

## Address by Professor Rocky S. Tuan

# “A Beauty in Doing Things Together”

I stand here today humbled by the trust put in me by the University Council and grateful for the charge given me as the eighth Vice-Chancellor and President of The Chinese University of Hong Kong. I am thankful for the exemplary work done by my seven predecessors, who have laid down a solid foundation and steered the University down many avenues of success in the past five and half decades to make my appointment both welcoming and challenging.

I am further indebted to all members of the University community who have shown both their good will and candour since my appointment last July, and my assumption of duty just over a hundred days ago. I thank all the students, faculty, and staff from the Colleges, academic departments and professional services units, the alumni, and benefactors and friends of the University who have been helping me to read and understand the voluminous book which is ‘The Chinese University of Hong Kong’.

### **The Great Book of Learning**

CUHK is truly a Great Book of Learning! It is a classic whose themes and plots have been crafted serially by its first authors, and acted upon sequentially in letters and spirits by generations of dedicated students, teachers, administrators, and executives. Reading it verse by verse, chapter by chapter, is a constant source of inspiration for me and will serve to guide me in leading the University in the next phase of its development. I am prepared to lead it through the challenges of the times, take it to new heights of excellence and engagement, and pass on its precious legacy.

Fifty-five years ago, The Chinese University of Hong Kong was founded with the mission to assist in the preservation, creation, application and dissemination of knowledge by teaching, research and public service. The oft-repeated adage from the founding Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Li Choh-ming: ‘To combine tradition with modernity, and to bring

together China and the West’, has never lost its relevance and guiding vitality. Since its inception, CUHK has been and still is a university steeped in Chinese humanitarian values, combined with an international outlook. From its first days, it has opened its door to local students as well as scholars from the mainland and from overseas. The citizenship of international faculty members and students and their integration into campus life have created a rich, bilingual and multicultural setting for personal and intellectual growth. Tradition sits leisurely and comfortably with modernity on our beautiful and scenic campus, whose contours are lined with its water towers, a *tai chi* sculpture and scenic pools and pavilions as well as modern auditoriums and state-of-the-art facilities.

CUHK is the pioneer and sole purveyor of the collegiate system in Hong Kong, which is constantly evolving — renewing, reinventing and upgrading itself. It maximizes, in a large mansion, the teaching and research critical mass to enhance our students’ educational experience, but at the same time delivers to them, in each of the little houses, pastoral care and whole-person development. Our collegiate system is very much admired by many enterprising younger universities, which have actively sought to replicate it on many campuses in Asia and the mainland.

General education is another distinctive hallmark of the University. We have been steadfast and ingenious in offering general education courses to our students on both the University and the College level, and upgraded the curriculum whenever opportunities beckoned. This ‘liberal’ education format has continuously aimed to nurture future citizens of the world by providing a ‘whole-person’ education.

Critics have often lamented that higher education is increasingly losing sight of the learner in favour of additives such as learning hardware and job

---

prospects. William Deresiewicz, author of *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life*, quipped: 'Instead of humanities, students are getting amenities.' While CUHK has excellent amenities to facilitate teaching and learning, we are also putting our freshmen in dialogue with nature and with humanity and through a plethora of non-formal co-curricular activities. All these add a vitalizing dose of humanitarianism to their minds, and place their chosen majors in a broader societal context.

At half-century, the great tome of CUHK is old enough to be an endless source of wisdom and inspirations, but young enough to open up new vistas and whet the appetite for adventure. I am fully aware of my role in authoring the next chapter of this great book and the need for new words and new metaphors to forge new ideas and find new answers. Surely, both opportunities and challenges for CUHK await me!

### **Opportunities within Reach**

Close to home, as an institution of higher learning committed to both subject learning and whole-person nurturing, CUHK will continue to produce well-qualified graduates in answer to the human capital needs of a diversified knowledge-based economy that Hong Kong and other cities in the region are moving towards.

This new economy will be largely driven by science and technology and bold cross-disciplinary innovations. CUHK has a long tradition of excellence in fundamental and applied research, being home to over 30 research institutes and many more joint research centres which leverage the excellence of other leading partners in many parts of the world. We have demonstrated strengths and expertise in diverse areas, including artificial intelligence, deep learning, robotics, computer-brain interface, smart city, genetic screening, cancer therapeutics, just to name a few. It is my firm belief that CUHK will continue to excel as a fountainhead of basic, applied and translational scientific innovations and breakthroughs.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has been projected as the Asian Century, particularly given China's rapid rise to economic, cultural and political prominence. CUHK has a long tradition and deep roots in China studies, not only in the humanities and the social sciences, but also in business, law, engineering and physical and life sciences. In addition, we already have a strong foothold across the border, having established CUHK(Shenzhen), the Shenzhen Institute of Advanced Technology, and the Shenzhen Research Institute. We are therefore poised for further exploration of exciting educational and research opportunities in, among others, the Greater Bay Area and the Belt and Road city clusters.

### **Encroaching Challenges**

On a global scale, advances in information and communication technology are rapidly changing how we live and learn, with far-reaching effects on the way we run our school and teach our classes. CUHK has been proactive and will continue our pioneering efforts in eLearning innovations to push the frontiers of teaching technologies.

