

**HKU Centenary Ceremony**  
**Speech by Professor Lap-Chee Tsui**  
**August 18, 2011**

Vice Premier Mr Li Keqiang, Minister of Education Mr Yuan Guiren, Mr Chancellor, Distinguished Guests, Members of the HKU Family, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good morning!

And, on behalf of The University of Hong Kong, I would like to welcome you to the University this morning and, at the same time, thank you for coming to celebrate with us the University's Centenary.

The last century has witnessed tremendous changes in Hong Kong, China and around the world, be it technological, economical, social or political.

The University has also moved with the times over the past 100 years and evolved from an institute with only three areas of studies to a comprehensive university of many disciplines. As members of the international academe, we share the global challenges at the forefront of higher education developments.

Indeed, the birth of this first and foremost University was an important part of the history of Hong Kong and China. It was the result of the combined efforts of the two governments, in Hong Kong and in Canton (now Guangdong), despite the rather delicate Sino-British relations in the last years of the Qing Dynasty. It could have been an impossible dream, had it not been for those who believed in the need for a university in Hong Kong and the generosity of those who wished to see one built for China and the world.

The University of Hong Kong was formally established in 1911; however, it has been a constant debate among our alumni and the community at large as to whether the University should be dated back to 1887, the year when the College of Medicine for Chinese was established in Hong Kong. Adding to this debate was the famous quote from Dr Sun Yat-sen, one of the first graduates of the College: He said, "I feel as though I have returned home because Hong Kong and the University of Hong Kong are the birthplace of my knowledge." That was what Dr Sun told the students in this great hall, back in 1923.

Despite these academic arguments, generations of scholars, students and alumni have so shaped HKU that it has gained a momentum of its own, transcending time and changes, as a university should. The enlightenment of teaching and learning at the University is now further enriched by the wealth of groundbreaking research. Our graduates have moved beyond careers in the civil service, to all sectors of society, and they have moved beyond Hong Kong.

HKU remains a guardian of knowledge, an incubator of ideas and innovations, a cradle for new intellect and talent, and a pioneer in social consciousness and responsibility.

Indeed, universities are among the most enduring institutions of any society; they are its soul and they bring hope.

It is in this spirit that we celebrate our Centenary and look into the future. Let me elaborate this further, in three aspects.

First, despite variations of the relationship between Hong Kong and its motherland, the University of Hong Kong has never ceased to play its unique role in contributing to China's modernization. Apart from Sun Yat-sen, many alumni have contributed directly to the development of the Mainland in the past Century. In addition, HKU graduates have played essential parts in building the great modern metropolis of Hong Kong, which in turn has proved to be an asset to its motherland.

However, as China moves forward, HKU must assume the responsibility to play an even bigger role at a higher level, to support and fulfill the nation's economic and social needs. HKU must see and establish itself as a key institution in China.

Second, a hundred years ago, HKU was already an international hub for intellectuals, as most, if not all, of the teachers were expatriates and two-thirds of the students were non-Chinese. Notwithstanding fluctuations in the past century, HKU has retained its international outlook. We are privileged to have a great assembly of the finest scholars, brightest students and world citizens from diverse background and cultures, all under one roof.

This international composition, which has grown well beyond the original legacy, has made us the unusual test case of being the most international institution within a Chinese community on Chinese soil. In an increasingly globalised world, HKU also has a clear responsibility to further bridge China and the world, and to facilitate the process of internationalization of higher education in China.

Third, we cannot pretend that we are living in a stable and peaceful world. We face natural disasters almost everyday, energy shortages, global warming, emerging infectious diseases, recurring epidemics, man-made accidents, precarious economic crises, abrupt social turmoil and unwanted wars. We know that some of these are unavoidable, so we have to do our best to mitigate or learn to overcome their effects with our scientific knowledge and technological advancements. For the entirely avoidable ones, however, we have a responsibility to safeguard sustainable development, and to champion the restoration of human values.

In this respect, we have to thank HKU's founders for their wisdom in choosing the brilliant university motto "*mingde gewu*"(明德格物). Ladies and gentlemen, please allow me to switch to Chinese for a moment.

「明德」、「格物」是香港大學的校訓。二語都出自「四書」中的《大學》，是儒家「修身齊家治國平天下」的學說。簡單來說，港大學生需要「明德」，使與生俱來的光明皎潔的德性，彰顯出來，並將它發揚光大，推己及人；同時，又必需要「格物」這個基本工夫，來窮究事物的原理，追求淵博的知識。從「格物」、「致知」，到「明明德於天下」，不只是求學的道理，也是做人的道理。

所以我們很感謝先賢給我們的校訓-「明德」、「格物」；這個道理不只是適用於過去港大的一百年、或者是中華文化的五千年，在今天和將來的地球村更是意義重大。而我們校訓的拉丁文版本（*Sapientia et Virtus*）也是從中文翻譯過去的。

Ladies and gentlemen, I just explained the origin of our HKU motto, which came from the Chinese Classic Great Learning. Although it was beautifully translated into Latin: *Sapientia et Virtus*, meaning wisdom and virtue, in English, the translation could only capture part of the original essence.

In any case, it is in the context of wisdom and virtue that we celebrate our Centenary. The dimensions of “knowledge, heritage and service” represent the missions of our multiple roles: to be a knowledge hub for learning and research, a cultural crossroads where East meets West and the past illuminates the future, and a service platform where the University nurtures global citizens and is itself nurtured by the community.

Amidst our festive celebrations, we could not help asking ourselves: What do we treasure?

HKU is a community that cherishes openness, diversity and freedom, which have evolved into our core values. These values have made us a pluralistic and harmonious community of people from various backgrounds and diverse cultures. These same values have also liberated the intellectual potential among academics and students, and have hence unleashed the energies essential for sustaining and advancing a vibrant community of academic excellence.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the University of Hong Kong had modest beginnings. It has been the hard work of all members of the HKU Family, which includes our staff, students and alumni, and the unfailing support of both the Government and the community at large, especially our donors and partners who believe in our cause, that have brought us to where we are today in the international arena.

As the world continues to change, HKU will continue to evolve, and we are committed to keeping ourselves at the forefront of developments of humankind. We aim high, and tolerate no compromise in quality, ethics, social responsibility, and human values. We think globally, and position ourselves in the national context and the international arena. It will be our vision for excellence, our aspiration for freedom, our devotion to student learning. and, our commitment to society that will guide us through the next 100 years.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to end my remarks with the following Chinese verse:

筭路藍縷，以啟山林；  
由來淬礪，種圃艱辛；  
明德格物，百載傳承；  
門牆桃李，奮翮前程。

請允許我在這裡，再次謝謝各位今天來臨參加香港大學的百年校慶典禮！  
Thank you very much.

*Please check against delivery.*