

### Welcome Remarks at the AALAU Presidents' Forum 2024

1 November 2024

Lee Ping Yuen Chamber, Lee Quo Wei Academic Building, Yuen Campus, HSUHK

President Hiram Chodosh, our Governor Dr Patrick Poon, AALAU representatives, distinguished guests, colleagues and students,

Good morning! With great pleasure and excitement, I welcome all of you to The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong. For many of you, this is your first time on our campus. I hope you will enjoy the Forum and our green campus here.

Hang Seng U is a non-profit private liberal-arts-oriented university approaching its 45th anniversary next year, with its roots stretching back to 1980 when Hang Seng School of Commerce was first established as our predecessor. It is our privilege to host this AALAU Presidents' Forum with the theme "Sustainability Leadership: The Role of Liberal Arts Education". Recognizing the pressing global challenges posed by climate change, biodiversity, social inequality, imbalance of stakeholders' rights, financial instability, etc., delegates at the UN Summit of the Future (SOTF) held in September 2024 commonly agreed that progress on achieving the SDGs is far too slow, partly due to the COVID-19 pandemics, the geo-political tensions and the insufficient high-quality finances furnished to the emerging and developing economies.

I firmly believe that liberal arts universities have a unique responsibility and key role in helping our societies move toward sustainable development in the coming years. As a signatory of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)'s Statement by University Leaders in Support of the SOTF, I have good faith that with shared insights and productive exchanges from allied universities, this Forum will identify the institutional frameworks and strategies to equip future leaders with the competencies to effectively manage the intricate and dynamic challenges of environment, social and economic sustainability.

It is indeed a long-awaited opportunity for this get-together and synergies among AALAU member institutions to drive more accelerated sustainable development solutions and actions.

#### **About HSUHK's "Liberal + Professional" Education Model**

At Hang Seng U, echoing the theme of the Forum, we deeply value liberal arts education and via such approach we have put in place a number of initiatives to achieve sustainability that will help transform our future generations.

Our University adopts a unique “Liberal + Professional” education model. By “Liberal”, we are committed to nurturing students’ freedom to think and thrive in the global village of the 21st century. Our aim is to empower students to pursue their aspirations by fostering the 5 core transferrable competencies, i.e. the 5 “Cs”, namely Critical thinking, Creativity, Communication/Collaboration, Caring attitude, and Continuous active learning. “Liberal” also represents a broad and cross-disciplinary approach to connecting knowledge domains, facilitating thinking, and solving problems, especially in our Common Core Curriculum. This enables students to tackle the complex challenges of their future life and work with confidence and fulfilment.

For the “Professional” component, unlike most fresh graduates of liberal arts colleges in the West who continue to pursue postgraduate studies, fresh graduates in Hong Kong mostly seek full-time jobs. “Professional” in this model represents the incorporation of professional subject elements in many of our major programmes, which equip students with transferrable professional competencies, professionalism, and a strong sense of ethics that are required in any future career options. Additionally, professional subjects such as business, finance and technology, are essentially conceptualized as liberal arts disciplines in our University. The Hang Seng U also adopts many student-centered core elements of liberal arts education. For instance, a mission focused on undergraduate education, a balanced curriculum, smaller-class teaching, individualized learning, faculty with passion for teaching, strong student engagement in and outside classrooms, close student-teacher relationships, residential college experience, and a commitment to creating a community of academic discourse.

### **About Hang Seng University’s Sustainability Efforts**

Besides adopting many core liberal arts education elements in our education process, the University has been engaging in many sustainability efforts with impacts.

Regarding environmental sustainability, you may have noticed the extensive eco-friendly bamboo features on our Platinum award-winning campus, earning us the nickname “Bamboo University” (or “Junzi” University). Hang Seng U applies bamboo material intensively in our building interior décor and furniture, which is known for bamboo’s fast growth, renewability, low carbon footprint, and high oxygen output. For example, the panel walls, this conference table, and benches in this Chamber are mainly made of bamboo. We have also planted various bamboo species across campus to promote biodiversity. Additionally, we regularly host the “Bamboo and Sustainability Forum” to unite industry experts, scholars, and youth in promoting green. Indeed, with hollow and thin-walled trunk, Bamboo symbolizes “gentlemanliness” (Junzi) in Chinese cultures, representing integrity and resilience while balancing grace and strength. Yet it is simple and humble. Hang Seng U upholds the Junzi value, hoping bamboo will influence our students both physically and spiritually.

Another sustainability effort is to educate students, colleagues, and the public on living greener, being mindful of the ecosystem, and embracing inner peace. We focus on five green dimensions: 'A' for Air/Water Quality, 'B' for Biodiversity & Ecology Conservation, 'C' for CO2 Reductions, 'D' for DeWasting/Disposing/Recycling, and 'E' for Energy/Resources Conservation. The University has installed more EV chargers and solar panels, and implemented measures for resource efficiency. Committed to reducing our carbon footprint, the Hang Seng U community utilizes kitchen waste, experiments with organic farming, cleans shores, and engages in programs to promote local biodiversity.

We also actively promote social sustainability by advocating equal opportunities for advancement and fostering social inclusion. We view business as a key driver of ESG practices and many sustainability goals. For over a decade, Hang Seng U has emphasized business ethics as the cornerstone for ESG performance among Hong Kong companies, including SMEs. Since 2013, our School of Business has organized the annual Junzi Corporation Awards Scheme to recognize companies that exemplify the five Junzi Virtues: “仁 Ren (Benevolence)”, “義 Yi (Righteousness)”, “禮 Li (Propriety)”, “智 Zhi (Wisdom)”, and “信 Xin (Trustworthiness)”. Based on this Junzi model, the “HSUHK Business Ethics Index” is announced annually to gauge its changes seeking continuous improvement.

Several student development and research centres relating to sustainability and ESG have been set up at HSUHK to drive changes. These include our Institute of Youth Sustainability Leadership (IYSL), Research Centre for ESG (CESG), the Asia-Pacific ASEAN Green Deal Centre (APAGDC), and the Start-ups and SME Resources Centre (SSRC). The IYSL is the first of its kind in the region which mobilises young people to find solutions for some pressing SDGs through education, empowerment and actions. All these centres and institutes aim to share knowledge, expertise and resources of sustainability development with various stakeholders in the wider community.

Lastly, Hang Seng University has incorporated an Integrated Conceptual Model of Responsible Management into our sustainability and ESG teaching and research. Developed by me and first presented at the 2016 UN PRME 10th Anniversary Summit, the Model links the concepts of social contracts, governance, business ethics, stakeholder values, and sustainability effectively. It helps to cultivate sustainability leadership in our students. With this model, we can bridge gaps in ESG business practices and ESG education.

## **Closing**

More on the above will be shared by my colleague, Prof Joshua Mok, in the panel session. Together, we need a holistic and transdisciplinary approach to sustainability, creating a more just, inclusive, harmonized, prosperous and sustainable future. And liberal arts education should play a unique pivotal role in addressing pressing global

challenges and nurturing the next generation of sustainability leadership that places humanity at the centre. And in some ways, this is unique to our Asian culture. Therefore, creating an Asia-focused sustainability impact model is needed to steer more positive changes.

In that spirit, member institutions of AALAU should affirm our collective commitment to fostering a new paradigm of sustainability. I also believe the AALAU network can promote wider partnerships providing critical and timely solutions, and we invite all to join us in this movement. And with these remarks, I would like to conclude my speech and wish you all an enjoyable and fruitful Forum. Thank you.