

Professor Simon S. M. Ho

Address at the Graduation Ceremony 2016

1 & 2 December 2016, College Hall, HSMC

Ms. Rose Lee, Dr. Moses Cheng, Governors and Council Members, Graduating Students, Parents, Colleagues, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the HSMC family, I would like to express my warmest congratulations to all 2016 graduates at this momentous occasion today. After four years of hard work, you have reached an important milestone in your life and will be conferred a degree today. Today is a time not only to celebrate the achievements of your university study, but also to pay special thanks to those who have supported you all along in your learning journey, in particular your parents, teachers, mentors, friends and fellow classmates. I would also like to thank all parents here for your trust in our College.

In recent years, HSMC has been adopting the unique “Liberal + Professional” education model with the aim to nurture our students acquire the 21st century transferrable competencies in preparation for the future challenges that they will encounter in their life and work. The education model, apart from helping students build a strong foundation in their chosen academic disciplines, also harness your ability to think critically and establish your own value system.

Dear graduating students, life is made up of numerous choices. Today, I would like, in particular, to share with you some of my views on critical thinking and personal values. In future, while you are diligently pursuing your career, I hope you will always reflect on the meaning and values of life, be loyal to your own aspirations, and choose your purposes of life.

I believe any university-educated and responsible citizen should be able to think critically. This broad skill includes free, independent, reflective, integrative, creative and flexible thinking. You would easily understand that free and independent thinking does not mean to act thoughtlessly, for convenience sake, or according to the opinion and expectations of the authority, the mainstream, the crowd or their peers.

However, quite a number of people have misunderstandings about "critical thinking". They think that "being critical" is to criticize or to be argumentative and critical of other people. In addition, some people mistakenly believe that people with critical thinking are more inclined to rebel against the established system. This is a misconception. On the contrary, people with critical thinking tend to be more thoughtful and prudent, less

inclined to criticise or oppose impetuously. They are good listeners and respect others' views.

“Being critical” refers to a person with a prudent attitude, an open mind, rational reasoning and creative thinking. “Being prudent” means being able to analyze both the ‘for’ and ‘against’ viewpoints from all perspectives in an objective manner, and to consider the long-term full picture before making a judgement. “Being open-minded” means not to insist on your own views as always right and true, but to accept that everyone may overlook or misread, and to remain skeptical about important ideas that are not yet proven.

To be “rational”, we try as far as possible to express fair and objective opinions based on analyses of facts and data. Regardless of whether we like or dislike the final result or conclusion, we should respect the truth and not be led by our personal emotions or ideologies. As for “creative”, it means thinking outside-of-the-box, challenging the norm and searching for the non-traditional or less commonly-used solutions.

Before making comments or judgments, we should use the broad range of cross-disciplinary knowledge that we have learnt to evaluate different claims from multiple angles. Being inquisitive, i.e. asking more “why” questions, will make people not just look on the surface. It is because how things look like on the surface often differ from what they truly are. We hope to seek out realities on the deeper side. For critical thinking, we have to be constructive too. We have to learn to be a problem-solver (not just a questioner, messenger or critic) and help to formulate recommendations or create new solutions.

Critical thinking is not just a way of thinking or learning, but also an attitude towards life. As Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living”. People with critical thinking will not easily follow the crowd, but will consciously choose whether or not to do certain things. They will choose a life, a school or a career that can realise their aspirations and values. In this way, they can find their own “why” answers and the values of life, rather than being satisfied with the convenient answers. As a result, they will have a more authentic and fulfilling life.

Of course, different people have different interpretations of the word “success”. Many people aspire to have a career, wealth, status, fame or even power. However, just possessing these things may not necessarily make you feel good, happy or authentic. Success can be non-traditional, non-material or intangible, such as upholding integrity and justice, leading a happy and simple life, being grateful, finding love, building deep relationships with people, realising personal interests and potentials, and contributing to society etc. For some people, these elements are more valuable and sustainable than the abovementioned “success” indicators.

Albert Einstein once said, “Strive not to be of success, but rather to be of value”. When

value really conflicts with success, we should know what to choose, and this is also the most satisfying moment for us. When we feel the meaning of our acts, we will feel our own values and possess true happiness.

Dear graduating students, it is natural to have ups and downs when you enter a new phase of life. Whenever you encounter difficulties, adversities or dilemmas, I hope you can face them with a positive and calm attitude, adhere to the belief of personal values and ignite the best side of your life.

Once again, my heartiest congratulations to the Class of 2016. May I wish you all a fruitful and fulfilling life journey ahead. Thank you.