

HKU Inauguration Ceremony for New Students
Speech by Professor Lap-Chee Tsui
August 24, 2011

Dear Students,

Welcome to The University of Hong Kong.

I wish to add my hearty congratulations to you. You've worked hard to earn to a place at this University. You should be very proud of your achievements.

University is a place of learning, where knowledge is created and shared. As Dean of Student Affairs has already elaborated in his introduction, HKU provides you with a rich environment with plenty of learning opportunities. At HKU, you will learn a lot, not only from your professors, but also from your peers, i.e., your fellow students and friends; not only inside classrooms but also outside; exchange and internship programmes, etc. etc.

Most important, we have a free, open and diverse learning environment. This is what HKU faculty and students have always enjoyed and treasured. And, as new members of the University, you have the privilege to learn in this environment. At the same time, however, we count on you to contribute to this community of learning with your passion, intelligence and dedication.

I am speaking to you with a deep sense of history and tradition.

You are entering HKU as the university celebrates its Centenary. You are sitting in Loke Yew Hall, in the first building on campus, where HKU started.

In fact, the foundation stone of this building was laid in 1910, during the Qing Dynasty. By the time the first batch of students was admitted in 1912, and the first Republic of China had been declared.

The person who made it happen?

Of course, it was Dr Sun Yat-sen, the father of Xinhai revolution and modern China.

And his relationship with HKU?

I don't think I need to go into any details of this except to quote his famous remark, which was made in this very same Hall: "Hong Kong and the University of Hong Kong are my intellectual birthplace."

So, history was made here. And each day, we continue to create our own history, with its trials and tribulations.

Dear New Students, be prepared. Controversies are not unusual at HKU. Protests, forums and debates, are frequent parts of student life here. And we are proud that our students, like students in many parts of the world, can be a noisy bunch.

Just last Thursday, Vice-Premier Li Keqiang of the State Council, and key officials from Ministries of Education, Science and Technology were among our invited guests at the University's Centenary Celebration. The event gave us not only the opportunity to showcase HKU's many achievements in different aspects, but also to further reaffirm the tie between Hong Kong and the Mainland. It was certainly a very significant event in the history of the University and that of Hong Kong.

It was also significant because a major controversy broke out over the Centenary Celebration event, on which a lot of loud debate is being heard right now, literally around the clock.

Let me digress a bit and put things into perspective. Over the past year, we have held more than 30 events to mark the Centenary of the University. We have welcome to our campus Nobel Laureates and the disadvantaged in society. We have also hosted dialogues Aung San Su Kyi who is a Nobel Laureate for Peace.

The visit of the Vice Premier was special, however, because, 100 years ago, our founder announced that HKU was a "University *for* China." Today, Hong Kong is part of China, and the University's history is closely intertwined with that of the Mainland. As the most international university on Chinese soil, HKU has the duty to serve as a bridge between mainland universities and the international community.

Back to the controversy – I should perhaps not repeat the details here because it can be found in the message I wrote two days ago to the University community. There, I expressed my regrets in our oversight in the handling of security on campus. And, for many of us at the University, the past week has been a learning experience.

Now, it will be up to you, as HKU students, to take part in your learning experience here. While you embark on your new journey at this University, do listen, think, and contribute to the discussions and debates. That is the only way to attain the two HKU learning principles that are enshrined on the University's Coat of Arms – 明德格物 (Sapientia et Virtus or Wisdom and Virtue).

Like Dr. Sun Yat-sen, make HKU your intellectual birthplace.

Make sure your passion and commitment are matched by a spirit of enquiry. Think critically and independently so that you would be free from prejudices, and be ever open to new possibilities. Hold on to your principles and face up to challenges. I, together with all the faculty, staff and alumni, will stand by you and help you along your way.

Earlier this year, at the kick-off ceremony for the Centenary Celebrations, we declared that HKU today is for HK, for China and for the World. The university embodies the values that all of us cherish in Hong Kong – freedom, liberty, and diversity. We must continue to contribute to the welfare of the people of Hong Kong. We must also remain ever vigilant in safeguarding the autonomy of the University, our academic freedom, and, our right to free expression, on and off campus.

This is our heritage.

With the courage and audacity of our faculty and you, our students – and with modesty and humility – HKU shall continue to lead, and to serve, for the next 100 years, and beyond.

Now, for the sake for those who would like to hear me say a few words of Chinese (Cantonese), let me say the following:

年初港大百週年校慶啟動儀式上，我們宣佈今天的港大是為香港、為中國，和是為世界而立的。香港大學體現了香港人珍視的價值：自由、開放、多元。我們必須繼續為香港社會的福祉作出貢獻。我們還必須保持警惕，維護大學的自主，以及校園內外自由表達意見的權利。

這是我們的傳統。

港大教職員將和同學們一起，懷著勇氣、無畏、謙遜、和虛心勇往直前的精神，邁向下一個百年、新的世紀。謝謝。

Thank you.