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ADDRESS BY PROFESSOR LU JIE  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION, *honoris causa*

## Gratitude and Reflections

First of all, I must express my heartfelt gratitude to The Hong Kong Institute of Education, for bestowing upon me the honourable degree of Doctor of Education, *honoris causa*. This is an honour I will greatly treasure, after spending a total of 55 years in education and teaching. Education is not only an arena that I have offered my life-long commitment, it is also my spiritual home where I have found the meanings and values of life. It is exactly this life experience of mine, which gives me such a substantive feeling about the "heaviness" of an honorary degree in education, and the true values attached to it. On this very special day, I must say that my mind is laden with reflective thoughts when I look back at those 55 years.

For me to become a teacher is closely related to my family background. However, I would still consider myself having been "thrown into" this career, as in the words of Heidegger. I was only 23 when I first stood on the lecturer platform, facing a class of nearly a hundred university students in a tiered-platform lecture hall. It was not because I was a young woman of exceptional bravery. On the contrary, I was actually scared to death! I just told myself to face the music, after resigning to the fact that I had been "thrown into" this situation. Then somebody came up to embolden me with a secret tip, "Just treat all those students down there as woodblocks and you won't be scared anymore!" So, that was how I started my teaching career, armed with the concept that people could be treated as woodblocks. It was only after repeated troubles and blunders I have made that this "woodblock theory" of mine began to change. Gradually, I came to realise that those sitting right in front of me are actually "human beings", and not woodblocks. This discovery could probably be described as Copernican in my education career. It has altered my understanding, attitude and beliefs in education.

By "human being", we do not simply mean physical life; we also refer to a realm close to the heart and the soul. Therefore, we should never approach or treat a "human being" the way we do to an "object". At the same time, we should never assume that we could come to a full understanding of human being by just having a set of knowledge and rules, and apply them as the basis of education work. In my own experience, many rational concepts and systematic knowledge have paled into insignificance when tested upon real life individuals. To understand a "human being" is the greatest mystery still waiting to be solved by education. Teaching students has made me realise that when trying to understand or deal with them, we need to resort not only to our brain and a scientific mindset, but also our total devotion to embrace them. The latter encompasses care and love, understanding and empathy. As Einstein had pointed out, it is very important to understand the humans, but without any empathy for a person's sorrows or happiness, this kind of understanding is just empty words. It is only when a heart-to-heart exchange takes place between individuals that the most sublime level of education can be reached, whereby there

is a "you" in "me" and a "me" in "you". Therefore, I am convinced that education is not just a task of the brain; it is also a mission of the heart. This is what distinguishes education from other types of work, and it is probably where its heaviness, sacredness and attraction lie.

My research focus is on moral education. Besides having to treat human beings as they are, I am also responsible for the caring of their existential well-being. Beyond that, I need to take heed of people's potentials. My work requires me to capture the most humanistic side and the best nature of an individual, and make such qualities the "sunshine" of his or her life through the process of education. My testimony to all is that "human beings can really be that good!" I can feel profoundly the joy and pleasure in my work because those beautiful hearts I have touched keep warming me up and cheering me on. Nevertheless, in a world where "amorality" or even "anti-morality" prevails, I would feel lost and become despondent at certain times too. I have also felt hopelessly lonely and alienated. Fortunately, my daily life and work have always backed me up with valuable lessons and the force to move forward. They fortify my convictions, saving me from depravation. The havoc at the Wenchuan earthquake this year is an example, where we witness many touching stories, testifying to the fact that my presumption on human nature is correct. My conviction in education is that "human beings can be that good, and the sacred mission of education is to strive to make this possibility a reality." This is my conviction, which I will uphold till the end of my life.

At this year's Teachers' Festival, a young teacher sent me words from Niebuhr's *Serenity Prayer*, which says "May God grant me the courage, to change what I can....." Today, please let me also pray that I and all of you be granted enough courage to change all the things we can, through the efforts we make in education. In this way, we can truly live up to the honours bestowed upon us by The Hong Kong Institute of Education and fulfil its great expectations.

Thank you!