

Dear All.

Sadly I can't be with you to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the C.K. Choi Building. Many of the people who were present at the creation will be attending as well as those fortunate enough to have worked, talked, studied, taught, eaten, laughed and occasionally cried under its five-peaked roof. I had the personal pleasure of attending the opening ceremony, brought from Toronto to partake at the invitation of Terry McGee. The concept of the building, its enviro vibe, its exquisite setting, its quirky features, and its equally quirky cast of characters were enough to lure me back on a permanent basis a few years later.

I rarely enter the building without thinking of one person who won't be with us, David Strangway. I had encountered but never seen David in Asia on several occasions in the early 1990s when I was travelling (separately) with the presidents of two universities in Toronto. Wherever we would visit we would discover that he'd been there three times in the last year, had just left, had many, many friends, and was working with them to transform the architectural and institutional landscape at UBC. Eventually, green with envy and filled with curiosity, I knocked on his door and in a series of conversations over the years got to know what he was trying to do and more importantly why he was doing it.

Then and later, David was the personification of innovation, incessantly searching for that right combination of ideas, opportunity, and the human relations and aspirations that make things happen. A major part of this was capital construction across campus in his era as president with one eye firmly fixed on a rising Asia and the province's rich Asian connections. He often said that it was exceptionally difficult to innovate at universities by subtracting from or taxing what exists; instead, new things, big new things in particular, needed new sources of financial support, leadership, and energy.

At a time when inter-disciplinarity was in its infancy, when the idea of organizing on a pan-Asian basis was unproven and seen to be overly ambitious, and when there were very few clusters of scholars looking to connect deep area expertise to social science and international relations, the building was not just a home but an incubator. Similarly, the idea of separating the Institute from the well-established and widely-respected work in line departments and faculties, meant finding new lines of funding for permanent appointments and building an administrative structure to nourish and protect a fledgling enterprise. This was a one-two punch that was as bold and it was demanding.

Many were present at the creation and they will be honoured on February the 8th for getting things rolling. At a time of rapid change at UBC and in the world, the physical structure they conceived will house a new generation of activities related to Asia that now extend far beyond Asian specialists alone. And new frames are being devised for the next phase of research, communication and policy impact.

But to my mind this is the house that David built. In it dwells a spirit of ceaseless innovation that would make him smile and take just a little satisfaction.

With abiding admiration and affection for the man and what he gave us,

Paul Evans