“I feel as though I have returned home, because Hong Kong and the University of Hong Kong are the birth place of my knowledge.”

Public address by Sun Yat-sen at HKU’s Loke Yew Hall on February 20, 1923

The Historical Giant Returns to HKU

1. Lily Pond
2. Sun Yat-sen Place, the HKU campus today
3. Young Sun Yat-sen (second left) with classmates and revolutionary friends, 1888
4. Young Sun Yat-sen, just before studying at the Hong Kong College of Medicine
Eighty years ago, on a sunny morning in the Spring of 1923, Dr Sun Yat-sen visited the University of Hong Kong (HKU) and had a close encounter with students of HKU. It was on this historic occasion that he remarked, “Hong Kong and the University of Hong Kong are the birth place of my knowledge.” This statement underlines the events and endeavours that Sun Yat-sen, Hong Kong and the University have gone through in the past eighty years.

Sun Yat-sen received a modern education in Hong Kong. He was among the first graduates of the Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese, which was the predecessor of the HKU Faculty of Medicine. HKU was founded in 1911, bringing higher education in Hong Kong into a new era. In the same year, the great Chinese Revolution broke out. The feudal imperial monarchy in China, with a history of two thousand years, was overthrown. Sun Yat-sen led China into a new epoch.

The historical giant, trailing his slender shadow, strode past the age of heroic events, and also brushed past every brick and stone of the Main Building. The Main Building symbolises the cultural interflow between China and the West, witnesses the progress of history, and preserves that 1923 visit as part of the University’s perpetual memory, guarding the University’s mission: “The University of Hong Kong for China.”

The tradition has to be sustained and the story should continue. We have always wished to erect a statue of Sun Yat-sen on campus, so that this great man could stay at HKU and students could follow this historic footprint.

The founding of the Sun Yat-sen memorial statue has now completed. The statue will sit beside the Lily Pond, surrounded by green lawns fragrant with lily blossoms, situated at the heart of the campus. The statue will add new meaning to the campus. The statue shows Sun Yat-sen as he looked when he visited HKU in 1923, at the age of 56. He made a public lecture in the Great Hall (now Loke Yew Hall) at the invitation of the HKU Students’ Union. Dressed in Chinese long gown and mandarin jacket, he looked vigorous and personable, with the air of a senior scholar. Therefore, Sun Yat-sen will be seen as an elderly gentleman strolling on the University campus, carrying a walking stick, as if telling those around him, “This is my campus.”

Professor David Lung
Convenor
Working Group on Sun Yat-sen Statue
Dr Sun Yat-sen was born in Cuiheng Village, Xiangshan County (now Zhongshan), Guangdong Province, China in 1866. He came to Hong Kong at the age of 17 and was admitted into the Diocesan Home and Orphanage (now Diocesan Boys’ School) and later the Central School (now Queen's College) for his secondary education. Between 1887 and 1892, Sun attended the College of Medicine for Chinese (predecessor of HKU Faculty of Medicine) where he received professional training in Western medicine. In his speech when visiting the University of Hong Kong in 1923, Sun admitted that his revolutionary ideas originated in Hong Kong. Despite repeated failures, in 1911, the revolutionary activities led by Sun finally overthrew the Qing dynasty, established the Republic of China, and opened a new chapter in the development of modern China.

Professor Wang Gungwu
(Former Vice-Chancellor, The University of Hong Kong
Director, East Asian Institute, The National University of Singapore)

The people of Hong Kong think of Sun Yat-sen as great even though he failed more than he succeeded. They will not go back to the time when only the winner is acknowledged to be king and the losers are declared as bandits. Their historical mindset has changed. Thus they will respect leaders not by success alone, but by their ideas, vision and personal qualities.

Professor Wang Gungwu
(Former Vice-Chancellor, The University of Hong Kong
Director, East Asian Institute, The National University of Singapore)
In welcoming the visitor, Mr Edward Ho Tung (Students’ Union President) said Dr Sun’s name was almost synonymous with that of the China, and his experiences, if written in book form, would make one of the most fascinating romances ever written. (Applause.) If a love of liberty was a test of greatness, if a love of one’s country was a test of greatness, then Dr Sun would be associated with the name of greatness itself. (Loud applause.)

Dr Sun Yat-sen’s Address

Dr Sun Yat-sen, who received another ovation on raising to speak, began by saying that he felt as though he had returned home, because Hong Kong and its University were his intellectual birthplaces.

He had not prepared a speech but thought he would like to answer certain questions which had been put to him many times and which, no doubt, many would also like to put to him. He had never before been able to answer it properly, but he felt to-day that he was in a position to answer the question. The question was “Where and how did I get my revolutionary and modern ideas?” The answer was, “I got my idea in this very place: in the Colony of Hong Kong.” (Laughing.) And many young men followed him immediately they began work outside the colony, there was trouble and at last he had to give up his idea of getting Hong Kong on a small scale. (Laughter.) Later, he approached the magistrate of the district, who was sympathetic and promised to help him. He applied himself to sweep the street and make a road to connect with the villages. The elders approved but said, “We have not got the money.” He replied, “Labour can we start the work.” During his stay at home he helped to sweep the street and clean the road. (Applause.)

Dr Sun was a great Chinese, a true gentleman and a large-hearted patriot. (Applause.) He was told that the good governments in England and in Europe were not at first natural to those places, but that men had men a long time ago there was just the same corruption, just the same forgeries in the Courts, and the same cruelty. But, he was told, Englishmen loved liberty and that Englishmen had said, “We shall no longer stand these things, we shall change them.” Then the idea came into his head. “Why can we not change it in China?” (Applause.) He must imitate the same thing; we must change the government first, before we can start anything. Without good government a people could do nothing and in China “we had no government” and were miserable for many centuries. (“Immediately after I graduated I saw” added Dr Sun “that it was necessary to give up my profession of healing men and take up my part to cure the country.” (Loud applause.)

The first matter for my care was to see my own policeman and my own protector. (Applause.)

“When I arrived home I had to be my own policeman and my own protector. “Why can’t we change it in China?” – (Applause.) The idea came into his head. “Why can’t we change it in China?” – (Applause.) The idea came into his head. “Why can’t we change it in China?” – (Applause.)

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