The establishment of the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1963 was unquestionably a victory for Chinese higher education. As a symbol of Chinese language, scholarship, and culture, it made every effort to underline its Chinese character and image in its formative years. The British colonial government, having agreed to establish a Chinese-medium university, wanted to show its faith in its second tertiary institution and emphasize its cultural significance within Hong Kong. Then-governor Black formulated the name of the new university specifically to reflect its origins and orientation:

In Chinese it is “Heung Kong Chung Man Tai Hok” and the English equivalent will be “The Chinese University of Hong Kong.” The words “Chung Man” mean literature or culture, and I think they are the most appropriate words in our circumstances here.1

The Chinese significance of this name was later further explained by the university’s first vice chancellor: “The name of The Chinese University, in Chinese, may mean the use of Chinese as the principal language of instruction. It may also mean a university with a firm background in Chinese culture.” 2 The government made it a point to appoint Chinese leadership to the university. Of particular importance was the appointment of the first vice chancellor.3 Governor Black decided that, given the nature of the university and the circumstances spurring its establishment, the candidates for vice chancellorship should be limited to “Chinese names only.”4 The Hong Kong public also advocated this in newspaper letters to the editor in the time preceding the formal founding. One letter expressed the issue clearly

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3 Following the commonwealth tradition, the vice chancellor is the executive head of the university, while the governor occupies the ceremonial post of chancellor.
in terms of cultural pride and public expectations for the Chinese University in contrast to HKU:

To have a non-Chinese in the Chair of Chinese in the Faculty of Arts in Hongkong University is already considered by many as an affront to the national pride and intelligence of 99 per cent of the population of our community. But then, Hongkong University is not renowned for its Chinese scholars! The establishment of a Chinese University is a very different kettle of fish. Here, it is said, the main medium of instruction will be in Chinese. To appoint anyone but a Chinese as the Vice-Chancellor may prove to be the last straw that will break the camel’s back.5

The same letter pointed out that, in view of the new university’s funding sources—which, whether public or private, would come from Chinese people—it was only fair that the leader of the institution to which Chinese people would financially contribute be Chinese:

As a practical consideration, undoubtedly, the new University will need quite some financial backing and endowments. If a non-Chinese were to be appointed to its highest post, I wonder what support it will have from local financial circles. Of course, Government may decide to foot the whole bill. But have we forgotten that the main contributions to the public purse are still from the Chinese?6

In judging the political and cultural mood in Hong Kong, Black declared that “the requirement is undoubtedly for a Vice-Chancellor of the Chinese race, and in the long term, that no other candidate will be acceptable.”7

The Chinese image of the new university was given substance with the curricular and scholarly focuses it developed. The university set Chinese studies as a prime area of emphasis, stating that “the University strives to become a major centre of teaching and research for regional studies, particularly studies of China.”8 Of the first two doctoral programs the university created, one was in Chinese studies.9 In building up the library collection, acquiring more materials and sources for Chinese studies was the highest priority; in the university’s first comprehensive report, Chinese studies was the only area specifically

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6 Ibid.
8 Chinese University Vice-Chancellor, The First Six Years, 6.
9 Ng, The Quest for Excellence, 155.