

HKU PCLL Opening Ceremony – 1 September 2025

Philip K. H. Wong Theatre, Faculty of Law, HKU

Speech by Mr. Roden Tong President of the Law Society of Hong Kong

Dear Professor Fu, Ms. Jen, distinguished guests, Faculty members, students, ladies and gentlemen,

1. It is a great honour to join you today as we welcome the incoming class of 2025 to the Postgraduate Certificate in Laws programme. Congratulations on your admission to this esteemed programme. You are now part of a tradition of excellence that has shaped generations of legal professionals in Hong Kong.

To be Proud of Our Profession as Young Lawyers

2. Indeed, I just landed yesterday morning from a duty visit to New Delhi, India, where I had the honour to speak at two major international legal events, the 2nd New Delhi International Rule of Law Convention, and the 35th Summit of Presidents of Law Associations of Asia (POLA), which brought together presidents from law associations from across the Asia-Pacific region to exchange insights on regional legal developments.
3. During this visit, in addition to sharing legal challenges and exploring opportunities for collaboration among fellow leaders of the law associations, I have had immense and deeper feelings that young lawyers are very vital to the legal profession. Under “One Country, Two Systems”, Hong Kong is the only common law jurisdiction within China and the only truly bilingual (Chinese and English) common law jurisdiction in the world. Hong Kong enjoys distinctive legal advantages that underpin our pivotal role as a legal centre.
4. In my outreach to the community and the young generations in the city, I have also often been asked by many students: Is “law” still a career worth

considering? My firm answer is a clear “Yes”. While the selection of academic programmes in colleges or for postgraduate studies hinges on one’s personal choice, I am still very pleased to have met many elite law students.

5. “Law”, in my personal and proud opinion, is a truly honourable career to pursue. So, when you become a member of our profession in the future, which will be a reality soon after a year of hard work and dedication, you should be proud of yourself as well as our legal profession.

Rising Challenges of AI and Social Media

6. Allow me to continue on this with a serious reflection: Hong Kong’s legal profession continues to be recognised as one of the most esteemed across global jurisdictions. In a jurisdiction as dynamic and fast-moving as Hong Kong, where the pace and expectations of legal practice are among the most demanding globally, our profession is consistently expected to perform with precision, resilience, and professionalism. It is not an easy task to be a young lawyer in this era.
7. As highlighted in the Global Financial Centres Index (GFCI) 37 Report, Hong Kong ranks first in the Asia-Pacific region and third globally, behind only New York and London. More recently, our Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan, remarked at the Wealth Management Expo 2025 that Hong Kong is expected to surpass Switzerland in the next two to three years to become the world’s number one cross-border asset management centre. These achievements reflect not only the strength of our financial system but also the indispensable contributions of our legal community. To sustain Hong Kong’s strength as the international financial centre, young lawyers have to stay positive and inject your passion, energy and synergy into the profession.
8. In this era of rapid changes, it is imperative to acknowledge and address the complex concerns that artificial intelligence and social media raise across multiple aspects, particularly in relation to integrity, ethics,

individual rights, and the independence and impartiality of the judiciary. The use of such technologies must be carefully managed to ensure that the rule of law remains the guiding framework in the digital era. As legal professionals, it is our responsibility to ensure that these enduring principles guide innovation.

9. To address these challenges, the Law Society began its journey toward integrating AI into the legal profession sixteen years ago. In 2009, we introduced principles of professional conduct in the '*Hong Kong Solicitors' Guide to Professional Conduct*' to regulate the conduct of solicitors in the use of technology, ensuring compliance with legal and ethical requirements.
10. A question that often crosses my mind is: when the day comes – and I believe it is not far off – that the use of AI becomes a norm in our legal practice – *if a lawyer decides not to adopt technological, advancement or AI in servicing his/her clients, or incapable of doing so, will it be considered a breach of his/ her professional duty to the clients?*
11. A relevant Principle (Principle 6.01) of our Conduct Guide may shed some light on the competency of using AI by lawyers, which suggests that, *“A solicitor owes his client a duty to be competent to perform any legal services undertaken on the client’s behalf ... [and] must serve his client in a conscientious, diligent, prompt and efficient manner.”*.
12. Separately, just last year, the Law Society has published a Position Paper on '*The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on the Legal Profession*', which aimed to impress upon our profession and other stakeholders including, among others, the Government, the Judiciary and legal professionals and academics the urgent need of timely and proactive actions and reforms, so that we can guide the direction of the application of AI for the benefit of our profession as a whole.
13. Now we turn to the challenge posed by social media – we all know that it is now so handy and instant that one can access information on social media; and what’s more concerning is that, very often, content posted on social media may not necessarily reflect a thorough examination of the whole

truth. Fragmented, biased, or even untrue narratives on social media often lead to confusion.

