

Professor Leung Yuen-sang

Acceptance Speech

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

As May softly descends upon the campus

The celebrative mood of the diamond jubilee lingers on.

Standing tall on the picturesque environs of the campus is the twin-tower

Witnessing faculty and students relentlessly diving into the bottomless sea of learning.

Six decades of sweat and toil by us all

Helped transform the modest institution into a global leader of knowledge.

Founded six decades ago, The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) began its knowledge voyage in the barren Ma Liu Shui. With fearless determination, our predecessors built on the rugged hillock a chain of teaching blocks, and started offering tertiary education especially for local middle school students. Throughout the past half-century, CUHK has been a part of my life. I was admitted to CUHK in 1968 and completed my undergraduate and then MPhil studies six years later. Upon returning from the US, I started teaching at Chung Chi College for nearly 30 years until my retirement. Throughout my CUHK academic life, I was fortunate to have witnessed its transformation from a humble university with three constituent colleges

into what is now a congenial community of learning comprising nine colleges, where students enjoy close interaction with teachers and grow with their peers. The serendipity of being closely involved in providing colourful learning opportunities through whole person education for our students had been most enlightening, and a driving force for academic excellence for all in the past half a century, when the barren campus ground gradually turning into a lustrous greenery mingled with modern, intelligent and also environmental-friendly buildings. We, staff and students together, saw the changing landscapes as well as the strengthening of academic fortitude first-hand, and couldn't help feeling amazed, and blessed too. The changes are not

just for the eyes of those within, but the society at large as the academy prepares future service leaders for the region and beyond. But believe me, these changes at CUHK also accomplish the inevitable metamorphosis of us academics into champions of education. It also saw me, a young and at times overconfident history student, growing into a grey-haired self-effacing elder. In retrospect, the rapid development of CUHK, and the intellectual ballooning of its academics, are two sides of the same coin. The process, while jubilating but occasionally painstaking, has always brought back fond memories to all connected to CUHK one way or the other. With this as the background, I would like to share with you today the passionate and occasionally sentimental feelings I have had over my close and prolonged association with CUHK, as follows.

Firstly, it is the feeling of 'role reversal'. In the past, I used to stand on this podium as an orator delivering citations at many conferment ceremonies to honour distinguished individuals. Today, I am the

one who stands on the ceremonial ground being honoured by a citation specifically written for me. In the past, I was the one to blow the trumpet, paying tribute to the honorands. Now, the citation is on me. This role reversal experience is a bit strange and to a certain degree ludicrous. But this 'role reversal' experience had been a frequent visitor to me throughout my life at CUHK: from student to teacher; from being told what to do, to having to tell others what they should do; from a quiet attentive student to, at times, an absent-minded mischievous one; and from one of those sitting conscientiously in the lecture hall, to being the one delivering lectures on the podium. Throughout these decades, the above role-changing experiences happened time and again. But these experiences, coupled with introspection and self-examination, gradually imparted on me a positive attitude in life. They teach me when to change, for the better, and when not to, for the sake of maintaining equilibrium; and more importantly, the rationale behind. Change for change's sake is not practical. If one does just that, and ponders on the

issue at hand with a fixed mindset, this would only make things worse, and surely, nothing better will be accomplished.

Secondly, it's about the feeling of 'crossing', crossing through time and space! This also includes crossing the boundaries of culture, language and academic disciplines. Since retirement, I have more time watching television. In the past when I was still in active service, I spent my precious leisurely moments watching only the news. Now I enjoy watching drama series indiscriminately, be they mainland dramas, Taiwanese or Korean ones. In so doing, I have noticed that scriptwriters often apply the plot of the aforesaid 'crossing' in TV dramas. Crossing from one time and space to another, from ancient times to the present, or from the present back into the past – sometimes even spanning through several dynasties. This technique of crossing through time and space is not unfamiliar to historians like me. It means we are using what we are familiar with the present, including new technique and know-how, to examine issues of the past,

for the purpose of understanding and examining how they interplay in different scenarios, supported often by data and illustrations. Through studying history from the perspective of crossing time and space, there are lessons to be learnt. In other words, what we learn today may help us solve many past unsolved problems. At the same time, many of our accomplishments today, when looking back, do not come without a reason, or foundation. Most of them are actually derived from past wisdom, and they are not achieved as a matter of fact. The most obvious example is that the articles we write, or the citations you just heard, are often composed of or derived from a number of idioms, poems and ancient verses, so as to help enhance their presentation and in some cases, make them more concise and convincing, or occasionally allowing us to reverberate the past. I call this 'crossing' of texts. Besides, 'crossing' can be realised in knowledge transfer, during which various forms of knowledge cross one another. However, 'crossing' does not mean replacing. It could also mean allowing oneself to be immersed

in the process of crossing through different time and space. At CUHK, one of our missions is to 'combine tradition with modernity, and to bring together China and the West', which precisely embodies the spirit of 'crossing', in this case, the past and present, and between the East and West.

Finally, my feeling today can be encapsulated in one word: gratitude. Today, my heart is filled with mixed emotions and my thoughts are like a spinning wheel. Yet the strongest feeling is 'gratitude'. I want to express my sincere gratitude to a lot of people. On this auspicious occasion, I particularly want to thank all our University principal officers, and also all of my mentors, past and present. It is my great pleasure too to speak on behalf of the honorands today: Professor Fok Tai-fai, Professor Hui King-man Michael, Dr Kwok Pik-lin Barbara, Mr Lee Kwok-chung Simon, Dr Lee Nai-shee Harry and Mr Luk Koon-hoo Roger. We would like to express our appreciation to the University for the recognition of our services. On a personal note, I would like to thank wholeheartedly the secretaries and other support staff

who helped me manoeuvre through many unavoidable administrative chores in the past. Without their help, I probably couldn't complete them properly, not to say on time. Most important of all, I would like to extend my utmost gratitude to my family, especially to my wife, who had not only in the past half a century put up with my busy work life but also supported me all the way. Her care for and understanding of me are warmly appreciated, and I sincerely hope that we could continue to spend every second of our precious moments together in the years to come.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who are attending today's ceremony, and ask for your continuous support for CUHK. I also wish the University great success in this challenging era, and prosperity in the coming sexagenary cycle, like a flying dragon in the sky!

*This acceptance speech is delivered by
Professor Leung Yuen-sang on behalf of all
Honorary Fellows*