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 Yueh-ngor.

We conferred honorary doctorates on four outstanding individuals: Emmanuel 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 protectionism thinking poses a big threat to globalization and social mobility.

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 iPad, 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.

We are 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 the 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 togethers, 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.