



66th Convocation
Address by Professor Alexander Wai
President and Vice-Chancellor

May the FORCE be with you

Dear Students and Colleagues,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the 66th Convocation of Hong Kong Baptist University. University represents one of life's major milestones, not just in terms of your education and what you will learn, but also in terms of the friendships you will form, and the ups and downs you will experience. It is truly a transformative time, and you will grow and become a better and more well-rounded person while you are here at HKBU.

Over the past 18 months, we have all experienced a challenging time as a result of the pandemic. As students in your final year of high school, you had to adapt to online classes, and you also faced uncertainty over one of the most important examinations of your life.

Yet challenges create character. In the face of the pandemic, we united to prevent the spread of the virus. We shared anti-epidemic supplies with the underprivileged and the needy even though at times we didn't have enough for ourselves. Despite these challenges, we emerged to be stronger and more compassionate, and we eventually shed the anxiety and frustration brought on by the pandemic to build a more caring society.

Challenges also create changes. Thanks to recent advances in technology, we are now exposed and connected to a bigger world as more things go virtual. Tonight, you could potentially watch the Berlin Philharmonic perform some amazing music, and tomorrow, you could transport yourself to the British Museum to learn about ancient civilisations. This flexibility also extends to your education, as our students, for example, can now interact and pursue international exchanges with a greater number of students from other parts of the world in the digital space.

The wheel of fortune may take you to unfamiliar places. While the ride will keep you busy, at times it may make you feel like you are going nowhere. Welcome to the real world! You never fully know your strengths and limits until you are put to the test. Embrace these challenges, and be grateful for these tests, as you may be surprised by the unforeseen results and what you can achieve.

When I was a bit younger than you, I had a passion for chemistry. Unfortunately, my allergy to chemicals prevented me from pursuing this further, and I ended up studying physics – and became a physicist. So setbacks in life are not the end of the world. They may just be the key to unlocking the door to a better tomorrow.

In physics, we study force, and according to Newton's Third Law – something which I'm sure you all learnt in school – every action has an equal and opposite reaction. When you step on the floor, the floor "pushes back" to your feet. And when you're confronted with a challenge, use your knowledge, skills and mental fortitude to push back and overcome what's in front of you.

We can also interpret FORCE in another way, as it is also an acronym for the five important skills and attributes that I would like you to possess.

Be **F**lexible. The past few years have shown us that lives often don't work out as planned, and change is one of the eternal forces in the universe. Everything around us are constantly breaking down and reacting together to form new molecules and compounds. Embrace this change, and even the chaos and the entropy in the system, and remember that being flexible will allow you to quickly adapt to your environment and learn new things.

Be **O**pen-minded. Our world is becoming more complex, and the boundaries between disciplines are starting to blur. For those who beat some 40 competitors to be admitted to your favourite programme, congratulations! For those who are going to study a discipline which was not your first choice, while you may be disappointed, try and look at the bigger picture. Leonardo Da Vinci is known as a great artist, but at the same time, he ventured into aviation, anatomy and many other branches of sciences.

At HKBU, we have been advocating a transdisciplinary education and research environment. It is a place where artists meet scientists, creating possibilities that we never could have imagined. Thus, no matter which discipline you are studying, aspire to be a Renaissance Man who is well-versed in the arts and sciences. Be open-minded about your education and life, and open yourselves up to the opportunities around you.

Be **R**esilient. Life is never easy and obstacles are inevitable, but you are stronger than you think you are. You must have heard the name Daniel Chan (陳浩源) or seen his photo in the MTR, as he has just represented Hong Kong in the Paralympics and won a bronze medal in the Badminton Men's Singles WH2 event. He is a student of the Physical Education and Recreation Management programme.

Daniel lost his left leg in a car crash, and the accident left him bewildered and full of despair. A badminton lover, his will to fight was rekindled when he picked up a badminton racket again. With much perseverance and courage, he rose up and became a stronger man, and he is now one of the top para-badminton players in the

world. The rest is history. Daniel is our pride and joy, and he is undoubtedly a role model for all of us.

Be Creative. HKBU is known to be a cradle of creativity, nurturing artists, musicians, filmmakers, and writers. Creativity is in HKBU's DNA, and our programmes and activities are designed to nurture creativity, even if you study science, Chinese medicine, or business. Find creative solutions and use them to adapt to the new normal.

Lastly, be Empathetic. Our education not only equips you with the knowledge and skills to thrive in our changing world, but it also shows you the importance of serving the needs of society. We can learn to become wise and gain useful knowledge, but we can truly elevate ourselves to a new level by helping others. Care for humanity is intrinsic to an HKBU education. It is also part of our research ethos.

Over the next four or five years, you will receive one of the best liberal arts educations in the world. On top of our transdisciplinary curriculum, we have designed personalised learning pathways for you. There are also a wide variety of service-learning, experiential learning programmes, and general education courses for you to try. These will endow you with the necessary attributes, wisdom, and drive to go on and become the leaders of tomorrow.

On the other hand, HKBU will continue to build on our rich heritage in culture, the humanities and the arts with the support of science and technology, and you will see many examples of this around the University, whether in your curriculum or the research around you. This legacy will provide you with the well-rounded education needed in this new world, and our transdisciplinary education and the personalised learning pathways designed for you at HKBU will take you to a higher plane, where your dreams can take flight.

I'm really excited about the future and your educational journey at HKBU, as you are joining the University at a historic juncture, a time when there is *A New Hope*. To quote Star Wars, I also encourage you to harness the FORCE during your time here. Remember, the acronym FORCE stands for being Flexible, Open-minded, Creative, Resilient and Empathetic. Combining these individual components will enable you to become the best version of yourself. When you reimagine changes and challenges anew, you will find your way and thrive in the new world and in this new era. I wish you all an enjoyable journey of learning and self-discovery during your time here. May the FORCE be with you!

Thank you.