

Senior Counsel Admission Ceremony – 7 June 2025
Speech by Chairman of the Hong Kong Bar Association¹

1. Chief Justice, Secretary for Justice, President of the Law Society of Hong Kong, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.
2. On behalf of the Bar, we would like to extend to you, Catrina, Priscilia and Tim our sincere and warmest congratulations on your appointment to the inner bar.
3. Last year, my predecessor Victor Dawes SC mentioned that it was the first time that the number of female appointees exceeded that of men, 2 to 1. On this occasion I am happy to say that history doesn't just rhyme but at times repeats itself. I will perhaps make a bold prediction that this is likely to happen with much more regularity going forward.
4. The new appointments bring the total number of practising female silks at 18. Half of those 18 were appointed to the inner bar in the last 8 years. This is only likely to increase in the future.
5. In addition, approximately 30% of judges in our Court of Appeal and 40% of our Court of First Instance judges are women. The increase in the number of female role models will inspire more women who are students to join the Bar and at the appropriate juncture, join the Bench.
6. After today's appointments, the number of practising senior counsel will stand at 111. The new appointees practise in the fields of criminal law, competition law, public law and commercial law.
7. 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 in Hong Kong.
8. That pool is composed of barristers but also solicitors of course who advise and represent their clients in court regularly.
9. The Bar is a referral profession, and so for Hong Kong litigation matters, barristers are as a general rule instructed by solicitors. It is the latter who are directly retained by the litigants, serving as their first port of call and as a vital interface with counsel. The role of

¹ Note: This is the text of the speech as drafted, which may differ from the delivered version.

solicitors is thus pivotal in these and other aspects of our litigation system.

10. All solicitors enjoy full rights of audience in the Magistrates Court, the District Court and in the higher courts for matters heard in Chambers. This constitutes the overwhelming majority of cases heard before the Hong Kong courts and where barristers are instructed by them to represent litigants day in day out. For matters heard in open court in the higher courts, solicitors with higher rights of audience can also appear.
11. This demonstrates that solicitors and barristers work together in a symbiotic manner which has been a success for both legal professions and, more importantly, in the best interests of their clients.
12. According to the statistics available from the Law Society of Hong Kong, of the 921 law firms existing in May 2025, 414 were sole proprietorships and 396 had 2 to 5 partners. The existence of a strong and independent Bar allows the small and even medium firms to have access to over 1,700 barristers who are able to provide independent legal advice and representation in about every discipline and level of seniority. This enhances the competitiveness of those law firms and the legal market as a whole. It ensures that litigants are able to enjoy a very wide range of expertise irrespective of the size of the law firm and knowing that those 1,700 odd barristers are bound by the cab-rank rule.
13. In addition to those who have joined the Bar immediately after obtaining their legal qualifications, we also have been infused with experienced solicitors who have decided that they would wish to practise as independent advocates. Many of them have thrived bringing with them their wealth of experience as solicitors, and indeed quite a number have been appointed to the inner bar in the last few years, with some subsequently joining the judiciary.
14. I will also mention a number of leading counsel from other common law jurisdictions (including England and Wales and New Zealand) who have been called to the Hong Kong Bar after passing the requisite examinations and relocated to Hong Kong. They are now fully paid members of the Hong Kong Bar and in the time honoured tradition of the Bar have selflessly contributed to its affairs.
15. Last, but not least, as part of one of our common law traditions, in addition to having overseas non-permanent judges, we also have overseas counsel being admitted on an *ad hoc* basis to represent litigants and assist our courts when it is in the public interest to do so. What matters is the public interest. It is in the interests of Hong Kong that the courts

have the assistance they require in building up our common law precedents under the one country, two systems principle.

