

## Professor Ge Zhaoguang

Doctor of Humanities, *honoris causa*

Council Chairman Dr David Wong, Council Members, President Professor Stephen Cheung, distinguished guests, staff and friends of The Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK).

To be conferred this Honorary Doctorate by The Education University of Hong Kong is a great honour, for which Dr Charles Chen Yidan, Dr Zhang Yimou and I are most grateful. There are many others who deserve this award, but we are among the lucky ones. I am aware that the honour represents the University's recognition of academic research, artistic creation and social service, and that we so happen to be selected this year. While I feel a deep sense of gratitude, I am somewhat uneasy with the honour bestowed on me.

If I may, I would like to take this grand occasion to share some of my feelings regarding uncertainty, something which has been talked about around the world over the past few years. While I am not sure how the other two Honorary Doctors feel, I am filled with a sense of bewilderment resulting from this uncertainty towards the future. Globalisation, which once seemed unstoppable, appears to have suddenly come to a halt against the tide of anti-globalisation or nationalism; universal values that were regarded as common sense now seem to have become obscure. Differentiating between right and wrong is no longer easy. There used to be an increasing integration of different systems, but now we are returning to a 'them and us' state-of-being. The so-called 'clash of civilisations' seems to have morphed from differences in languages, customs, religious beliefs, and ideology into actual war. Many friends, be they scholars, artists or industrialists, now live in a state of great apprehension.

In these times of uncertainty, is there anything that is indeed certain? After much consideration and reflection, it appears to me that 'education' is the only answer. I am not saying this because of The Education University of Hong Kong and its name. It is my genuine belief that clarity of values has to be restored, that the world order has to be reasonable, and that consensus has to be reached among different people. This calls for collective effort, not only from the current generations, but those of the future. This echoes the lyrics of the theme song at the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, directed by Dr Zhang: 'You and me, from the world, we are family'. The shaping of knowledge, concepts and values of the next generations depends on the education of today. Education is of particular importance, as it defines whether the world will change for the better. Frankly speaking, we are not politicians, and we have no statutory power. We can only influence the next generation with our writing, work and conscience.

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We cannot help but look back on our own experience when we think of the next generation. The three Honorary Doctors this year all come from the mainland. Dr Zhang and I are of the same age, slightly older than Dr Chen. Perhaps we share some common background, experiences and memories among our generation. The award of an Honorary Doctorate today reminds me of a past event, which I would like to share with you here. More than 20 years ago, a well-known Japanese university appointed me as a visiting professor. During the review process before my appointment, they realised that I did not have a high school education, nor had I received formal doctoral training. The committee subsequently sent me a letter to inquire about the reasons behind this, but it was difficult to explain, despite my best efforts. The same doubt cropped up again when Princeton University appointed me more than 10 years ago. I understand their perplexity, as they had not lived through what I had, so they could not begin to comprehend the situation. They could hardly imagine a place where regular secondary education could have been disrupted for no comprehensible reason, and that someone could have entered university only at the age of 28.

This incomplete academic journey of my age was the result of what happened during that era. Such a gap has left us with no choice but to keep looking back and to care more about what is going on today. Be it Dr Zhang's filmmaking, my research on history, or Dr Chen's dedication to charity, we can see that practitioners from different fields in China have devoted themselves to humanistic care of our epoch, society and reality. This means that our careers and professions are never purely technical in nature. We had high hopes - the hope 'to live' and the hope of 'returning home'. It was our hope that everyone could receive education and that no one would be left out. May our history of missing out on education and incomplete academic qualification never be repeated.

The three of us are truly fortunate to be conferred Honorary Doctorates, and we will certainly continue to do our very best in contributing to society. We work in different areas, with perhaps different approaches. Dr Chen donates to building schools, Dr Zhang directs films, and I conduct historical research. If there is any commonality among us or any connection we have with The Education University of Hong Kong, it would be 'education'. Through schools, the arts, charity and historical studies, we all strive to nurture more talent for the future, with holistic character development.

Thank you.