

The Honourable Chief Justice Geoffrey Ma Tao-li, GBM

Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*

Address

It is an immense honour for my fellow recipients, Dr Rex Auyeung and Professor Qian Yingyi and I to be present today at Lingnan University to be awarded honorary doctorates by the University. We thank the University profoundly for these honours. We are also humbled by the conferment of these degrees and this humbleness comes from a realisation of what Lingnan University stands for. Before I develop this theme, perhaps I may be permitted to say something about my fellow recipients.

Dr Auyeung is a person of much distinction as we have just heard. One of the qualities he has which stood out for me is his reputation of finding out different points of view in resolving problems. In other words, he listens, he observes and he acts on what he hears and has observed. Apart from putting himself in the best position to arrive at the right solution, perhaps more important, it demonstrates that quality which is essential in any community, respect for the views and sensitivities of others.

Professor Qian Yingyi needs little introduction. He is a distinguished economist who had been with Tsinghua University for many years as the Dean of the School of Economics and Management. In a well-known study called “What is Missing in Chinese Education: Creativity”, his hypothesis is that mere knowledge is not enough for a complete education. There must also be a spark and that spark he calls creativity, which is the product of curiosity and imagination. I have found it to be an extremely perceptive and stimulating piece.

However, creativity is not the only other component in an education. Lingnan University, as a foremost liberal arts institution with a formidable international reputation, identifies this other component in its ethos to enable “its students to think, judge, care and ultimately act responsibly in the changing circumstances of Hong Kong, the region and the world”. I made reference to this over six years ago when I had the honour of delivering an Address to the University Assembly (the title of the Address was “A Respect for Rights and a Respect for the Rights of Others”). This ethos applies as much now as it ever did, perhaps even more so in light of the events we have witnessed within Hong Kong and worldwide in the recent past. The vision of the University is well worth bearing in mind: this is the vision of community engagement, the nurturing of students with core values and emphasising the value of a readiness to serve, going to Lingnan’s ultimate aim of (in its words) “the betterment of humanity”.

These are in truth lofty ideals and aspirations befitting a mature educational establishment. Underlying these ideals is the attempt to inculcate in its students a way of thinking that goes beyond themselves and their personal interests. This means for me a readiness, willingness and the acceptance of an obligation to serve the community with the objective, putting it in simple terms, of creating a better society not just for the present generation but also future ones. No one would quarrel with the ideal of service to the community, but one may ask rhetorically: how do members of a community go about to achieve this?

In general, the road to achieving anything worthwhile of course requires hard work, dedication and focus. But when we are referring to something as hard to define yet obviously tangible as the benefit to the community, it is important to stress the necessity of having in mind at all times principles to guide one's approach. Conceptually, it is the same approach when devising strategies or policies. In these exercises, adherence to guiding principles is key.

In serving one's community to better the society in which each of us lives and works, we must (I would suggest) bear firmly in mind the principles of fairness, justice, equality, tolerance and of course respect for others. In my own case, my professional life as a lawyer and as a judge has taught me the value of these principles which I continue aspiring to apply.

The recognition of the obligation to serve the community requires a humbleness at times to put aside one's own interests. I have no doubt that Dr Auyeung and Professor Qian already apply the principles I have just spoken of. Once again, we thank the University for our honours, and wish the University continued success in what it has since its establishment been its role in our community.