14. Yet, in the digital age, there is a big question mark here: *how to ensure that online information is accurate, impartial and complete with examination of the cases as thorough as the courts do?*

Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights recognises that freedom of expression is not without limits. These rights come with special duties and responsibilities. They may be subject to restrictions — but only when prescribed by law and necessary to protect the rights or reputations of others, or to safeguard national security, public order, public health, or morals.

15. In the digital age, the right to access information is not only about speed or format. More importantly, it is about ensuring fairness, impartiality, and justice to all – principles that lie at the heart of a trustworthy and equitable information ecosystem. The legal framework reflects a core principle of constitutional jurisprudence: that fundamental freedoms must be exercised in balance with the rights of others and the collective interests of society. Freedom of expression, while indispensable, must be exercised with responsibility and in accordance with the rule of law.

Exchange Opportunities for Young Legal Minds across the World

16. The future of Hong Kong lies in the hands of a generation that is both rooted in its identity and open to the world. Nurturing young legal professionals is, by all means, one of the Law Society's key priorities. We provide mentorship, continuing education, and resources tailored to young lawyers; we also collaborate with universities, including The University of Hong Kong, schools and community organisations through various initiatives, from "Law Week", "Teen Talk" to professional courses, to promote ethical awareness and professional integrity among younger generations and members of the profession.
17. Every year, the Law Society sponsors young lawyers to attend major

international conferences in cities such as Tokyo, Madrid, Mexico City, Paris, and many others. These experiences broaden horizons, foster global networks, and prepare our members to thrive in an interconnected world. We have also launched the “Young Lawyers Exchange Programme”, an initiative crafted to nurture young lawyers into embracing global engagement, cultivating their interconnected affiliations, and broadening their international horizons through participation in international events.

18. Indeed, my recent duty visit to New Delhi offered a vivid reminder of how deeply interconnected the legal profession has become. From engaging with leaders at international conventions to exchanging views with the incoming Chief Justice of India, I was struck by the shared commitment to nurturing young legal minds. These dialogues reaffirmed the importance of global exposure and cross-border collaboration - values that are increasingly essential for the next generation of lawyers, including all of you.
19. You may have come across a recent report from a Swiss organisation claiming that Hong Kong has the highest legal service costs in the world. Whether or not that's entirely accurate, it certainly speaks volumes about the exceptional quality and global demand for our legal expertise. Clients are willing to invest in excellence and soon, you'll be part of the reason why. So yes, the stakes are high, but so are the standards. And that's something to be proud of.
20. As young lawyers, you are strongly encouraged to think big, think further, and to have a grand and yet achievable vision – to lead the Hong Kong legal profession in the world.
21. If you share this vision and find our initiatives compelling which I certainly would, were I still as young and ambitious as all of you then I warmly encourage you to join the Law Society as student members. Membership is free and open to all law students, offering access to weekly circulars, legal updates, networking events, and recreational programmes that will enrich your journey.

Student Membership: Your First Step

22. Through this membership, you will be introduced to a vibrant professional network from trainee solicitors to seasoned practitioners, and perhaps even your future employers. These interactions will provide you with practical insights into the legal landscape, helping you stay informed and prepared for the evolving demands of our profession. More importantly, you will begin to see yourself not merely as a student, but as a valued member of a community committed to justice, service, and excellence.
23. On a lighter note and this may be news to some of you, the Law Society will be relocating to our new office premises next year at The Centre on Queen's Road, Central. While I assure you this move is not for my personal comfort, it represents a strategic investment in our future. The new space will better support the expanding scope of our work and the growing needs of our 13,000+ solicitor members, including many of you in the years ahead. It will also allow us to create a more dynamic, accessible, and future-ready environment for collaboration and professional development.

A Final Encouraging Word

24. Dear students, the journey ahead will be rigorous, but it will also be deeply rewarding. You will learn to think critically, advocate with integrity, and uphold the values that define our profession. You will be challenged not only to grow as lawyers, but also as leaders who shape the future of justice.
25. So, stay curious, stay courageous, and never lose sight of the broader purpose behind the law. Look beyond casebooks and statutes, and seek to understand the human stories they represent. The law is not just a career it is a calling.
26. Thank you for allowing me to share this moment with you. I wish you every success in your studies and career, and I look forward to welcoming you as fellow practitioners at future Law Society events.