Opening Comment at the MOU Signing Ceremony between University of Malaya and National Cheng Kung University

Da Hsuan Feng
Senior Executive Vice President
National Cheng Kung University

My good friend Vice Chancellor Ghauth Jasmon, Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Malaysia, the honorable Representative Yu-Ching Lo, the honorable Deputy Representative Min-Li Lin, National Cheng Kung University Alumni Association in Malaysia Chairman Hongfah Lee, other members of NCKU Alumni Association, distinguished members from University of Malaya and representatives from Malaysia’s news media, Ladies and Gentlemen,
I as Senior Executive Vice President of National Cheng Kung University is here today representing Academician Michael M. C. Lai, President of NCKU, to witness the final signing an Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between our two institutions.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is a historical moment. As we would say in Taiwan, today is a 喜日子 (or Xi Ri Zi,) a joyous day. Of course, such a term is generally reserved for a marriage ceremony. In a broader, much broader sense, this is precisely what we have today, the marriage of two major research universities, the University of Malaya (UM) and National Cheng Kung University (NCKU.) As we are in the fledgling stage of the 21st century, our two institutions are now globally visible educational entities embedded in one of the most exciting regions of the world, the Asia Pacific Region.

Ever since World War II ended, UM and NCKU had assumed the arduous responsibility of being the driving forces for economic and intellectual developments for Malaysia and Taiwan respectively. For several decades, UM as the only higher education institution in Malaysia, and now its flagship university, had produce the intellectual and economic, and of course, not to be forgotten, and political leaders. NCKU, likewise, had for many years, been also one of the, if not the, driving forces in the Republic of China to transform its economy from agriculture to silicon. It too had produced many of the intellectual, economic and political leaders. The contributions of both institutions to Malaysia and the Republic of China in the second half of the 20th century had seared deeply into the minds of Asians as being fundamental.

Yet, both institutions are now faced with new and even more formidable challenges. For one thing, unlike the second half of the 20th century where Asia Pacific economically was still in the “rapidly catching up mode,” Asia Pacific today has assumed the “caught up mode.” The economic expansion of the second half of the 20th century is now an economic explosion. With this explosion, there is a ground swell of metamorphic transformation in the aspiration of our people in Malaysia and the Republic of China in particular, the people in Asia Pacific in general. Indeed, such “new” sentiments bear no resemblance to the generation of 50 years ago. Indeed, our region, ladies and
gentlemen, have taken on a new sense of confidence.

Very interestingly, such a sense of confidence has also been translated into a new demand on quality and pursuit of excellence to improve the quality of life of the people in this region! It is no wonder that with this target in mind, the center of attention is now almost exclusively focused on the quality of our universities. After all, universities are the human organization which could produce workforce to reach this new demand.

In this new paradigm, universities bearing the “elite” crown, such as UM and NCKU, need to especially cognizant that they should continuously reinvent themselves, to seek new intellectual mindsets and venues and place new demands to pursue excellence on themselves. This is indeed a tall order, which is unprecedented for our universities ever since UM and NCKU were created 100 and 80 years respectively. Indeed, basked in this landscape, “business as usual” for our universities is no longer sufficient, or even, acceptable.

As Vice Chancellor Jasmon who was so kind to outline the benefit to MU in entering into this relationship with NCKU. So allow me to take this opportunity to state why it is important for NCKU to do the likewise in reverse.

Malaysia is an important nation in Southeast Asia. Not only is it economically robust and politically stable, it is also one of the few countries in the world where there are three major ethnic groups living in great harmony. I think if one were to just walk down any street in KL, you will easily spot Chinese, Indians and Malays shops sitting side-by-side one another. Such harmony is seldom seen in the world.

Therefore besides the intellectual benefits NCKU could derive from interacting with MU, as was emphasized by VC Jasmon, this relationship with the flagship university of Malaysia could also allow NCKU to glimpse into and also develop, through the bridging effort of our powerful 4000 strong Malaysian alumni association, whose members are all profoundly loyal citizens of this country, deep and meaningful relations with all ethnic groups of Malaysia. It will allow NCKU communities in particular, Taiwan higher education communities to understand Malaysians from Malaysia
point of view.

It is with this as background that we are extremely pleased that under the helms of Vice Chancellor Jasmon and President (Academician) Michael Lai, the leaderships of UM and NCKU realized this paradigm is not simply arduous, but presented to the universities enormous opportunities that is as two flagships universities of Malaysia and Republic of China, by entering into a serious and sustainable collaborations, can not only move the nations they are embedded in economically and intellectually, but could also be what the Chinese refer to as "星星之火可以燎原," the spark to cause intellectual and economic prairie fire not just for Asia Pacific, but perhaps the globe in general.