

**92nd Congregation for the Conferment of
Bachelor's, Master's, Doctoral and Honorary Degrees**

9 November 2023

Address by the Acting Vice-Chancellor and President
Professor Alan KL Chan

Council Chairman, distinguished guests, dear graduates, ladies and gentlemen – good morning and welcome.

Today marks an important occasion in the history of The Chinese University of Hong Kong. My warmest congratulations to the amazing class of 2023 graduates – you have spent your university years navigating through hardship and a new reality brought on by the once-in-a-century COVID-19 pandemic. You are also graduating in the University's diamond jubilee year! Our 60th anniversary is an opportunity for the entire CUHK community to celebrate our history, our story, and to reflect on our mission, as well as our contributions to and impact on society.

On 12 February this year, just behind where we are gathered today on the University Mall, more than 1200 faculty members, staff, students, alumni and community representatives came together to mark the commencement of this important anniversary year. That was the beginning of an eighteen-month programme of over 120 celebratory events, including international conferences, lectures, concerts, exhibitions, and student-led activities. Just last night for example, CUHK was deeply honoured and privileged to host, in partnership with the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, a special anniversary concert featuring the celebrated cellist Yo-Yo Ma. Maestro Yo-Yo Ma has a special affiliation with CUHK as he is the nephew of our founding Vice-Chancellor Professor Choh-ming Li, and moreover, he was awarded an honorary doctorate of literature in 1993, which was our 30th anniversary year.

But beyond events and celebrations – as important as they are – our 60th anniversary is about so much more. It is about you. Today, you are joining the ranks of over a quarter of a million members of the extraordinary CUHK alumni community. When we were pondering how best we could articulate CUHK's position in this special year, we landed on “Where Great Minds Shine”, in Chinese 甲子連心，任重志遠. Both taglines do carry special meaning for each of you as you embark on the next chapter of your lives.

You are all “great minds”. Aside from your intellectual capability and academic achievements, we believe the education you received in CUHK has nurtured you to become socially responsible

citizens, endowed with a capacity for critical thinking, empathy, kindness and respect. These are the qualities that make you “shine”. The approach of CUHK education is very much grounded in the values of Confucian scholarship and virtue, exemplified in the motto on which the CUHK phoenix proudly stands – 博文約禮 – “From Learning and Temperance to Virtue”.

In traditional Chinese calendar system, 60 years refer to 一甲子, representing the end of a cycle, and the commencement of a new one. This carries immense importance in Chinese culture, for it symbolises the intersection of time and the notion of rebirth. I think this is especially fitting for each of you as you graduate today. While all of you are far from sixty, in many ways the end of your studies in CUHK marks the end of a cycle and signal the birth of a new chapter in your lives. As you commence this new chapter in your lives, I would like to leave you with a few thoughts on my hopes and aspirations for you at this most exciting time.

Just as CUHK has evolved from its humble beginning as a teaching university on a barren hill, to a modern, world-class, comprehensive university today – so has our country transformed on an extraordinary journey from a ravaged country a century ago to its role today as a major global economy, shining on the global stage as the world’s centre of gravity shifts to Asia. Higher education has also seen a revolutionary transformation, there are now more than 33 million students receiving higher education in the nation compared to a mere 110,000 students in 1949. University education has indeed been a fundamental ingredient in the nation’s social mobility and economic prosperity, and will remain so.

Today, as you become a member of our alumni community, I extend to you an earnest invitation to remain closely involved with your alma mater and join us in our efforts to contribute to the next chapter of development of our country. This year, the University has set up six new academic, innovation and entrepreneurship bases in Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen. These bases provide spaces and opportunities for our alumni community to showcase and actualize their business ideas or their research credentials to our growing network of government, industry, and academic collaborators in China and around the world.

It needs no further emphasis on the special role Hong Kong has to play in the nation’s development and its global engagement endeavours. I often see Hong Kong acting as the neck of an hourglass, the conduit and the vehicle by which abundant sands of opportunity and sparkling crystals of collaboration move between China and the world. So is CUHK. Founded six decades ago with a mission “to combine tradition and modernity and to bring together China and the West”, CUHK is uniquely placed for the important calling as the engine to advance global collaborations. Just as in the case of the hourglass, time is of the essence.

Dear graduates, you are about to embark on a profound journey and to assume greater responsibility in the global community. Please do think about what you can do to make the world a better place for all. Be inspired by the world-renowned economist and sustainable development leader, Professor Jeffrey Sachs, who recently came to CUHK to receive an honorary degree and address our first Global Conference on Sustainable Development, who said, “The world is not a zero-sum struggle in which one country’s gain is another’s loss.” Countries and regions can achieve cooperation and mutual prosperity and work together towards common growth. As proud graduates of a university that stands at the forefront of addressing global challenges of our time, you have the knowledge and skills to play a critical and rewarding role. Step forward and think about the broader issues that demand our attention: the ravages of wars, the exigent climate crisis, and the imperative for a sustainable world. In your pursuit of truths and solutions to tackle these crises, always believe in the power of every small action you take – for they have the potential to create a ripple effect, or in chaos theory, a butterfly effect, and make a huge difference.

Dear graduates, the CUHK degree that you receive today represents a genuine appreciation of traditional Chinese culture, a capacity for critical thinking, a sense of social responsibility, and a strong awareness of the international environment. Yes, the world may seem to be becoming increasingly uncertain. However, we have no doubt that all of you are wholly equipped and empowered to navigate the shifting sands of opportunity, to rise to the challenges of the future, and to make a difference in the world. As one famous saying goes: “There are no passengers on spaceship Earth. We are all crew members.”

Once again, congratulations and my best wishes to all of you. Thank you.