



**An address given by**  
**Professor James C. Y. Watt, BA, MA**

Today's ceremony is the seventh of such occasions for the conferment of Honorary Fellows of the University. It is my great pleasure to speak on behalf of all the honorands to express our thanks and appreciation to the University for the recognition of our services. Speaking for myself, it is also an honor for me to be thus included in a distinguished group of scholars, administrators and benefactors. My own contribution was only in playing a small part in the early days of the developing University. In 1971, when I first joined the University, the building of the Institute of Chinese Studies had just been put up. My task was to establish the Art Gallery (now named the Art Museum) which occupied one side of the building. I also had the responsibility of part-time teaching at New Asia College. That was in the days when New Asia was still in Nongpu Road in Kowloon. At New Asia, I learned the College anthem, which began with "Hands empty, not a thing." When I arrived on my first day at the Art Gallery, I could sing the same song. The Gallery did not have a single thing. After some ten years, the Art Gallery took on something resembling a University museum. It was only in the nearly thirty years since I left, that the Art Museum, with the support of Dr J. S. Lee and the efforts of the two successive directors and the staff, that the Art Museum began its development in every area. The Art Museum today takes its rightful place among the university museums in the world. Its collections, of course, cannot match those of museums of universities with centuries of history, such as Harvard and Oxford. Nevertheless, some of its collections, such as those of ancient seals, old rubbings and paintings and calligraphies by Guangdong artists, are of great significance. This is the result of the carrying out of a policy determined at the founding of the Art Museum: to collect what the international community has ignored or that which foreign institutions have yet been unable to understand or study. The research work done by the curators and research fellows at the Art Museum on the collections has been of a very high standard, and the exhibitions they have mounted have been at a level at least equal to those at any university art museum. The Art Museum is only a small part of the University, but its achievements can be regarded as an indicator of the larger achievements of the whole university.

Here I should like to beg the indulgence of this assembly and offer a few words on the position of The Chinese University of Hong Kong in the international academic community. In my humble opinion, the mission of the University is two-fold. The one is to participate in research and teaching in all academic fields common to all universities, such as science and engineering, architecture, medical sciences and business management. This goes without saying. In this regard, the University has a special advantage. Hong Kong is not only a free port, but in the sphere of learning, it is also freely open to all parts of the world without restrictions – witness the international teaching staff of the University.

And it is also because of the advantage of Hong Kong's position, the University can also make a special contribution to what can be broadly termed Chinese Studies. The very name of Chinese University implies a special emphasis on Chinese culture, at least that was the original intention at its founding. Some people may think that, with so many universities in China, the



University does not need to compete in this area. This is not necessarily so. The Chinese University, because of its easy communication with the international academic community, would have the advantage of early knowledge of latest trends in all branches of learning. Thus it becomes possible to apply modes of thought and academic methods developed in other culture areas for the further study of our own culture. It is, of course, not necessary to agree with, or take over, the theories and conclusions of studies outside China, such as those grouped under the general heading of post-modernism. However, there is always something we can learn from studying other approaches to the same topics. I am not advocating the return to the earlier call for “Chinese learning in essence and Western learning for application,” but rather the objective re-examination of traditional Chinese culture, based on an awareness of international trends and methods in academic thought. Or, to put it in the words of Song Neo-Confucians, it is to assume the stance of “objective reflection” and “self negation” in our approach to Chinese studies. Something may be gained this way.

It is my hope, and my belief, that the Chinese University is in the right position and has the capability to accomplish the dual-mission mentioned above. Lastly, on behalf of the present honorands, I offer our sincere wish that the Chinese University will continue to flourish.