

Honorable Chief Executive,

Members of the Shaw Prize Council and Selection Committees

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an immense and unexpected honor for me to receive the Shaw Prize today.

In the long chain of extremely unlikely events which brought me here, Hong-Kong played a small but crucial part.

The luckiest event of my life is to have met in Kent, Ohio, a stupendous PHD student who instantly captured my heart to this day. I proposed to her after three days. You are crazy, she said. I followed her to Korea.

She sent me back to France with a broken heart. On the way home, I stopped over in Hong-Kong. I had the address of a fantastic wholesaler, where I bought her as a parting gift the best pearl necklace I could afford. This unselfish deed moved her, and the story continued.

Her father was a well-known scholar in Korea, and had raised his children in the belief that scholarly achievement is the supreme value in life. I have often wondered if this belief had more to do in her decision to share my life than my good looks.

Despite having a full professional life, she has been extraordinarily supportive. I never heard the words I dreaded the most: Now is not the time to work. This does not mean that I did not see my family. The secret of success in mathematic is to work every day until exhaustion, but not more. Do not believe her when she says I devoted 99% of my life to mathematics and 1% to her. She got at least 2%.

Having the perfect spouse, all the rest was easy. I wish I could say that I had a grand vision of mathematics but the reality is very different. I know little mathematics. I simply tried solving problems which came my way, always attempting to go to the bottom of things. I did not work on fashionable areas, but I focused on simple universal structures because there lay important questions. I

owe a great debt to Gilles Pisier, Vitali Milman, and others, who introduced me to the areas where I became the most successful.

Modern science is like a magnificent temple in perpetual construction. I am proud I could contribute one small brick to its foundations.