

Professor the Honourable Leung Mei-fun Priscilla

Acceptance Speech

Council Chairman, Vice-Chancellor,
distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is really a privilege and an honour for me to deliver such a high honours speech on behalf of two other very distinguished and accomplished recipients: Professor Ching Pak-chung, an academic heavyweight, and Professor Wu Ting-yuk Anthony, a giant in the field of public health administration. All three of us share a profound love for both Hong Kong and our motherland, making contributions in service of our people and the rest of the world.

We were all born in an age of great transformation. We saw our country undergoing a sea change, climbing from the depth of poverty to become the world's second largest economy, and now a leading nation of innovation in science and technology.

I am really honoured and excited to have this opportunity to speak to you here. Last time when I had the opportunity to speak here was to my fellow classmates as the representative of the graduates 38 years

ago. I was a major in Government and Public Administration. Then, I went up to Beijing for a master's degree programme specialising in the Chinese Constitution and the Basic Law of Hong Kong, while the drafting process of the Basic Law was still under way.

As a student, my choice to go to Beijing was a big surprise at the time. My fellow classmates kept on asking me why I decided to go to Beijing and study law there, as in the eyes of many, the decision would not offer me a job in the future. They were curious of my choice because they knew I had got a full scholarship to further my studies in some very good universities overseas including US and France, which I gave up.

So, let me tell you why now. The Chinese University of Hong Kong did not only impart me knowledge, but also the opportunities to find out how much potential I could reach when I decided to pursue my dream. And to go to Beijing either to work or to study had always been my dream since high school.

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My heart to serve China goes back to the time when I was fifteen years old. I went back to visit my hometown in northern Guangdong. What I saw moved me to tears. Everywhere I went I met children in shabby clothes, but they still managed to smile, even though life was hard. I swore to myself that I would do all I could to turn my country into a better place for my fellow countrymen.

I was lucky to have a unique opportunity when I graduated. For the first time, China was willing to accept university graduates from Hong Kong to study in Beijing – together with other mainland Chinese students, living the same campus life. For us, coming from the beautiful campus at CUHK, the campus I saw in mainland China was quite “shocking”. The poverty in China was manifest in Renmin University, which could only afford students to have one shower per week.

Chinese leaders have always acknowledged Hong Kong's contributions to the country's economic success, especially in the 1980s, when Hong Kong brought their know-how

and international networks and experience in building our country into a manufacturing powerhouse.

At that time, I chose to pursue my master's and doctoral degrees in Renmin University, which laid the foundation for my subsequent role in helping build the rule of law in China. China has been a super-success in reinventing itself economically. But economic prosperity must be underpinned by the development of a civil society with a sound legal system that measures up to interconnect with international law.

In the past 30 years, I have dedicated myself to the modernisation of the mainland's court system, helping to translate the first decades of court judgements in China into English, which cost me my tiny flat when I was a young scholar in 1995. Then I helped train up mainland judges to get education in international law and practice. It is always my motto that “the earth had no roads to begin with, but when many people pass one way, a road is made”. It has always been my motto, as well as a testament of the rapid modernisation of China. Now, 35

years on, China has developed to another level of prosperity, enrichment, and culture. It has found its way. When I saw the three judges from China being elected as justices to the International Court of Justice at the United Nations, my eyes were filled with tears of joy.

I am particularly delighted to see China determined to take a leading role in the area of international law. Legal scholars from this city have likewise contributed significantly to the development of China's legal system. This development occurred at the critical time when Hong Kong was undergoing the historic transition, when our beloved city returned to Chinese sovereignty. Laying the groundwork of the Basic Law is crucial to the success of the unique "One Country, Two Systems" concept. I feel honoured that I have been appointed as a member of the Committee for the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Negotiating this handover of Hong Kong to China requires knowledge of common law and Chinese Law, as well as familiarity with Chinese and Western cultures. Educating the people both in China and the world

about the uniqueness of "One Country, Two Systems" and the importance of the Basic Law, takes both legal and socio-cultural knowledge of both sides of the world. This is a role I embrace enthusiastically both as a professor of law and as a lawmaker at the Hong Kong Legislative Council.

My 17 years as a LegCo member have taught me that the rule of law is at the heart of the effective functioning of a great society. The Basic Law is the cornerstone for the implementation of "One Country, Two Systems". It is a hybrid of common law and Chinese Law. Without it, there is chaos. The social unrest and divisions that we have witnessed and experienced in Hong Kong in the past decade underline the consequences that follow when misguided people fail to understand the Basic Law because of foreign interference, misinformation and lack of appreciation of the wisdom and unique value of "One Country, Two Systems" as a model of peace. It is also anchored with stability and prosperity. Hong Kong enjoys the best of both worlds, with the common law and Basic Law existing side by side. Our city is

blessed with the full support of our Central Government, backed by being next to the world's second largest economy, while enjoying the full benefits of a free and open society.

With many parts of the world in disarray, we are fortunate to live in a country of peace and stability. "One Country, Two Systems" is a great creation of political system to harmonise differences on earth. It is a gift for Hong Kong and Macao, and also a good reference to solve historical disputes in the world. Looking at history, it is so rare that disputes over sovereignty can be settled without bloodshed. Only Hong Kong and Macao can do so because we have "One Country, Two Systems". We must treasure and continue to do our best in improving our unique system as China promotes the ideal of a common shared prosperity with the rest of the world. I am sure Hong Kong will not only be the Pearl of the Orient, but also the diamond of the world.

Once again, on behalf of my fellow recipients, I would like to thank my alma mater for bestowing this great honour on

us. I see this as a positive reinforcement for doing our part in making a stable, law-abiding, and prosperous society and in upholding the rule of law and "One Country, Two Systems" for another century to come. Thank you.

This acceptance speech is delivered by Professor Leung Mei-fun Priscilla on behalf of all Honorary Fellows