Professor Gene D. Block

Acceptance Speech

Vice-Chancellor, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great privilege to be asked to speak on behalf of my esteemed fellow honorands: Professor James Heckman, Sir Paul Nurse, Professor Pan Jianwei, and of course myself. All of us are deeply thankful to CUHK for this recognition. An honorary degree is an acknowledgement of achievement — for which we are all very appreciative — but it is also a call for us to continue to work for the greater good. I assure you that each of us will answer that call.

We are particularly grateful to receive this honor from such a remarkable institution. CUHK was established only six decades ago, making it much younger than many universities in the west. Yet it has made outstanding progress in that time. While that progress has spanned a number of different areas, I want to briefly mention just five.

First among CUHK's strengths is its academic excellence. CUHK is renowned for its rigour, and consistently ranks among the top universities worldwide — which is an exceptional feat for a young university.

Second, CUHK has become a hub for research with world-changing implications — particularly in the fields of medicine, engineering and the sciences. It has also served as one of the premier centers for Chinese cultural research, and has been a leader in promoting Chinese culture and heritage.

Third, CUHK is a great proponent of global collaboration. The university has established many partnerships with other top universities worldwide and has facilitated a robust exchange of students, faculty and ideas. This includes a 50-year partnership between CUHK and the University of California focused on study abroad programmes.

Fourth, CUHK has produced extraordinarily impactful alumni. The university's graduates have become leaders in academia, government, business and many other fields. Their contributions have fueled China's recent growth and success.

And finally, CUHK has been a pioneer in promoting sustainability and combating climate change on its campus and beyond — launching important green initiatives and supporting prominent environmental research programmes.

Personally — during my 17 years at UCLA, throughout my time as chair of the Association of Pacific Rim Universities, and throughout my whole career — I have been deeply impressed by this university. My connections and relationships with colleagues here have meant a great deal to me.

Over the past several years, I have worked very closely with President Rocky Tuan as we have helped guide the Association of Pacific Rim Universities. President Tuan brings a wealth of experience to international networks. He is smart and ethical, and working with him has been a delightful and rewarding experience.

And finally, I want to mention that I had the great honour of taking an economics class at Stanford from CUHK's former president, Professor Lawrence Lau. Professor Lau was a brilliant young assistant professor when I sat for his class nearly a half century ago. I know he accomplished much in his career at Stanford and even more in his leadership role at CUHK.

As I near the end of my tenure as UCLA's chancellor, I have been reflecting on the colleagues and institutions that have played an important role in my professional life. I am deeply appreciative of the time I have spent at CUHK and throughout Hong Kong and mainland China, and I will always be thankful for the partnerships and friendships we have formed.

My fellow honorands and I extend our deepest gratitude to CUHK for this wonderful recognition. Thank you.