

# Committed to the Community

**An Interview with Dr. The Honorable David K.P. Li,  
Chairman and Chief Executive, The Bank of East Asia, Limited**

**EDITORS' NOTE** David Li is a member of the Legislative Council of Hong Kong and the Banking Advisory Committee and represents The Bank of East Asia on the Executive Committee of the Hong Kong Association of Banks. He is Chairman of the Chinese Banks' Association and has served as a member of the preparatory committee for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region as a Hong Kong Affairs Adviser to the People's Republic of China, and as Vice Chairman of the Basic Law Drafting Committee. The Basic Law underpins One Country Two Systems, which provides the framework for Hong Kong's current status within China. Li received his M.A. as well as an honorary doctorate in Laws from the University of Cambridge.



Dr. The Hon. David K.P. Li

**COMPANY BRIEF** The Bank of East Asia, Limited ([www.bkbea.com](http://www.bkbea.com); BEA) was incorporated in 1918, and provides corporate and personal banking services to customers in China and overseas. As the largest independent local bank in Hong Kong, the bank is listed on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange and is one of the constituent stocks of the Hang Seng Index. The Bank of East Asia employs more than 10,000 people worldwide and maintains over 130 branches. The bank also operates a New York-based subsidiary, The Bank of East Asia (U.S.A.) N.A., and branches in Great Britain, the British Virgin Islands, and throughout Southeast Asia.

## **Would you highlight the importance of corporate philanthropy and social responsibility to the culture of The Bank of East Asia?**

As a leading bank in Hong Kong and one of the largest foreign banks on the Mainland, The Bank of East Asia is closely identified with the markets that we serve. We are a personal bank, a community bank, a bank for small business, a bank for large corporations – we prosper through the success of the communities that we serve.

Thus, we consider it not just important, but essential that we play an active role in community and social development. Our involvement is wide-ranging, from education to care for the elderly, from internship programs to environmental sustainability, and from essay-writing competitions to disaster relief.

## **How do you engage your employees in your philanthropic efforts?**

Our corporate culture emphasizes our commitment to the community and we encourage our employees to become involved in community affairs. A very high percentage of our managers are involved in professional organizations, in industry associations, and in public service. Many serve on government committees, not just those related to banking and finance, but a broad spectrum of advisory and oversight committees that assist the government in its work.

We also encourage our staff to take part in public fundraising activities organized by different organizations. For example, we helped to organize the “Bank Cup” under Green Power’s annual Green Power Hike, bringing together teams not only from our own bank but from all banks in Hong Kong in a friendly competition to raise funds to support environmental awareness.

Team events and family events are especially popular with our staff and our Staff Recreation Association is very active in promoting the various activities announced by different charitable groups. We offer sponsorship and other assistance to support their participation.

## **You have been known as a leader in philanthropy for a long time. How did you gain such an interest in this area?**

I first became involved with The Salvation Army when I was a schoolboy in England after the Second World War. I kept up my contacts after returning to Hong Kong, and I have been very fortunate to serve as the Chairman of the Salvation Army Hong Kong and on the Macau Command Advisory Board for more than two decades. The international reach of The Salvation Army is a great advantage, as there is much sharing of knowledge and experience across the different commands. In addition, the Army is well equipped to mobilize wherever there is a natural calamity.

I became involved with the St. James Settlement through my Mother, who for many years was a leading fundraiser and event organizer for them. The Settlement is a local charity, which began as a community-based organization in one area of Hong Kong that had a particularly high number of elderly persons and street sleepers, and provided shelter and care.

The Settlement has grown to become one of the largest NGOs operating in Hong Kong, providing a wide range of community outreach

and social enterprise services. It is still a leading provider of services to the elderly, but is now involved in projects as wide ranging as neighborhood preservation, recycling services, food banks, and youth centers.

The Settlement has been a path-breaker in many areas, introducing new models to provide services and proving them for adoption by other NGOs and by government. The Settlement now operates throughout Hong Kong and is often called upon by the government to address community needs.

A particular passion of mine is education. I know from personal experience how education opens doors and I think one of the greatest tragedies is to allow talent to wither through lack of opportunity.

In 1982, I worked with a number of committed people in Hong Kong and in England to found The Friends of Cambridge University in Hong Kong. Our aim was to provide the means for talented individuals from Hong Kong to study at one of the world’s greatest universities, thus challenging themselves to excel and fulfill their potential. Over the past 30 years, we have supported over 150 students at Cambridge, most with full scholarships covering all tuition and expenses. Many have returned to Hong Kong to become leading figures in public and private life. I am very proud that the Friends is now largely run by returned scholars who want to provide others with the same opportunities that were provided to them.

I also want to mention the Asian Youth Orchestra (AYO). I served as Chairman of the AYO for two years before passing on the baton at the end of 2010, and I have a special fondness for the remarkable work of Mr. Richard Pontzius and his dedicated team at AYO.

Founded 21 years ago in Hong Kong by Mr. Pontzius, the AYO is recreated anew each year by auditioning young musicians from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. They come together for six weeks during the summer – starting with a three-week rehearsal camp in Hong Kong, followed by a concert tour to major destinations in Asia with celebrated conductors and solo artists.

The maximum age of Orchestra members is 26 and the AYO provides a life-changing learning experience for these talented pre-professional musicians.

It is truly inspiring to see what young people are capable of when given the chance. ●