

# My last congregation at HKUST

## Out of the Box

Tony Chan Fan-cheong is president of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. He has spent his life pursuing his dreams relating to teaching and research, and has unique views on education, scientific and technological development, and nurturing the young.



**LAST WEEK, THE** Hong Kong University of Science and Technology held its 25th congregation, presided by our chancellor, Chief Executive Carrie Lam Yuet-ngor.

We conferred honorary doctorates on four outstanding individuals: Emmanuelle Charpentier, renowned microbiologist known for inventing the gene editing technique CRISPR; Ian Fok, CEO of the Fok Ying Tung Group, Dipak Jain, former dean at Kellogg Business School of Northwestern University; and Yan Lianke, prize-winning writer.

They're all great role models for our graduates.

Charpentier gave an inspiring commencement speech on her life journey and how an open mind makes a better person. Many of her points are spot on in the world today, where protectionist thinking poses a big threat to globalization and social mobility.

"I was always confronted with unexpected and new challenges that come with moving to a new

country and working in new environments," said Charpentier, whose career features stops in France, the United States, Austria, Sweden, and now Berlin.

"But with each of these challenges, you will be pushing your own limits, you will expand your mind-set and, eventually, you will learn something new about yourself. Crossing borders forces you to self-reflect and teaches you to be open-minded and persistent. In these uncertain, post-truth times, where the core values of science are threatened, I think it is crucial that all countries keep an open door to international scientists."

Jain's career stops also span multiple countries.

He told me he nearly died, twice!

During his deanship at INSEAD in Paris, he was diagnosed with a brain tumor, which forced him to step down. He made a miraculous recovery, and is now president-designate of the China Europe International Business School in Shanghai. In 2004, he was on Phuket beach when the tsunami hit but miraculously the water stopped within feet of wiping him and his family out. He lives every day like it is his last.

Tony Chan gives his last congregation speech at HKUST.



It was my last congregation speech at HKUST. I still remember vividly my inaugural speech in 2009, when I pledged that "we must be known as one of the best science and technology universities globally in both education and research"; "we will grow our own talent and train students to be future leaders"; and "we must be recognized as a global innovator in research."

In a lecture in 2011, our 20th anniversary year, when people were lining up to buy the iPad2, I predicted that by our 40th anniversary, the world will be lining up to buy a product invented by one of our alumni or faculty member. Many thought we set the bar too high.

Yet that's exactly what we have achieved. Today, HKUST is ranked 30th globally and third in Asia in the latest *QS World University Rankings*.

Our alumni are leaders in all walks of life, including the founder of the largest drone company in the world. Our alumni rank 12th in a Global Employability Survey as published by *Times Higher Education*.

People are indeed lining up to buy DJI drones. But we must not be satisfied or complacent. Today,

innovation and technology are what fuel the world economy and no society can afford to be left behind. Government initiatives, such as the Greater Bay Area, the river loop, and Belt and Road, are going to bring unforeseen opportunities for us.

"Graduates, there has never been a better time for you to chart your own course and deliver on HKUST's mission. Let's continue innovating today and imagining tomorrow," I said in my speech.

We are living in an age of political polarization, where extreme ideologies have impeded society's development.

"In times like this, you will need not only skills and knowledge, but also a critical mind that thinks independently rather than follow others blindly," I said. "Do not get caught in short-term thinking about quick paths to career and financial stability. Be a leader, not just a follower; take some risks, set long-term goals, constantly broaden your horizon, and aim to leave your own mark in this world."

I will leave HKUST with a feeling of pride that it is in a much better position than when I came. I am optimistic for its future.

If all our stakeholders put our minds together, focus on our mission, respect our individual roles and responsibilities, then we can together achieve goals in the future that today we may consider too high to reach. With our core values of 1-HKUST and can-do spirit, we can make miracles happen.