



**Hong Kong Baptist University
62nd Commencement
Presidential Address**

Be a noble modern-day Renaissance person

Welcome to the 62nd Commencement of Hong Kong Baptist University. I am delighted that we can gather here today to celebrate one of the major milestones in your life. I would also like to congratulate you and your families on this most important day, as you have finally reached the end of this particular academic journey after the unexpected hiccups in your final year of study. But despite all the ups and downs, you have shone during the darkest moments, and your parents, and all of us at HKBU, are extremely proud of your achievements.

We are also honoured to have five honorary doctorate recipients joining the HKBU community. They are Dr Chow Yun-fat, Professor Steven Chu, Professor Ding Jian, Dr David TC Ho, and Professor Alan B Rickinson. They are all widely recognised elites in their respective fields. From their citations, we learn about how we can illuminate humanity and make the most of our gifts through hard work and dedication. Much like the Renaissance figures of the past, these five distinguished persons have continued to push the boundaries, and they often explore ideas from other areas. With their endless curiosity, generosity and nobility, they have reached the pinnacle of their fields and contributed in various ways to the betterment and advancement of humankind. Their success stories inspire us and show how we can reach even greater heights in our various pursuits, and they reveal the solutions to challenges with their braveness, perseverance and clarity of thought.

Over the past two years, we have all faced major difficulties. The prolonged pandemic has put us all to the test and completely transformed our lives. So much has changed since the start of your time at HKBU. When you attended the Convocation as a freshman a few years ago, the idea that you would only have online classes during your final year was unimaginable, when you should have been finishing up your research in the laboratories, or filming your honours project around the territory, or practising as an intern. But you did it, and you did so well that you have now emerged as a stronger and wiser person. Learning to cope is a life-long journey, and you are not alone in having to develop coping strategies for all these changes. Your teachers

cope by innovating new ways for you to learn via online classes. Governments around the globe are learning to manage the devastating social and economic impact of the pandemic. Remember, when one door closes, another one opens. While some jobs have disappeared, others have been created!

The pandemic period, which has gone both fast and painfully slow, has also been an ongoing examination of our resilience and patience. At the start of the outbreak, when “Covid-19” and “lockdowns” were unfamiliar concepts, our survival instincts were activated. The privileged modern man and our affluent societies have forgotten the hardships that our ancestors endured, and all of a sudden, we were confronted with an unfamiliar sensation as we strove to protect ourselves and our loved ones.

Yet as Martin Luther King Jr said, “Only in the darkness can you see the stars”. Challenging moments also bring out the kindness and nobility in us and the idea of “love thy neighbour”. When the virus first emerged in Hong Kong, the HKBU community used their expertise to provide support to the needy and their creativity to comfort souls. Compassion and friendship have got us through this pandemic. Hard times can bring the best out of people, and together we learnt to cope with this “new normal”.

The pandemic has also been a test of our humanity, and it has raised questions around who to save and prioritise when the supply of vaccines, ventilators or medical supplies is insufficient. With many developing nations still struggling with this devastating disaster due to financial or infrastructure issues, the WHO has earlier called for a halt to booster shots for healthy people. As a result, countries need to think hard about the right decision. These situations around the world have brought the ethical dilemmas from your philosophy class to life. Utilitarianism and Kantism are no longer abstract concepts stuck on the page. We all know that we can only solve this pandemic by working together. We cannot, and should not, thrive alone when our neighbours suffer. Care for humanity is fundamental to an HKBU education, with which you are richly endowed.

The challenges we face are deeply illuminating, as they provide us with an opportunity to reflect on what we want and what is valuable in our lives. They shed light on long-held views and prejudices, and they prompt us to reflect on our priorities, and the best way to lead a dignified and meaningful life. The pandemic is a harsh teacher, but it has also made you stronger and enabled you to mature. Life is full of tough choices – between loving your neighbour and your family, between protecting yourself

and the community when they are dichotomous, and deciding who you will give your mask to or share your necessities with when you don't even have enough yourself. You can afford to fall ill, but you cannot afford to fall from grace. You can let your guard down occasionally in the fight against the virus, but never let yourself down. Be a noble Renaissance person. This is our eternal quest.

Recall these lessons as you move into a new post-university phase of your life and think about the kind of role you want to play amidst these problems and challenges. Upon graduation, you may be an entrepreneur, an administrator, an inventor, an office worker or even a slashie. But apart from getting a good job, remember that it is not the impact of the pandemic on you, but your reaction to it and the choices you make that defines who you are. It is not just the act of completing an academic programme, but your commitment to society and the world around us that makes you a university graduate. After all, it is the nobility of mind that defines man, and the care for humanity that ennobles man.

As a graduate of HKBU, you are well-equipped to emulate the Renaissance figures from the past and become future leaders who can shape the world with confidence, competence and commitment, much like our distinguished honorary doctorate recipients. You may have to cope with many changes, but our heritage of a whole person education endows you with the requisite skills and knowledge. We also believe that it is the best way to prepare you for the unpredictable post-pandemic world that you are graduating into. Our transdisciplinary liberal arts education not only gives you the facts and knowledge that you need, but it also provides you with the necessary qualities, such as resilience, flexibility and creativity, to thrive and cope with whatever you come across in this new era.

As you prepare to take your next steps, remember that your potential for development is limitless, so try and acquire as much knowledge as you can and develop your own abilities to the fullest. Ultimately, you all have a hugely important role to play in this new world, but be kind-hearted and wise, and use your passion to explore new avenues and embrace what's in store for you. Your knowledge, wisdom and skills can bring light and hope to humankind in this new era. As John Connor says in *Terminator 3*, "The future has not been written. There is no fate but what we make for ourselves." Good luck and I look forward to hearing about all your achievements in the years to come.

Thank you.