



Address by Professor Gu Mingyuan

Professor Hayhoe, colleagues at The Hong Kong Institute of Education, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen,

In the first year of a new century, as I stand here inhaling the warmth of early winter in this southern part of China, I feel both thrilled and honoured to have been conferred the degree of Doctor of Education, *honoris causa*, by The Hong Kong Institute of Education, the cradle of school teachers in Hong Kong. This is an award which I do not deserve, but which I look upon as an honour bestowed by the Hong Kong academia on the mainland's educational circles in general and Beijing Normal University in particular. The University, at which I work, is to witness its 100th anniversary next year, and my receiving the award may be regarded as a tribute to the anniversary. May I on behalf of the mainland's educational circles and Beijing Normal University extend our sincerest gratitude to Hong Kong's academics, educationalists, and the HKIED.

Today is also a happy day in that it sees the HKIED conferring degrees to the first cohort of its graduate students for the first time in its history. This is a highly significant step towards enhancing the educational standard as well as social status of primary teachers in Hong Kong. I would therefore like to offer my warmest congratulations to the Institute and to the prospective teachers who have received their degrees.

Thanks to the support of Professor Hayhoe, Beijing Normal University has enjoyed very good relations with the HKIED since the latter's establishment, as evidenced by frequent visits between teachers of the two institutions as well as a regular programme of student exchanges. Together we have launched quite a number of academic exchange and cooperation projects for the promotion of learning and quality education. I am confident that in future closer ties and more cooperation projects will be established between us.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have now entered the 21st century, a century vibrant with dreams and expectations. But to us it should hold more than a temporal meaning. It should mean above all significant changes in human society, lofty aspirations and challenging opportunities. Admission tickets to the new century are not given for free, and we cannot expect to enjoy what it has in store unless we qualify ourselves for it by working hard and getting ourselves well equipped for innovation.

Twentieth century technology has transformed our world into an information society, or knowledge-based society, where knowledge spreads as quickly as it grows, and proves crucial to economic prosperity. The success story of some countries is clearly showing that an unprecedented knowledge-based economy is quickly replacing the traditional agrarian or industrial economy, and knowledge is becoming a significant driving force for economic development. No longer an intangible asset hidden behind the scenes or an economic accessory of little importance, knowledge has now made its grand entry upon the economic stage, playing a crucial role in the growth of national economies and the enhancement of labour productivity. More importantly, such knowledge is not the traditional kind inherited habitually from the past, but is acquired through innovative learning and is therefore original. It is not dead and divorced from reality, but is living and closely applicable to our everyday life. This goes to show that innovation is characteristic of a knowledge-based society.

And a knowledge-based society must be a society of lifelong learning, since the acquisition of new, living knowledge is not a simple activity that may be meaningfully completed, but requires a lifetime's continuous efforts. It is an activity that is not confined to traditional schools, but goes on in every family, community, workplace and social stratum. In short, the whole society should be devoted to lifelong learning. In a more traditional economy, learning is essentially a hereditary process enabling the learner to cope with familiar, recurring situations;

in an ever-changing information society, on the other hand, innovative learning proves more important than it has ever been in human history since the learner is expected to handle unforeseeable challenges and crises as and when they arise. Thus, innovation is also characteristic of a society of lifelong learning.

Of course innovation is not the only feature of our future society, nor is it the only quality our workforce should possess. However, it is undeniably a quality required for success in the 21st century. As the quality of our workforce depends heavily on education, educationalists today have to rise to the challenge of the times. To compete internationally as the 21st century progresses, we must look for quality in education, and quality education means amongst other things the nurturing of an innovative workforce.

It should be noted that we cannot have an innovative workforce without an innovative education system, which must have the inherent mechanism of reforming and revitalising itself. In this respect teachers have a pivotal role to play. They not only must be knowledgeable and observe the highest professional ethics, but also should be innovative in thought and deed. Teaching as a career is unmistakably getting more and more professional. And we at institutes of education or normal universities are responsible for the nurturing of professional teachers.

A young institute of higher learning for teacher education, the HKIED has since its establishment seven years ago shown great vitality under the vigorous leadership of Professor Hayhoe. Sparing no efforts to upgrade its education quality, the Institute has contributed significantly to Hong Kong's basic education. May I take this opportunity to extend my warmest congratulations to the Institute's teachers and students and to Professor Hayhoe for the success achieved so far. May I also wish the Institute even greater success in its work and development in the new century.

Beijing Normal University and the HKIED are alike in that we are both devoted to teacher education. We carry the same mission, and there is much room for academic cooperation and exchanges. Already we have built a solid foundation for cooperation, and I look forward to even closer ties between us. May the friendship of the two institutions grow in stature and may they remain in close partnership!

Thank you.