

A one-of-a-kind scholarship

Out of the Box

Tony Chan Fan-cheung 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.



of several Stanford spin-off companies, including Google and Cisco.

The KHPS is a new program, funded by a US\$400 million (HK\$3.12 billion) donation from Phil Knight, the founder of Nike and a Stanford MBA alumni. Together with other donations, the KHPS now has US\$750 million in funds, making it the largest fully endowed scholar program in the world.

According to John, it took Knight only one month to decide to make the donation, but under two conditions: that John's name will be part of the name of the scholarship, and that he will be the inaugural director.

Many in Hong Kong may see this as a conflict of interest, but the fact that Stanford's board of trustees accepted this arrangement simply shows that it is very forward looking and innovative, surely part of the reason that Stanford has been so successful today.

The KHPS plans to fund 100 postgraduate scholarships per year, in any field of study, at Stanford, ranging from MD, MBA, to PhD programs.

The goal is to recruit top students globally to form cohorts of talented students who will be global leaders of the future. Each student will be fully funded for three years, and if the degree program requires more time, the home department will pick up the support.

A distinguishing feature of KHPS is cohort activities – that is, activities outside of each student's own area of specialization that brings the whole KHPS cohort together to share.

John mentioned for example bringing in successful Silicon Valley entrepreneurs such as the founders of Google and Facebook to speak with the students.

I wish that, when I applied to Stanford for my PhD studies in computer science more than 40 years ago, that Stanford had such a program.

What I missed then was not the financial support,



Tony Chan meets former Stanford president John Hennessy during his visit to Hong Kong to promote the Knight-Hennessy Postgraduate Scholarships.

which I had, but the cohort activities. Naturally, back then the people I met at Stanford were mostly computer science (or maybe maths or electrical engineering) students, and perhaps other students from Hong Kong. There were few occasions for me to meet other students in other disciplines, and yet I now believe that friends with a different background from your own often brings the most inspiration and influence.

A prospective student has to apply both to the

KHPS and the relevant department, and to get the scholarship, he/she has to be admitted by both the KHPS and the department.

Some in Hong Kong may think that scholarships are only for those with the highest scores, but scores do not count in the application to KHPS.

The KHPS leaves those to the departments to evaluate and it focuses only on leadership qualities, namely, independent thinking, leadership skills, and a civic mind.

These are much harder to evaluate and harder yet to prepare and qualify for.

These qualities have to be intrinsic to the candidate, to have accumulated and practiced throughout one's life, and to reflect true beliefs.

How much of these do we in Hong Kong believe in? Perhaps some in Hong Kong

think these are too "soft" and do not directly lead to a monetarily rewarding career. How much does our education system prepare our students for such qualities?

If universities in Hong Kong used these qualities in our admission, would society not cry foul for being unfair and unclear? These are soul searching questions to ask ourselves.