

23rd Congregation (FH) – Valedictory Speech by DENG Chen (MACC)

Good morning, distinguished guests, faculty dean, teachers, fellow graduates, ladies and gentlemen:

I am so delighted to be here today to give this speech as the representative of graduates receiving postgraduate degrees and awards of 2017.

Having enjoyed the soft breeze of September, crossed the dark clouds of December, and experienced the moist air of March, finally, we have earned our place on this commencement day at PolyU. My fellow graduates, please allow me to express my warmest congratulations. Highly educated, well-informed, confidence budding, and ready for the future. We made it.

I was born in Suizhou (隨州), a city with several thousand years' history, known as Shennong's native land and the site of Zeng Houyi's famous bells (炎帝神農故里 · 編鐘古樂之鄉). Every year on the April 26th of the lunar calendar, a grand ceremony is held to celebrate the birthday of Yandi (炎帝). Thousands of people including overseas Chinese gather together to worship ancestors and celebrate festivals. At that time, all those traditional customs felt so natural to me that I never thought about why we needed them.

In that edifying cultural atmosphere, I nurtured a special sense of culture and history. And that was why I decided to seek more possibilities at the Department of Chinese Culture.

I still remember the first day I arrived in Hong Kong; everything was brand new for me. On my way home, a red temple by the roadside caught my attention. Strange but natural, it stood amidst the downtown area; of course, now I know that kind of scene is normal in this city. But I had never met with such a site before. Then it suddenly occurred to me that I didn't really understand the word "culture" until I encountered differences.

As we all know, the Faculty of Humanities is striving to become application-oriented. Thus, I was provided to extensive exposure to different culture on and off the campus. During the fieldtrip class, we visited sites of folk religion, sacred place of revolution, and walked along the old Hong Kong streets. We observed, explored, and drew new conclusions. More importantly, we had the confidence to back up our new conclusions with facts. Our studies trained us well for critical thinking. Instead of accepting anything at face value, we started to figure out why it happened and what was behind it.

When I recall all the memories of culture in my lifetime, I realize that there is always an origin, but the origins of cultural practices seldom get the attention they deserve. Concerning about the origins will prevent us from taking everything for granted, therefore achieving our higher goal—making contribution to cultural protection and inheritance. At the same time, by poking holes in old theories and digging for origins, we get to know where we've been and where we are heading. This way of thinking can apply to any other field, and we can benefit from it throughout our whole lives.

I should say that the past two years studying at this school have brought me closer to the truth of history. Never before have I felt so strong a desire to express myself and all the profound mysteries I've discovered. The process was trying challenge, but so fascinating that I went deeper and deeper, finding no ends to truth-seeking nor self-discovery.

I am sure for graduates from other programmes and departments, you will agree with me that studying at PolyU also contributes a remarkable experience in your lifetime. So I have to thank PolyU and the Faculty of Humanities for helping me meet so many friends and respected teachers. And here I'd like to express my special gratitude to my MA dissertation supervisor, Dr. Wicky Tse. You turn on my passion for history. And I thank the Department of Chinese Culture for opening my eyes to a new world in a way that I had never imagined, and giving me the opportunity to learn about myself--that is the most precious gift of education. And it is one that I hope all my fellow graduates are seizing today, and in the years to come.

Thank you!