

# Farewell, for now

## 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.



right next to the home where I grew up and where my father worked as the chief engineer of a quarry. The *Sing Tao Daily* editors were so fascinated by the history of their neighborhood that they asked me on the spot to write a few articles on A Kung Ngam's history.

When I started, I thought I'd write only a few articles but later I broadened the scope to higher education, innovation and technology, and international affairs.

These are topics that I am familiar with and passionate about but still I did not expect that I could continue writing for five full years (260 articles in total)!

My initial fear of running out of topics turned into the challenge of having too many topics to write about.

Two books have already been published and a third is coming. I am as proud of this endeavor as I am of my scholarly research output.

Writing these articles has forced me to be more observant of things that are happening around me, and also to dig deeper, to learn, to think, and then to turn all that into an article that is accessible to a general audience, and that reflects my personal view on the topic. I have tried to include something in each article that is relevant to Hong Kong.

To accomplish that under the time (weekly) and space (word limit) constraint is both challenging and rewarding. It has instilled a discipline in me that I never

thought I had. I'd like to thank my two editors, Regina Kwan and Ivan Tong, for their trust and the freedom that they have given me.

This is the second time I'll be "leaving" Hong Kong – the first was 48 years ago when I left to pursue university studies in the United States.

When I came back in 2009, I thought Hong Kong has changed so much. When friends asked me what was the most difficult thing I had to adapt to, I told them it was the culture – which surprised them because they knew I grew up here. But Hong Kong had changed a lot in those 40 years that I had been away.

But what I had not anticipated were the dramatic changes that have taken place in Hong Kong during these past nine years.

The biggest is politics, in the role that it has played in almost every aspect of our social discourse. I am not against political discourse in society, but I regret seeing the Hong Kong version impeding its development and splitting society.

There are many things that I have enjoyed, and will miss, in Hong Kong: the East and West atmosphere, the hustle and bustle, the variety and quality of restaurants, the great outdoors (especially hiking trails), the transportation system, and the view from my HKUST office. And the many friendship that I have made.

I have some farewell wishes for Hong Kong: get out of the political quagmire and move forward, society be more united, recover Hong Kong's "can-do" mojo, and keep its international nature.

Of course, also success in innovation & technology, and taking advantage of Greater Bay Area and Belt & Road initiatives.

Maybe I'll be back a third time.

**IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE**, but after two years of writing a weekly column here (and five years for *East Week*), I'll be pausing for a while. By the time you read this article, I'll have started my new position as president of the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia, after spending nine years at HKUST.

While I may write something in the future about my experience there (not sure whether anyone would be interested), I expect not to be as attuned to Hong Kong affairs. Thus, this article allows me to reflect on my most recent nine-year sojourn in Hong Kong, and also to thank you, my readers, for your loyalty.

These past few weeks, I have been invited by many friends and colleagues to farewell dinners and events, culminating to a HKUST campus-wide ceremony last week, attended by close to 500 people.

I want to publicly thank all those who have organized those gatherings – there is no better farewell than being feted by true friends.

I started writing my weekly column serendipitously. On my first visit to the former Sing Tao News Corp headquarters in A Kung Ngam in Shau Kei Wan, I discovered to my great surprise that it was situated



HKUST satff and students bid farewell to Tony Chan.