On the other hand, it has been said that, 'Every two days now we create as much information as we did from the dawn of civilisation up until 2003.' The world is shrunken by technology and inundated by information. We are all witness to some worrying trends in various parts of the world where the basic code of conduct and mode of communication are being broken and re-cast. Joel Stein, essayist for *Time* magazine, wrote: 'Expressing socially unacceptable views is becoming more socially acceptable.' The tech-savvy and cell phone-happy millennials can easily lose their way in the echo chamber of tweets and posts, or are simply unable to tell truths from post-truths. I am, however, cautiously sanguine about what education, our education, can do to help. On top of general education, our students' formal curriculum has all along been supplemented and complemented by a variety of experiential learning and service

---

programmes offered by the Colleges, the Faculties, student clubs and societies. To keep a clear head amidst the rapid-firing of feisty remarks and feistier ripostes, our students can benefit from sharpening their critical faculty to distinguish between facts and opinions, while developing their own ethical stance without becoming opinionated themselves and all the while respecting others' opinions.

Another challenge to our planet is sustainability. It is sobering to note that achieving the target of putting a lid on the global rise of temperature as agreed upon in the Paris Accord in 2015 is now by no means certain. Last year, 15,000 scientists from 184 countries issued a second warning to humanity, calling for urgent actions to be taken to halt the rate at which the Earth's resources are being destroyed and depleted.

CUHK's environmental 'green' tooth developed early, probably due to the sense of duty we feel we owe to preserve and conserve this beautiful, naturally endowed campus. We must continue to cherish and practice campus biodiversity, and nurture a culture of sustainability that reaches deep into every facet of teaching and learning, hostel life, and day-to-day management and procurement routines. More importantly, we, as a centre for the generation and concentration of knowledge, must take up a global leadership role in facing the many challenges of sustainable development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Not only do we create and incubate new technologies in tackling these challenges through research and development, most importantly it is our solemn obligation to educate and inspire our future generations of leaders in sustainable development.

### **The Journey Home**

As most of you probably know, I was born and raised in Hong Kong, and left Hong Kong as a teenager. So standing here is indeed a wonderful journey home for me, with a tremendous sense of belonging. This brings me back to the core mission,

core competence and core value of our University. Our duty and responsibility must lie first and foremost with the young women and men put in our charge. In the words of Benjamin Disraeli, 'The Youth of a Nation are the trustees of Posterity.' Our task is to make sure that the trustees of posterity are knowledgeable, intelligent and responsible citizens of the world.

In the past five decades, CUHK has groomed and graduated over 200,000 bright young women and men who do their parts and make impact in every trade, profession and calling. Some of them have been publicly recognised or even decorated; many more continue to impress in private. All of them carry within themselves what has been learned in our labs or classrooms, and delight in lifelong friendships made in our college canteens or sport grounds. To the outside world, CUHK is known by the faces and feats of these fine products of the University. They are the bridge between CUHK and society.

We often speak of students, staff and alumni as if they are distinct entities and well-demarcated populations of the University. Actually, the line dividing them is finer than you think. You are likely to meet on campus a teacher who graduated from CUHK, or have a colleague who is currently studying for a master's degree here in the evenings. Since you may have a hard time identifying those who have CUHK credential, let me just tell you that our alumni make up 42% of our teaching staff and 25% of our non-teaching staff. Together CUHK alumni represent 29% of its current workforce.

This is a fairly high percentage, isn't it? Namely, roughly one in three of the people who work for and serve the University in various ways and capacities are CUHK degree-holders. The Latin noun *alumnus* refers to a foster child or pupil, and is derived from the verb *alere* meaning 'to nourish'. According to John Boswell, a Yale historian, the word has connotation of both a beloved child and a servant. I would like

---

to emphasise the latter element of service, or loyalty owed to the place where one has spent probably the most formative years of one's life. I wish to tap this rich resource of talented members of the University alumni community for the good of the University, and to shore up and take forward the University's strategic objectives of increasing its global profile and presence.

I recently saw a photograph in the University Gallery, a black-and-white photograph taken in 1971. In the photograph, hundreds of students and staff formed a human chain to move books from the old Chung Chi Library to the soon-to-be-opened Elisabeth Luce Moore Library. I was moved beyond words, for never in the history of higher education has the transmission of knowledge received such a literal enactment. Today's libraries have fewer books, but the university as a communal ground for the generation and exchange of knowledge has not changed. I would very much like to see a higher number of those who have 'checked out' over the years coming home, 'checking in' and opening their life's book to the current crop of CUHK members.

The novels of Orhan Pamuk, winner of the 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature, often touch on issues of tradition versus modernity in his native Turkey. The narrator in his *The Museum of Innocence* says: 'Life was an adventure, and there was a beauty in doing things together.' In taking the helm of this great University I am embarking on the most exciting and meaningful adventure of my life. I have the incredibly good fortune of being in the same place with you for the duration of my term. I now extend an invitation to you—dear staff, alumni, benefactors, friends and, most important of all, trustees of posterity—to join me on this glorious journey that is CUHK!

#### **A Solemn Pledge**

On this day I accept the seal of the University and enter my name in the University annals as its eighth Vice-Chancellor and President. I solemnly

pledge to you that I would, to the best of my knowledge and ability, cherish and pass on the legacy of this University. I will count on your support and advice to do my job well, and I sincerely thank you all for being here this afternoon. Thank you.