

**ADDRESS BY PROFESSOR COLIN NELSON POWER, AM
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Chancellor the Honourable Donald Tsang Yam-kuen, Council Chairman Mr Pang Yiu-kai and members of the Council, President Professor Anthony Cheung, staff, students and friends of The Hong Kong Institute of Education,

Firstly, on behalf of the four recipients of honorary doctorates at the 17th Congregation, namely Ms Sheila Purves, Prof Ting Pang-Hsin and Dr Fong Yun-wah and myself, let me express our profound gratitude for the honour bestowed on us by the Institute.

Secondly, on behalf of all involved in the struggle to improve education in Hong Kong, China and our region, I should like to congratulate the Institute, its leadership and staff for the enormous contribution it has made, and continues to make, through its teaching, research, innovative programmes and service to the community. Without a doubt, it has earned the high regard which is held by all of us.

Thirdly, allow me to add my voice to those who would like to see the Institute officially recognised as a university. Given my professional background, I have been heavily involved in seeking to improve the quality and impact of higher education for many years. I have had the privilege of working with the Premier and Ministers of Education of the People's Republic of China on the reform of education in China and to ensure that others benefit from the Chinese experience. One of my obsessions has been to ensure that educational research informs policy and practice. Thus, I have been working with the Institute for more than a decade and particularly with Professors YC Cheng, Kerry Kennedy, Magdalena Mok and Rupert Maclean to strengthen educational research and innovation throughout Asia and the Pacific.

In no small measure, the high regard in which the Institute is held in our region can be attributed to the exceptionally high quality of its staff and students. But to create a really great institution, one also needs leadership. In January this year, I attended the World Universities Forum. At the Forum, your President, Professor Anthony Cheung shared his vision for the Institute. Later we discussed what needs to be done to make that vision a reality. Today, the Institute really is an education-focussed, multi-disciplinary, research-oriented university. The vision is a reality, in all but the last detail. It is high time that its status as a university is confirmed.

But more than this. I believe that the Institute can and should be a world leader in redefining the role and functions of the university in the 21st century. Interactions between scholars and artists from the "east" and the "west" have been at the heart at some of the greatest advances in human knowledge, science and the arts in human history. The same is needed for higher education. A long history lies

behind the values that define the mission of universities in Europe. And there is an even longer tradition stemming back to Confucius (K'ung Tzu) that underpins higher education in China. My argument is that the interaction between the two could well lead us to a new consensus about the role and function of universities in the 21st century.

In both the east and the west, higher education institutions have always had a place and time bound identity: they are embedded in the communities they serve and which sustain them. In addition, universities in Europe have always seen themselves as part of a global knowledge community, the community of scholars. But there is an obvious tension between the global and knowledge-oriented role of universities and their obligation to serve immediate needs of the community that supports them. There needs to be a link between the global and the local functions of the university. Thus, universities, through their research and teaching, are expected to serve the "common good" as well as to push forward the frontiers of knowledge.

Sadly the long standing consensus about the role of public universities is under threat in the increasingly privatised, market-driven world of the west. If universities are no more than social machines for the manufacture of private benefit on the job market, there is no rationale for public universities¹. And with that, public universities will wither, and the advances made in serving the education, health and other basic needs of all in the west will grind to a halt.

If progress is to be real and sustainable, we need to blend what has proven to be of value from both the east and the west. Universities must continue to push forward the frontiers of knowledge and to ensure their graduates are well equipped to serve the common good. But also university research, teaching and community service need to rest on a set of ethical values, an ethic that is not at all evident the league tables, quality assurance systems and higher education policies of the west. "My teaching" declared Confucius (K'ung Tzu) "is open to everyone, without distinction" and the goal of education is to produce capable individuals (Xiancai) who combine "competence with virtue (junzi)." What we need today is virtuous universities, not just virtual ones, universities that serve the "common good" not just private interests.

In closing, I would like to thank the leadership and staff of the Institute for the splendid start it has made on creating such a university.

¹ See Simon Marginson "The public rationale of the universities" *Dissent* , 36, Spring 2011, 26-31, and Colin Power "Engaged Universities: The Quintessential University for New Times," Eidos Institute, August, 2005.