



Address at the Opening Ceremony of 2017 WHC

August 6, 2017, Liège

CHAO Gejin

Excellencies Mr. Getachew Engida, the Deputy Director-General of UNESCO and Mr. Paul-Emile Mottard, the Député-Président du Collège provincial de Liège,  
Distinguished guests, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to welcome participants from around the world as President of CIPSH. Please allow me to acknowledge the support and hard work of all friends and colleagues who has made this conference possible, special thanks go to my colleagues from UNESCO, Liège, and the CIPSH.

I would like to organize my welcome message around three key words that are relevant to today's conference, and to human sciences at large. The three words are: CIPSH, challenges, and anticipation.

The first keyword: CIPSH

As you know, CIPSH is an acronym of the International Council for Philosophy and Human Sciences.

Precisely 70 years ago, in 1947, Sir Julian Huxley, the first Director-General of UNESCO, decided to investigate how UNESCO could discharge the duties as laid down by its constitution in the domain of humanistic studies. As a result of that review, the International Council for Philosophy and Human Sciences (CIPSH) was founded in 1949, after much deliberation of the preparatory committee, and broad consultation with experts from different countries and various fields of knowledge. UNESCO has not only initiated CIPSH, it has also offered its considerable and continued support, in many ways, and over many years. As a non-governmental organization affiliated to UNESCO, CIPSH has been conceived as the intermediary between UNESCO on the one hand, and learned societies and national academies on the other. CIPSH federates hundreds of celebrated societies and institutions all around the globe, and has contributed substantially in the past decades to expand international cooperation, and to facilitate the exchange of ideas on crucial issues. Although the CIPSH did encounter enormous difficulties in the past, none of its previous presidents ever ceased their endeavors to safeguard its distinguished principles and valuable traditions. Their unrelenting work has extended influence of CIPSH and promoted the advancement of the humanistic studies. Today, we are here to convene the 1st World Humanities Conference. The presence in this room of such a large number of colleagues, from various countries and from different realms of knowledge, is a great salute to CIPSH, to the founding pioneers and past custodians of CIPSH, for their determined and relentless efforts.

The second keyword: Challenges

As scholars in arts, humanities and social sciences, we are all suffering budget cuts, declining enrolments, and increasing job insecurity. We are besieged by questions concerning the relevance of our enterprise, measured either by social impact, economic value or other misplaced metrics of utility. We are witnessing an alarming rising tide of philistinism and scientism, and technocrats are in the ascendancy. More and more societal sectors believe technology is the miracle cure for maladies afflicting modern society. At the same time, however, more and more scientists are concerned about the uncertain and unforeseeable social impact of technological advances. There is consensus that our era endures the surfeit of instrumental rationality and the lack of humanistic spirit.

The third keyword: Anticipation

We humanists do not reject science and technology. Rather, we hope to join hands with them. We are fully aware that humankind needs to understand not only the outer world, but ourselves as well. Science and humanities need to work together and complement each other, rather than replace each other. A robot can play chess, compose poems, and do many other marvelous deeds, but it could never be Homer or Pushkin. We are happy to see the rapid development of science and technology, which brings a brand-new look to the production, distribution and application of knowledge. Big data, mass storage, and convenient search engines all contribute to the emergence of new academic dimensions and breeding grounds. The Internet transmits ideas and codes around the world in an instant, unprecedentedly stimulating and facilitating wide collaboration among many disciplines.

In case after case, we have seen evidence of cross-fertilizing and mutual influence between the natural and social sciences, as well as the humanities. Just as science brings about new research questions for humanists, and changes the setting in which the human sciences operate, so do the arts and humanities illuminate the way ahead for science and technology. Behind every great scientific discovery there is a humanist dimension, and a humanist concern. The recent debate on ethics in science communities around robots is a case in point. We can anticipate that along with the information revolution, the roles and functions of both natural sciences and the human sciences will undoubtedly be enhanced. I strongly believe that the complementary partnership between natural and human sciences will lead to the enhanced wellbeing of humankind. I would like to use a quote from Tim Cook, the CEO of Apple, to conclude my message, "If science is a search in the darkness, then the humanities are a candle that shows us where we've been and the danger that lies ahead."

Thank you all.