

**Congratulatory Address**  
**(By Professor HUANG Chu-Ren, Chair Professor of CBS, FH)**

You are a very special group of students who entered college awed by the power of nature, from the shocking news of the 2004 Asian Tsunami. Yet you graduate with the pride and glory of being part of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Now you will be known as the first cohort to graduate with degrees from the Faculty of Humanities of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

Since you will be entering the society with a degree in the humanities, sooner or later, you will be asked the hard question, what does a humanities graduate bring to be competitive in this world of knowledge economy? This question may come up sooner than later given the down turn of the global financial market.

Allow me to try to find the answer to this question as a typical scholar in humanities first, by looking up the literatures. We could be reasonably romantic and invoke the commonly accepted saying that beauty is the goal of the humanities. And we can even promise happiness (Beauty is only the promise of happiness, Stendhal 1822). Unfortunately, promising happiness is not the same as delivering happiness. And I am sure you have made enough efforts pursuing other promises of happiness, such as falling in love or trading in stock markets.

Perhaps there is something special in the Beauty that we seek or how we seek. A hint may come from the first complete dictionary of all Chinese characters by Xyu Shen in 121 AD. This is beauty

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No, this is NOT because archaic Chinese was supposed to have many long vowels (MEEI).

Xyu Shen said that Beauty (美 mei3) is composed of SHEEP and BIG. And he was not joking.

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The character is composed of a part that represents sheep and another one that represents big, in a way that is traditionally called meaning association (會意). This original meaning is what you refer to when you have your delicious dim-sum (美味點心). But why big-sheep? In ancient Chinese society, sheep were domesticated and raised specifically for their meat (羊在六畜主給膳也), while bulls were raised for farming and horses for transportation. Hence, the association between sheep and how they taste was very salient at that time. Since Beauty is an abstract experience which cannot be described by a specific concrete object, the more concrete perception of the taste was borrowed. The meaning transfer from taste to vision and/or cognition is what we called conventional metaphor. “美” (mei3) is understood

as what is pleasing to the eye and mind because “美” (mei3) is known as what is pleasing to the taste. A simple word such as “美” turns out to be a very compact package of knowledge containing both literal and metaphoric meanings, as well as the conventionalized cultural context that travelled over three thousand years with the Chinese writing.

This leads back to the question you must be asking by now: what does the composition of Chinese character have to do with our purpose and role in society?

Beauty and “美” (mei3) is just one example to show that knowledge is preserved and communicated with language as vehicle and with cultural context. Another example linked to “美” (mei3) is “美耐皿” (mei3nai4min3), which literally means a container that is both beautiful and durable. The name, of course, is the transliteration of *melamine*, the chemical compound with which such utensils are made. Melamine was made world-famous recently because of the contaminated baby formula, and now widely known by its Chinese chemical name of “三聚氰胺” (san1ju4qing1an1). When the contamination crisis first broke out, “三聚氰胺” (san1ju4qing1an1) was such an obscure term that very little information can be found about it. Whoever can link questions about “三聚氰胺” (san1ju4qing1an1) to existing information on “美耐皿” and/or melamine (or even Japanese メラミン) will bring enriching knowledge to this emerging issues. In total, there are at least over 9 million pieces of highly relevant information on the web that one cannot find by searching for “三聚氰胺” (san1ju4qing1an1).

The melamine example underlines one of the challenges in our knowledge economy. Most of the time, there is no poverty of information. The knowledge gap exists because we do not have the right tool, often the right language or terms, to access the desired information. To apply what is taught at this university to benefit mankind, you will be the knowledge specialists who will be the vehicle to facilitate knowledge transfer. You will be the first reporter to look up and write up about melamine or “美耐皿” when the news on “三聚氰胺” (san1ju4qing1an1) broke. You will be the consumer advocate who is able to link the crisis to the inappropriate use of melamine utensils. And you will be the gourmand who is able to write about lamb dishes and how deeply entrenched they are in Chinese culture.

Yes, you are prepared to step up to the challenges and bring what you have learned. You will provide the vehicle and context of use of knowledge. You will continue to learn but you are now ready

To apply what you learn for the benefit of Mankind!

To Learn and to Apply,  
For the Benefit of Mankind