

Address by Professor Way KUO, President

Chancellor, Pro-Chancellor, Chairman, Deputy Chairman and Members of the Council, Honorary Graduates, Honourable Guests, Graduates and Colleagues:

This is a memorable occasion for our graduating students. We are gathered here today to witness the success of another group of young professionals as they step into society with acquired skills and expertise, with enriched minds and hearts, ready to contribute to this community and beyond. There is an English word “commencement” which carries the explicit meaning “beginning”, but in America, this very word is frequently used to refer to a graduation ceremony like ours. The idea is that once the students have finished their studies at university, more often than not they are stepping into society. Hence this occasion is both magnificent and worthy of our everlasting memories.

It was an ancient Greek philosopher, I believe, who compared knowledge to a circle. Inside lies the knowledge one has acquired, and outside lies the unknown world, which is beyond one’s scope of understanding. But as your knowledge accumulates, this circle expands. Once the circle is bigger, you become humble because you are more aware of the vastness of the unknown world. Some people try to explore the unknown, driven by curiosity. It is interesting to note that Eugene O’Neill, the father of modern drama in America, also believed that life was a closed circle of possibilities. Once the circle has enlarged, there are accordingly more possibilities.

We often say that knowledge is power. The power most of you possess should derive from your knowledge. Or rather, I should say that in university, you have made every effort to acquire more expertise, enrich your minds and broaden your vistas. You are ready to see a more colourful world with more possibilities than you could ever have imagined.

Here, allow me to liken an individual to a fish. Every fish enjoys a certain degree of freedom and suffers a certain degree of confinement as well. Some fish might find themselves in a fish tank, some in a stream or creek, while others swim in the vast ocean. Where you are depends largely on your mind and your abilities. Today, you are leaving university for society. I hope that you will never be satisfied with petty achievements and narrow perspectives at the expense of experiencing the

world. Instead, you should constantly raise your game and not stay content within the boundaries of a stream or creek, but strive to enjoy the freedom of the ocean. In *Life Without Principle*, the American transcendentalist writer Henry David Thoreau said the aim of the labourer should not be just to get “a good job” but to perform well at a certain kind of work; not to work for low ends, as for merely a livelihood, but for a scientific or moral purpose.

People can be divided into two camps: one that is satisfied with a certain level of success, and can hit all its marks from point-blank range; and one that, no matter how unsuccessful life may be, elevates its aim, though at a very slight angle to the horizon. In short, people from this camp work not just for money but for the love of the work.

I would like to share an anecdote about Albert Einstein, father of modern physics. When asked how he was different from others, Einstein said most people would stop at finding a needle in a haystack whereas he would hope for a second needle and would search the entire haystack again. In other words, there is no time for self-congratulation. We need to be forever searching for new solutions, new challenges, new ideas and new knowledge.

William Shakespeare, English poet and playwright, and Lin Yutang, a 20th-century Chinese literary scholar, both believed that humans were sandwiched between heaven and earth, leaving them depressed and hopeless. It is a tough situation to be in, but the human spirit helps to overcome life’s hurdles, encouraging others along the way. I know of a father whose son failed to get into university. Instead of scolding his son, the father hugged him, saying, “Take it easy. As my son, you are sure to rise like the sun, because you have found the mother of success”. His idea is born from the saying: Failure is the mother of success. He didn’t want to see his son lie between heaven and earth, depressed and hopeless. My dear young friends, you know all about challenges and hurdles. You have worked very hard to graduate, and this is an experience that you must not forget. Never let your spirits flag.

Though we are all sandwiched between heaven and earth, individuals can stand worlds apart. Between heaven and earth, some people lie depressed and hopeless; some stand, but with a bent head and crooked knees; and some stand upright and march or even run confidently. Everybody hopes to be a great hero between heaven and earth, but it is far from enough if you cherish only beautiful wishes. You have to work hard

to strengthen your foundation. Only your actions and ceaseless efforts will help you realise your dreams.

Today three outstanding people will receive honorary doctoral degrees from CityU. They are great role models for all of us. Though they are from different social sectors, they have scored remarkable achievements in their respective fields through their wisdom, knowledge and perspiration, travelling along the boulevard to the grand goal in life, under the guidance of their noble ideals, which are just like heavenly lights. They are indeed great heroes under the heaven.

My dear young friends, if you wish to realise your dreams, I hope what follows is important, valuable and even imperative. First, students in different disciplines should value learning and the acquisition of the basics of their specialised fields. With a solid foundation, you are blessed with the possibility of making constant and sustainable progress. Second, students should apply themselves to learning about the latest developments in their fields. Only by enriching your mind can you discover something fresh and create something new. Third, when your knowledge is eclectic, try to make your feelings varied, too. You should identify yourself with others and the universe. Once you have an expanded mind and heart, you can make yourself rich in knowledge, great in sympathy, and immense in love. You can make remarkable contributions to society and human progress. Fourth, you should know that the world is both sweet and sour.

My dear young friends, Steve Jobs, one of the Apple founders, once said to Stanford students: “Stay hungry; stay foolish”. I wish to add that you should also stay optimistic and positive. If you are negative about everything in life, you are likely to find yourself blocked by impenetrable walls and feel that life is too uncertain. If you are positive, you are likely to see life as a vast green meadow where you can enjoy the warm sunshine to your heart’s content and feel that life is full of possibilities.

What I have said so far can be seen as my expectations for you as well as real goals that we have set for our university.

Thank you.
