

**Inauguration Ceremony of the Undergraduate Law Society of the  
Student Union of the Chinese University of Hong Kong  
1 March 2018 (Thu)**

**Speech by The Honourable Mr Justice Tang PJ**

President King Cheung ...

1. Thank you for inviting me to speak. This must be an exciting moment for you. Some of you are in your first year, some in your final year, all of you, as undergraduates, are in the most important years of your lives.

2. I want to use this opportunity to share with you some of my thoughts.

3. People in my generation grew up under the shadow of 1997. After the question over the future of Hong Kong after 1997 was raised in the early 1980s, Hong Kong went through a period of great uncertainty. In the 1980s emigration from Hong Kong began in earnest. But those who chose to remain, and they were by far the biggest majority, were not passive. They were a force in the negotiation. I believe the terms arrived at in the Sino-

British Joint Declaration which was formalised and reinforced by the Basic Law owed much to the action of those people.

4.           Thereafter, by and large, the run up to 1997 was good. The transition was seamless. Many who had emigrated, returned. For many years after the transition, Hong Kong's previous system remained intact.

5.           But, you might say, that's history. How about the next 30 years? Indeed, beyond the promised 50 years. Nobody can tell what the future holds. The good can look after itself but it is wise to prepare for the worst. So I would deal with the worst scenario even though it is unlikely.

6.           What can one do if in the next 30 years there should be serious challenges to the rule of law or to our fundamental freedoms such as the freedom of speech and the freedom of conscience.

7.           First and foremost, you should remain true to yourself. Follow your conscience. Speak up against injustice. Do not bend with the wind.

8. Secondly, whatever you do, you must keep within the confines of the law. The law has a powerful arsenal which in willing hands can inflict serious damage. Judges have to enforce the law. As I said when I was Chairman of the Bar Association in 1988-89, the better the judge the more faithful he would be to the law which he has to administer. So judges cannot help you.

9. Thirdly, do not be apathetic: exercise your civic rights. Do not let the perfect be the enemy of the good. Support your professional bodies and support those whom you believe are truly committed to the rule of law.

10. Fourthly, during your career, the future of Hong Kong after 2047 will be determined. Do not be passive. If you give up hope, there will be no hope. Do not presume that everything will be the same after 2047. The world has changed since the 1980s. In many countries, immigrants are no longer welcome. So, not only is Hong Kong your home, it is likely to be your only home.

11. Lastly, don't underestimate the strength of Hong Kong. Hong Kong is often compared with other mainland cities. Don't believe it when

people say we are falling behind. Economic growth might be higher elsewhere but that is because of their lower base. Extrapolation is unsound. We enjoy enormous advantages over other Chinese cities. We do not have censorship. We are free. Speaking generally, I believe we have in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, a Government which is made up of people who share our hopes and aspirations as well as our fears. We have a sound legal system. We have independent judges and the legal professions are strong and independent. The independence of the judiciary and the rule of law are often mentioned in the same breath. What needs to be more often acknowledged is the importance of a strong and independent legal profession. The rule of law requires independent lawyers as well as independent judges. Indeed, without independent lawyers where would independent judges come from. We also have the common law. Common law are powerful tools for independent judges and lawyers.

12. If we appreciate what we have got and will defend them, Hong Kong is in a strong position to meet future challenges. Study well. Arm yourself with the best of the common law and its tradition and face the future with confidence.