14 of the 30 classrooms were full and nobody could quite work out what was wrong.

So Yeung Po-kwan was called in. "I took one look, saw there was a challenge, didn't even ask what the salary was and said I would take the job," he recalls.

First step was to tell the public about the school and what it had to offer. "You've got to fill the classrooms," he explains. Once his pamphlets and personal visits had prompted a flood of enquiries and the classrooms were filled, he could concentrate on raising the standard of students and teaching.

Five years later, with Kung Lee established and successful, he was transferred to Ming Yin College.

As a policeman, as a principal, as a law-maker, Yeung Po-kwan has a unique perception of some of the problems facing Hongkong and particularly its young people.

Youth and crime is one field in which he can speak with obvious authority and expertise and he does so with a message that will reassure many parents. By and large, drugs are not a problem in Hongkong schools, he contends. At least in Chinese schools. He's not ignoring the dangers, but experience as both a police officer and a teacher shows that most students spurn narcotics. (And here he speaks with the additional authority of being a member of the Action Committee Against Narcotics).

But the evil cancer of triads stays a threat and although young people may not themselves take drugs he is alert to the chances of them being snared into the societies by underworld recruiters. Triad members may approach a neatly-dressed secondary student and ask them to deliver a small package for a sizeable amount of money. Unknowingly, the children become couriers for the drug rings.

But it all boils down to a matter of discipline, he contends. Not harshness, not punishment, but self-discipline instilled by example.

It's obvious walking the corridors of his school that Yeung Po-kwan has the respect of his students. Not fear, respect.

A practising Christian, his message to his students — and to others lured by drugs and other easy temptations of modern society — is simple: "Lead me not into temptation."

The best way to help young people is by education, he maintains. And example.

Looking back to his days at high school and university, he recognises he learned perhaps as much from his acting in dramatic society (he loves Shakespeare) and student debating teams and other activities as he did in the classroom. He likes to encourage his students to have a wide range of interests.

And he feels teachers should make classrooms places of challenge and enquiry.

"If a teacher stands up and talks to a class, I don't think he achieves much," Yeung Po-kwan contends. "I like students to ask questions, to challenge, to raise issues. I want them to probe, to enquire, to ask why, why, why."

"As a school principal, I feel I've got to move with the times. It's no good me trying to communicate with young people if I'm speaking the language of the 1960s. I've got to talk in the language of the 1990s to find out what my students are thinking, how they feel."

He thinks that other teachers consider him rather liberal.

"I like to be lively in the classroom," he explains. "I feel students learn more if the teacher has a sense of humour. I consider students' questions a challenge and whatever they may ask, I try to answer."

"Of course, they pull your leg from time to time..."

Teachers should be like doctors, he argues, and stay up to date with modern educational trends and techniques. Just as surgeons keep abreast of developments in the operating theatres of the world, so should teachers try to be aware of how education is changing.

He has tried to keep abreast, gaining a diploma in education from the Chinese University, part-time, while being principal and policeman, then going on such overseas courses as advanced training in Scotland.

He has also done special translation courses and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

But of all these academic endeavours, Yeung Po-kwan feels there are few places where he has learned so much as on the streets of Hongkong. And his higher education there came during the outbreak of lawlessness in 1967.

He was only a constable by rank but his experience as a trainee inspector propelled him during that long hot summer into the pivotal command post at the eye of the storm, into Pol/Mil where the joint police-military operations against the rioters were planned.

He still got out on the streets and recalls his Land Rover going into Western and Wan Chai and Causeway Bay, the streets studded with milk powder cans packed with concrete and nails, bombs just waiting to rip human beings apart.

On the streets, despite provocations, months of attacks, murders and bombings, the auxiliary police stood firm, shoulder-to-shoulder with the regulars. And when the tear gas dispersed and the riots ended, both the career policemen and their volunteer colleagues were honoured with the title "Royal."

By 1984, when the auxiliary force was celebrating its silver jubilee (in its present form, the history of part-time policing goes back much further) Yeung Po-kwan was chosen to oversee production of a special booklet outlining its long and distinguished role in keeping Hongkong safe.

There's no doubting his pride in the auxiliary force and his 24-year service in it, a contribution which has earned him the coveted Colonial Police Medal.

In fact, he likes to joke, when most people go on vacations, they tend to head for resorts or theatres or beaches or casinos. Not Yeung Po-kwan. When he is away, he goes to visit local police stations.

On recent trips, he has dropped into law enforcement agencies in England and India. While a delegate at Commonwealth Parliamentary Association gatherings overseas, he tries to slip away to go down to the local police headquarters and swap tales of police work with the locals.

So how does he split up his day, this principal-policeman-legislator? Does he spend most of his time planning on how to make laws in Legco, how to enforce laws out on the streets of Hongkong Island or on teaching his students how law and order make for a workable society?

Yeung Po-kwan gives a smile and looks about him at the hundreds of students streaming down the corridors during recess at Ming Yin College.

"The students come first," he says.