

An acceptance speech given by Dr Chen Yidan Charles

Council Chairman Dr Norman Leung, Vice-Chancellor Professor Rocky Tuan, Honorable Guests, and Friends of the University:

I am greatly honoured today to be standing here to deliver this address on behalf of Professor Sir Shankar Balasubramanian, Professor Sir John Bell, Professor Harvey Lodish, Dr Shen Jinkang and Professor Sir Steve Smith. Our heartfelt thanks to The Chinese University of Hong Kong for bestowing on us these honorary doctoral degrees.

The motto of The Chinese University of Hong Kong: 'Through learning and temperance to virtue' originated from the chapter Yongye Pian of the *Analects* of Confucius¹. The original text is 'the superior man, extensively studying all learning, and keeping himself under the restraint of the rules of propriety, may thus likewise not overstep what is right'. This passage says that we should pursue knowledge in terms of both broadness and sophistication. Nevertheless, the ultimate goal of such endeavour is to inculcate in ourselves propriety and self-restraint, and the will to always follow the righteous path. It is indeed an educational goal every one of us here should pursue vigorously. Education has changed my life. I believe in the power of innovation in education. It is capable of bringing to the world positive influences. For more than 10 years, I have been investing both my time and energy in education and public welfare undertakings. I believe the crux of education lies in how one can continue scaling new heights and achieving breakthroughs after reaching a pre-set goal, which to me is just the 'ground zero' of the venture concerned. It is on this topic that I am honoured today to be able to share with you my ideas and ideals in education.

In this forever-changing world of today, the objective of education has gone far beyond the transmission of knowledge. A good education programme establishes a strong basic foundation for society to advance for further development; but along the

journey, we must innovate. Only by innovating continuously can we meet the various needs of society, and turn limited resources into infinite possibilities. That is how I derived from experience the concept of 'from zero to infinity.'

We have noticed that technology has played an important role in tackling the problems and issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the height of the pandemic, education institutions in 191 countries around the world have been shut down, affecting the learning process of approximately 1.6 billion students. Amidst such drastic and out of the blue changes in society, a number of full-fledged online tools have helped shoulder multiple teaching functions at all levels: from kindergarten to grade 12, all the way up to the tertiary sector.

Hitherto online education has mainly been designed for after school tutoring, skills transfer courses and continuing education, all as the peripheral platform to supplement the formal education curriculum. The pandemic, for the first time, lets society not only realize the full potential technology can bring to education but also recognize that it could be the main driving force behind this important task.

In dealing with the impact brought forth by the pandemic, some developing countries however have to face a number of hurdles, mainly due to the inadequacy of hardware support and insufficient online resources. In this regard, the low-income strata are likely to suffer more in the areas of medical care, education and economic deprivation.

To a certain extent, the pandemic has set off a devastating loop of our time: deepening economic inequality in society. It is therefore important that public policy makers, when drawing up long-term economic and social strategies, should consider allocating more resources to underprivileged groups, small and medium-sized enterprises, and low-income families or individuals in society.

The government, social enterprises, charitable organizations and education institutions have always been paying special attention to people with disabilities, left-behind children, the vulnerable and the impoverished groups in the city. Only upon a thorough understanding of their plight and suffering could we identify their needs; and accordingly provide assistance to help them. What is obvious now is that the World Health Organization (WHO) has regarded managing our mental health a very important issue during the current COVID-19 outbreak.

At this particular time the issue demands our full attention. It is because, after all is said and done, education is about people and what is in their mind. During the pandemic, a number of mental illness cases, such as depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, claustrophobia, etc. would readily break out. In this trying time, we all the more need to care about our family, friends and their kids, and pay particular attention to their well-being.

When ruminating about the future of education, we should not only focus on imparting knowledge, technical know-how and scientific

literacy, and the expedience that they could bring to society. We should, at the same time, identify the best way to nurture civic-mindedness and to mould the perfect personality, so as to inculcate moral values in our future leaders. We are all a part of the community. It is therefore our civic duty to care for each other. When the pandemic is over and the university operation gradually returns to normal, we especially need to work together to explore, each as a world citizen, how innovation in education can in the future drum up greater momentum among us to shoulder together our responsibilities in society.

Innovation is the end product of cooperation. Innovation could also result from collaboration among different enterprises in various sectors, with credit given to teamwork. Great innovations do not take place in isolation, and they are in fact the fruits of interdependence and cooperation across different spheres or sectors in society.

Education nurtures broad-mindedness, curiosity and analytical thinking that can be put to good use in different situations. All these unique qualities are the requisites for innovative power. Good education policies and planning, coupled with sufficient resources and budget, will be able to nurture innovative minds, thus helping to unleash the creativity capability in society. This is the immense and long-lasting positive effect that education can give to society.

There is an English saying: 'Necessity is the mother of invention'. Nowadays, all the basic needs of mankind have mostly been fulfilled. What

society wants, beyond basic needs, is innovation. This is why, here and now, I am more inclined to say 'Education is the mother of innovation, and education opens up boundless possibilities.'

The above, incidentally, is also the vision of the Yidan Prize I set up in 2016: 'To create a better world through education'. The Yidan Prize is a platform for the acclamation of breakthroughs in research and endeavours in education that are impactful and game-changing. It is my firm belief that innovative research and its applications will become resources that can be shared by all. To better prepare mankind in the face of continuous global change, the Yidan Prize Foundation founded the 'Worldwide Educating for the Future Index' and commissioned the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2017 to produce the report. This annual index applies three criteria in assessing the degree of success in a country's education system. They are: policy trends, teaching and learning environment, and degree of openness in society. These three criteria also assess the efficacy of the requisite elements for future success in education. This index aims to provide a comprehensive database and an independent analysis of education systems, for policy makers concerned to take reference when charting future education plans and strategies.

It is my great honour to be here sharing with you all my ideas about education, and taking this opportunity to pay my sincere respect to the leaders and teachers in the field, including those of CUHK. My heartfelt thanks are due to all of you for your tenacity in promoting education, and

your efforts in coming up with innovative ideas. Please also accept my salutation to your aspiration in, and commitment to, education.

Lastly, we would like to express once more our sincere gratitude to The Chinese University of Hong Kong for bestowing on us this exceptional honour. We will look upon it as a great encouragement, and also a strong motivational force in the future. We look forward to working with you all to promote further development in education, and to sharing with you the fruit of success in these exciting and innovative ventures. Thank you.

¹ The *Analects* is a collection of saying by the ancient sage Confucius (551 – 479 BC). It covers almost all the basic ethical concepts of Confucius, and together they express a philosophy, or a moral code. The chapter on *Yongye Pinn* deals with the doctrines of ‘moderate’, ‘forgiveness’, ‘literary thought’, and ‘benevolence’.