16. I have heard it being suggested, perhaps in jest, that the Bar adopted a “closed shop” mindset when faced with such applications. *First*, it should be borne in mind that although the Bar and the Secretary for Justice can provide or withhold their consent, ultimately it is for the courts to decide on such admissions. *Second*, the Bar has of course adopted the public interest as the guiding principle when considering these applications.
17. In 2024, of the 19 applications for *ad hoc* admission the Bar has consented to all 19. This alone would disqualify us from being a decent trade union. For 2025 up until last week, we have consented to 8 applications already. Not only it assists the courts in the discharge of their duties, and not only does it allow the local counsel team to learn from advocates specialised in certain fields (who often hail from England but increasingly from other common law jurisdictions) to learn from each other. This is sometimes referred rather biologically perhaps as “cross fertilisation”. It also further allows top lawyers from other common law jurisdictions to participate and see first-hand the rule of law in action in Hong Kong. Seeing is believing.
18. I will now say a few words about the three appointees. My guess is, for this moment at least, each would wholeheartedly affirm the adage – “less is more”.
19. Catrina and I have known each other since 2000 when I was a pupil. Today is not the first time we have been speaking at the same event. Those of you who attended the Bar’s 75th anniversary gala dinner last November, may remember we were both emcees that evening and also that she was the better and more confident of the two. Once again, I got the short straw. When Catrina was asked by our then chairman to be emcee she agreed on the condition I would be co-emcees. I now realise that this is a prime example of Catrina employing the practice of “bundling or tying” to her advantage which is sometimes forbidden under competition law and also fully shows what a good tactician she is.
20. In our early years of practice, we would all be working until very late or rather the early hours of the morning. Behind Catrina’s permanent smile, gentle manner and immaculate suits lies a determined lawyer who will not let anything stop her. She is quietly confident. Neither shy nor unnecessarily aggressive. In short, a great advocate. I know what I am talking about because on the last occasion we were against each other, I came in second, so to speak.

21. Catrina has acted in cases in most areas of law but in recent years has found a keen interest in competition law and arbitration. She is an honourable member of the Middle Temple Society and the secretary of its Hong Kong branch. Catrina sits on a number of statutory boards like many barristers who have given their time to serve the public. She has also readily agreed to contribute to the affairs of the Bar when the Bar needed her to. On that score I am confident all three appointees will fare well.
22. Of the appointees, I have known Priscilia for the longest since we were both studying for the PCLL together. After completing her pupillage, Priscilia joined the Prosecutions Division of the Department of Justice. She rejoined the private Bar in 2006. Her thirst for legal knowledge is un-deniable. In 2005 and in 2008 she became a “servant to two masters”, obtaining a Masters in Chinese Laws and one on Arbitration and Dispute Resolution. She may have been inspired by the then Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions who managed the feat of obtaining an LLM in Human Rights from the University of Hong Kong while representing the Department himself in court almost every day of the week. Likewise, many criminal silks have told me that Priscilia is extremely hard working coming in weekends and late evenings.
23. Like many good barristers, Priscilia has both defended and prosecuted on *fiat*. She has defended in the first trial in which a defendant was charged under the United Nations (Anti-Terrorism Measures) Ordinance and almost immediately after, prosecuted in another case under the same Ordinance.
24. Consistent with the cab-rank rule under our Code of Conduct, barristers have an obligation to act for those who need representation and are not there to pick and choose their clients based on their own likings. The purpose of the rule is to ensure that everyone gets legal representation and a fair trial. Attacks on lawyers based on who they represent (whether they are prosecuting or defending) are thus misguided and also betray a misunderstanding on the role of lawyers. I am sure Priscilia will be highly sought after by both the Department of Justice as well as defendants. But be warned her diary is already very packed. Please book her dates early.
25. Tim is an administrative, public law and public international law expert and is in many ways the poster boy for about every recent policy of the Hong Kong Government. *First*, he is very much in the target segment for our Top Talent Pass Scheme, having obtained a BA in Chinese Studies from the University of Melbourne and an LLB from the University of Hong Kong as well as an LLM from Cambridge. *Second*, he is what economists call a “re-export”. Tim has appeared in the European Court of Human Rights, the Cayman

Islands and English Court of Appeal as well as the Privy Council in addition to his regular appearance before the Hong Kong courts thus increasing Hong Kong's services export balance. *Third* and perhaps most importantly, he has listened to the exhortations to contribute to the next generation by having that next generation – Tim recently welcomed a new member to their family. Congratulations again.

26. 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