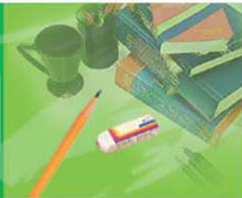


Education



HKUST president Tony Chan, left, conferring honorary doctorates on, from near right, Gerald Chan, Ingrid Daubechies, Robert Langer, Liu Chuanzhi, Luk Kam-biu and Elizabeth Perry.



Science can solve our problems

Out of the Box

Tony Chan Fan-cheong is president of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. He has spent his life pursuing his dreams relating to teaching and research, and has unique views on education, scientific and technological development, and nurturing the young.



I have known him for more than 15 years through UCLA – he is an alumnus and I was a dean.

I'd meet him on my regular visits to Hong Kong, but I'd also see him in the United States. We share some common background: born in Hong Kong in the early 50s, studied and lived in the US for a long time, and interest in science.

Gerald's writings span science, the humanities, public policy and business.

In biotechnology, he has been at the forefront of innovation, developing such novel technologies as oncolytic virus for treating cancer and treatments for dementia.

Working with academic scientists, he has guided the translation of many research projects from the laboratory to the clinic

As Gerald said: "Venture capital is about taking risks for the creation of a better future."

Under his leadership, the Morningside Group, a private equity and investment fund founded by the Chan family, has ventured into many biotechnology projects, especially in China, and was recognized by the journal *Nature* as the top venture investor behind innovative life science companies in the country.

The Chan brothers are also well known in inter-

national math circles; the Hang Lung Math Award, on which board I served for at least a decade, gives recognition to outstanding high-school math students, and the Morningside Medal of Mathematics, sometimes referred to as "Chinese Fields Medals," is given to the best mathematicians of Chinese descent during the triennial International Congress of Mathematicians.

I still remember clearly that at one of the Hang Lung Math Award ceremonies, Gerald gave an eloquent speech on the importance of STEM subjects. It was one of the best speeches I have ever heard, and I made a mental note that one day I'd ask Gerald to speak on a similar topic to HKUST students.

Serendipitously, I had the opportunity to ask Gerald to give our fourth commencement speech during our congregation last month, when he was awarded an honorary doctorate.

Titled "A Culture of Science," he spoke on his experience growing up in Hong Kong at a time when the best students would go into science. His genera-

tion was inspired by CN Yang and TD Lee winning the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1957.

The inspiration to study science was beyond words, but when we fast forward to the present, one sees that science no longer commands the same veneration that once captured society's imagination.

With the exception of China making bold commitments to supporting science, governments everywhere are cutting budgets. It is as if science is a luxury that society can splurge on when times are good and cut back when budgets are tight.

While science cannot solve all the problems facing mankind, we would do well to recognize that some of the most perilous problems we face today

can only be solved by advancing science. If Hong Kong is to have an economy that is in keeping with the times and competitive in today's world, science and technology are the indispensable foundation.

For Gerald, to build such an economy that is vibrant and sustainable, we must begin by building a culture of science.

I share many of Gerald's views. It sometimes takes someone from "outside" Hong Kong to point out what the SAR is doing well, and what we need to do better.

Gerald is an excellent role model for young people in Hong Kong.