



## **Aung San Suu Kyi's Speech**

One of my favourite dicta is that people should not be categorized as good or evil, wise or stupid. It would be much more sensible to divide them simply into learners and non-learners. In between the two extremes would be a broad spectrum graded on the degree to which individuals are capable of correct assessment and understanding of the learning material at their disposal.

Here of course I'm giving a very broad definition to learning. It would involve much more than what could be acquired from any one institution or from any one formal teacher. It would mean a process of gaining such knowledge and experience as would help us to cope with the challenges that life throws at us and to find ways of enhancing our own existence, as well as that of as great a portion as possible of all the other occupants of our planet.

To put it in another way, the highest form of learning would be that which makes us caring and responsible citizens of this world, and equips us with the intellectual means necessary to translate our concerns into specific deeds.

Surely such a view of learning is in harmony with the idea of education as conceived in the motto of Hong Kong University – Wisdom and Virtue.

One hundred years of furnishing the world with young people who have been provided with the capacity to think independently, to express those thoughts cogently, and to use them for the betterment of our world is an achievement of which this University can be justly proud. The hopes of its founding fathers have been more than realized.

At the foundation laying ceremony Sir Frederick Lugard hoped that the graduates of The University of Hong Kong would exert an influence which will be immeasurable in the future among the 400 millions of China's population. Little could he have envisaged such an institution as this one of today, internationally renowned and one that attracts students from all over the world, who will one day exert an ever-widening influence on the future of more than just one country.

As I contemplate the achievements of Hong Kong University, I am filled with deep admiration and also, it has to be admitted, with wistfulness. Whenever I consider the educational progress that has been made in other countries, I think with sadness of the deplorable state of education in my own.

There was a time when educational standards and institutions in Burma were viewed with respect and envy by many countries in Asia and elsewhere. Rangoon

University, ten years younger than Hong Kong University, is the outcome of the amalgam of Rangoon College and Judson College, the Baptist college. The University rapidly became the breeding ground not only of bright young intellectuals, but of dedicated nationalists determined to free their country from colonial rule.

Even as academic standards grew robustly and gained the recognition of long established institutions in the Western world, so did the patriotic fervor of the students gained new momentum. Rangoon University became the vanguard of movements demanding equality and justice and, eventually, these movements were supported and joined by students from Mandalay University, and from schools all over the country.

The close link between political movements and universities became an established tradition in Burma. When the country fell under military rule, students were among the first protesters calling for the restoration of democratic rights. As authoritarian rule tightened its grip on the country, the position of universities as institutions aimed at fostering freedom of thought, expression and association was steadily eroded.

Yet, after more than two decades of totalitarian governance, it was again the students of Rangoon University who led the movement to free the country from military administration. This was the famous public uprising of 1988.

Now, more than twenty years on, the aims of democracy and human rights, for which many students sacrificed liberty and life, have not yet been realized. In the meantime, the standard of education at all levels has fallen and Burma is a country crying out for the potential of its people, especially its young people, to be realized.

I might mention here that many leaders of the 1988 student movement still remain in prison today, serving unbelievably long sentences.

Education should be available to all, not just to a privileged few. Education should foster values that will promote human dignity and guide human progress in a positive direction. Education should be a true learning process, not a machine for churning out meek, obedient people incapable of reasoning why justice and liberty should not be the birthright of all human beings.

I congratulate The University of Hong Kong on its achievements on the human front as well as on its solid academic credentials, which have made it one of the most respected institutions in Asia. I look forward to a closer cooperation with both the faculty of the University, as well as with the student body.

I am confident that the day will come when we in Burma will be able to enjoy the fruits of real education and to share them with the rest of the world. This will be the day when wisdom and virtue will triumph.