

An address given by Dr Lee Lok-sze, Rebecca, MH, DHum (Hon)

I am very honoured to be awarded the title of Honorary Fellow by The Chinese University of Hong Kong. I am especially honoured to be able to express our vote of thanks on behalf of all the Honorary Fellows. We deeply appreciate the Chinese University for conferring the honorary title to us, and we thank all the guests present for your support and encouragement. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the University, and having the privilege to be awarded honorary titles and be part of the university family at this special time makes the occasion even more precious.

Fifty years ago, this place was just a hill with trees and flowers growing. At the foot of the hill was a beach, and the flowing water of Tolo Harbour, and across the harbour was a chain of green hills, creating a quiet atmosphere and beautiful scenery. Today, this place became an internationally recognised university, while a modernised train station is located at the foot of the hill, with high-rise buildings on the opposite shore. During the past several decades, the water of Tolo Harbour continues to flow, but the scenery has been ever changing, while the Chinese University has never stopped growing. Today, the Chinese University is a comprehensive university with impressive academic achievements. What is more precious is that during the past several decades, the University's teaching staff and students have been thriving to turn the wilderness into a beautiful campus, and created a place to acquire and create knowledge as well as to pursue goals.

Our ancestors have always lamented on the ever changing environment. With modern technology, there is nothing extraordinary about leveling hills and reclaiming land from the sea. Man may not be able to conquer the nature, but we do have enough power to change our environment. Massive construction projects may be unavoidable due to social development and urban construction, but it is a skill, as well as a responsibility, to grasp the balance between changing the landscapes and protecting the environment. The Chinese University, known as a "green campus", is especially successful in its effort on environmental protection. In the area of academic research, the university established the Institute of Environment, Energy and Sustainability, which launched multi-disciplinary research and education projects on areas such as climate change, energy, sustainable urban design, public health and environmental policy. Last year, the University received a donation from The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust and co-launched Initiative Gaia, and is constructing the Museum of Climate Change to present the valuable information I have gathered and photos I have taken at the North Pole, South Pole and Mount Everest, as well as to promote climate change. I am happy to see more and more fellow companions, especially the younger generation, are joining in the effort to protect the environment. I am so excited about this, and the feeling is indescribable.

After visiting the "three poles", I have been constantly hearing their callings. I am really saddened to see the Earth's environment being destroyed, and am absolutely determined to

protect the environment. In fact, the condition of our natural environment is deteriorating: excessive energy consumption has led to the massive emission of carbon dioxide, causing the planet's temperature to rise, which leads to extreme climate changes. Air quality has also deteriorated, and the whole ecosystem is affected. According to data released by United States' National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), nine of the 10 warmest years in the modern meteorological record have occurred since the year 2000. There is no time to spare. When I followed an expedition to the North Pole in 1999, not long after our icebreaker entered the Arctic Circle, we were stopped by ice at a latitude of 74° north. However, ships have been able to reach higher and higher up north: in 2003 ships can reach the 80° north, in 2008 the 85° north was reachable, and now ships could go up north to the 88° north. According to the NASA's calculation, the size of the Arctic ice cap has shrunk more than 20 percent since 1979. Arctic ice melt have sped up global warming, causing the sea levels to rise, and living creatures in the Arctic, nonetheless, are the first to suffer. During the past few years we are seeing polar bears looking for food at the base camps at the North Pole. They are willing to take the risk and enter human-inhabited area only because their living environment has greatly deteriorated, and are lacking food. I was at first shocked when I saw polar bears are losing their habitat, and then I felt distressed and worried. How did this happen? The Earth's environment belongs to all living creatures, not just humans. Furthermore, since only humans have the ability to change their environment, they also have a responsibility to protect it.

What kind of an environment are we living in now? What kind of an environment are we willing to handover to our next generation? This is a question that is worth thinking about. The theme of the Chinese University's golden jubilee is "Embrace our Culture, Empower our Future", and in a broader sense, I believe we could use this as an angle to think about our environmental problems. Living in today's world, we have an inescapable responsibility to both our past and our future. We must learn from our ancestors' experience on development, and whatever we are doing today, the consequences will be borne by our future generations. Now is the time to put words into action for ourselves and our future generations. I believe we should all take up the responsibility of a modern citizen, and alter our habits of consumerism, change our concept on consumption, treasure our resources, and strive together to protect the Earth's environment. I believe how we live our lives affect one another, and not one person, or a generation, could be left unaffected. Our future lies in our hands.

