

## **Acceptance Speech – Dr. Elaine Suk-Ching LIU**

Education has always been an important topic in my family. When I was young, my mom told us how her family employed a teacher to come to her home and teach her elder brother; but girls were totally excluded. My father had his own unique story. His village decided to open a school in the ancestor hall and my father was one of the first pupils. School opening day came and a big group photo was taken. Sadly, right after that, Japanese soldiers took over the village and classes were not offered until many years later. My father therefore missed the opportunity of an education. It was his biggest regret in life, he said many times. Anyhow, he persisted in learning how to read and write by his own effort and I witnessed the whole process of how he did it, which left a very deep impression on me.

My parents managed to bring up six children during the post-war time. Life was not easy. Nevertheless, both my parents gave us much encouragement and the desire to study. When I look back now, their guidance and support were really exceptional, as this was still an era when girls were discriminated against with respect to educational opportunities. All of us children eventually made something out of ourselves and our parents were often complimented by relatives saying: "...you are so lucky that all your children are clever and hardworking!" Hearing this, I always assumed our parents were the lucky ones to have us. Then, when my father aged and became less healthy, I started to rethink my relationship with him and realized how wrong I was. As children, we were so lucky to have parents determined to provide us with a good education. I recognized then the utmost importance of a nurturing environment to overcome personal constraints.

Parents, teachers, mentors as well as other adults are important nurturers to young people. However, they can also be controlling, limiting, and constraining. I therefore created a project for all CityU students, through which they can overcome personal constraints by engaging with and helping the community. The project is called the City-youth Empowerment Project, and combines both service-learning and youth empowerment, aimed at creating meaningful group and community activities for young people. From its inception in 2005 with only 160 volunteers, the project has grown to engage over 1,600 student volunteers, rendering each year 22,000 hours of volunteer work to the community. Student volunteers take on increasingly more responsibilities as their participation continues, thus building confidence and developing new problem-based skills related to their studies.

The City-youth Empowerment Project would have never succeeded without the wonderful efforts of the many student participants. Let me therefore take this opportunity to thank my students for their passion and devotion. I also want to thank City University for allowing me to do what I believe in. My colleagues who have worked with me on this project are my comrades. Without their shared commitment to youth empowerment, the project would not have been able to grow to its current size. My gratitude also belongs to the Department of Applied Social Sciences and all my colleagues there. They have been very generous and supportive—especially our Department Head Professor Wing Lo. My thanks go as well to the University Grants Committee, and the Selection Panel for choosing me. Finally, I want to recognize the love I received from my parents, my siblings, my husband and my son—it has been the fuel to keep me going all these years.