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125 INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE AND IDEAS

A CULTURALLY FLUENT BUSINESSMAN, FROM SHANGHAI TO TENNESSEE

LAURENCE ZA YU MOH, WG'53

WHEN LAURENCE Moh wanted to open a factory for his furniture businesses in mainland China, he would personally go to the province and, if necessary, sit outside the offices of the important officials, sometimes for many days.

When the plants finally opened, Moh continued his efforts to please the community, asking local Feng Shui practitioners about the best times and dates for openings, and even how the doors of the factories should face, in order that the factory would be a success in all ways.

Born in Shanghai, Moh went to Hong Kong upon completing his Wharton degree and soon established a teakwood-flooring business. Universal Furniture grew to be one of the first Far Eastern companies to concentrate on appealing to American middle-class tastes in furniture. “Long ago, Toyota realized that Americans didn’t care about the cars they were making in Japan for Japanese consumers,” wrote *Furniture Today*, the leading trade journal in the industry. “Larry realized the same thing about furniture.”

He sold Universal Furniture in 1989 and eventually started Fine Furniture Design and Marketing, one of the first Asian companies to concentrate on upper-end American furniture. Though Moh was in the vanguard in manufacturing in China

for the American market, he started factories for his more sophisticated furniture in Tennessee and North Carolina. For all his moves just a step ahead of the pack, *Furniture Today* called him “a visionary in the true sense of the word.”

He was also a philanthropist, establishing scholarships at schools from Singapore to North Carolina to Wharton, most named for his beloved wife Celia. On their 40th anniversary, Mrs. Moh said she didn’t want jewelry, but something more lasting. Moh, as he liked to relate, gave her a gift appropriate to a furniture executive’s wife, a chair — or more precisely, a set of chairs. To complement the Universal Furniture Professorship, which he created in 1987, he endowed new professorships at Wharton (where Health Care Management Professor Patricia Danzon is the Celia Z. Moh Professor) and at Singapore Management University, a business university begun in 1999 with support from Wharton.

A charter member of Wharton’s Executive Board for Asia, Moh’s legacy at the School includes his son, **Michael Moh**, W’92. Laurence Za Yu Moh died in 2002.

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WHARTON first

2002 Jon M. Huntsman Hall opened. Setting a new standard for state-of-the-art educational facilities, the building’s opening marked the culmination of the Campaign for Sustained Leadership, the most successful in business school history.