

I have been advised to give a speech in either Chinese or English at this important moment. But because of the demographic diversity in this school, I would like to talk in English here. Please allow me to take this opportunity to extend my warm congratulations to all graduates, and my best wishes for your continuous success in years to come.

Graduation is certainly a cause for celebration. Completing your secondary education is a significant accomplishment. Graduating from the Academy of Innovation (Confucius Hall), a school with a rich and colorful history of over 70 years, is particularly meaningful. Congratulations! You've done it; all the hard work has finally paid off, and you're all ready to take the next big step in life beyond secondary school. You are energetic young people ready to fulfill your aspirations and face all kinds of challenges ahead of you. Whatever paths you are going to take, you are the future of our city, our society, and our nation.

Take a look back at decades ago when I was a student not dissimilar to any of you. I missed a number of important moments like the ceremony we're attending today. There were no such ceremonies when I was a primary and secondary school student. I missed my graduation ceremony as an undergrad because of family issues. Again, I was unable to attend two graduation ceremonies in the United States for various reasons. You're the luckiest young people who can witness, experience, and celebrate your growth, maturity, and success at this moment. You've received years of education in this school that has helped to prepare you to become independent, responsible, and worthy members of the community. This education has

not only provided you with helpful knowledge but also instilled in you a set of values. You've learned to rekindle the Confucius torches and uphold fundamental Confucian virtues, "Filial piety, Fraternity, Loyalty, Earnestness, Propriety, Righteousness, Integrity, and Shame." You've gained skills and knowledge that are valuable assets that will serve you well in all areas of your life in the future. I urge you to make full use of the values, knowledge, and skills you have acquired here to make a lasting positive impact on the people around you, the communities you belong to, and the world you live in.

The world is undergoing rapid changes every day. New technologies emerge in an endless stream and are transforming our day-to-day lives in a profound way. Our society has become highly diverse, culturally, socio-economically, and demographically. International relations grow less stable and more complicated. Even worse, we may be witnessing the collapse of a world system that we're familiar with. The past few years saw the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the bitter trade disputes between the two biggest economies in the world, the wars and armed conflicts in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, and the recession of the world economy. We're fortunate. Hong Kong remains a relatively peaceful and prosperous place where every one of us can enjoy his or her lifestyle. However, we're facing and have to respond to tough challenges because we are living in an increasingly globalized world. We simply can't detach ourselves from other parts of the world. But the question is, "How?" I'm a historian by training. I have a firm belief that we can draw inspiration and empowerment from history. History is not just a reflection of the past; it is the framework for understanding our society,

our cultural DNA, and our relationship with the external world. Through the study of history, we have gained insights that transcend time and place, allowing us to arrive at a deeper understanding of the complexities of the modern world. Let's take Confucianism as an example. The Confucius Hall has been, for decades, committed to preserving and popularizing Confucian teachings. So, the next question is: "What do millennia-old Confucian teachings help us make sense of and find our footing in this uncertain environment in the world?"

First of all, Confucianism puts a strong emphasis on filial piety. In today's context, it refers to a commitment to family welfare, where individuals prioritize familial duties and support systems. Second, Confucianism underscores lifelong learning and self-improvement. Students are prepared for academic success and, meanwhile, are instilled in a sense of duty and ethical responsibility towards society. Third, Confucianism is about social harmony and governance. It advocates for a well-ordered society, where leaders are expected to govern with morality and righteousness. Moreover, Confucianism encourages conflict resolution through dialog and mutual understanding rather than confrontation or even violence to maintain social harmony. Finally, Confucianism is relevant to today's international relations, which are characterized by constant conflicts and even wars. As Confucius famously stated over two thousand years ago, "Do not impose on others what you would not wish for yourself," it is necessary to respect each other's sovereignty and cultural differences and refrain from undesired interventions or pressures. Issues and

controversies can be resolved through communications and collaborations. In sum, the emphasis on personal ethics, family values, commitment to education, and the pursuit of social and international harmony in Confucianism can still profoundly shape how individuals, communities, and nations behave and operate in today's world. The millennia-old teachings are highly relevant today. Graduates from the Academy of Innovation have been lucky enough to have received a Confucian-style education for years to mold yourselves into caring, responsible, passionate, and competent citizens. However, the pursuit of values is a long journey in life. I would like to suggest that you continue to uphold such values for decades to come.

As we celebrate your graduation today, I recognize the hard work, dedication, and resiliency that have brought you to this significant milestone. This milestone is just a process not the destination. In English, a graduation ceremony is also called a commencement ceremony. Commencement literally means the start of something new. Hence, I wish you all success as you start a new journey in your life. I look forward to seeing the incredible impact you'll make in the coming future. For the principal, the teachers, and the parents, I thank you for your boundless love and untiring efforts in supporting and guiding these young gentlemen and ladies as citizens and potential leaders of Hong Kong in the future. This is a day of harvest for you all. My best wishes for the school's lasting success in the coming years.

Thank you.
By He Qiliang

List of Awardees