Obituary

Ir SUNG Sing Zak
Past President of the Engineering Society of Hong Kong

Ir Sung Sing-zak, Past President of the Engineering Society of Hong Kong in year 1967/68, passed away in May 2007. Ir Sung was born in Mainland China in 1921 and graduated in Shanghai with an External BSc Honours Degree in Mechanical Engineering from the University of London. He first joined the Hong Kong Technical College, the forerunner of the Polytechnic University, as Assistant Master (Technical) in 1950. After study leave in 1952 - 1953 in the United Kingdom and his return to Hong Kong, he became the Head of the newly established Mathematics and Science Department in the old Technical College situated at the time in Wood Road, Wan Chai in 1956. After the College moved to Hung Hom in 1957, he became the Head of the Mechanical Engineering Department in the early 1960s. Ir Sung never served as Vice Principal but was promoted to Principal Technical College in 1965 succeeding the late Mr Watt Hoi-kee. He had in fact been earmarked for the post much earlier by previous Principal S J G Burt who held him in high regard.

Before taking up the office of Principal, Ir Sung was sent on a study tour largely to the United Kingdom, and, on his return, under his leadership the overall structure of courses at the College was reorganised. At the time the College was “all things to all men” with courses at both craft and professional level. But by far the majority were technician programmes. There is no doubt Ir Sung was farsighted in his approach and he also assisted in the early stages of the planning for the College’s upgrading to Polytechnic status in 1972.

Ir Sung was an enthusiastic pioneer of technical education in the region, and he inspired not only his students but many others in promoting local industry and in employing the latest production techniques and management skills. He was also well respected in industry for his strenuous efforts especially with regard to student placement for summer training and employment either locally or overseas after graduation.

His efforts extended beyond the Technical College and he served as the Secretary of the Engineering Society of Hong Kong, the predecessor of the Hong Kong Institution of Engineers, and he became the President of the Society in 1967/68. He also played a leading role in the upgrading of the Institution as a learned society which was later to become a qualifying body.

Ir Sung was known to close colleagues and friends as “S Z” or just as “Z” and, after
taking early retirement from the Hong Kong Government in 1970, he took up a post with the World Bank. The work consisted largely of assisting under-developed countries in the planning and development of their technical education systems with a variety of projects thus improving the livelihood and welfare of people around the world. Ir Sung undertook projects with the World Bank up until the late 1990s.

Instead of retiring in Washington where he was based with the World Bank, Ir Sung surprised many by returned to Hong Kong to spend his twilight years. There he could chat with old industrialists, meet with past colleagues and students and he could satisfy his passion for enjoying a wide variety of Chinese cuisines. He was a warm host.

He passed away peaceful at home after a short illness when he was survived by a son, a daughter and five grandchildren, as well as devoted in-laws. His many “monuments”, including past students holding high positions settled around the world, bear witness to his capabilities and attainments. Although he will be greatly missed, his legacy lives on. He will be long remembered by his fellow members of the HKIE, his colleagues, his students and his friends for his significant contributions to the Institution and the society of Hong Kong.