

A person in a dark suit is sitting on a dark wooden floor. Their hands are resting on their lap. In the foreground, there are several gears. One large gold gear has the words "International Policy" written on it. A smaller silver gear next to it has the word "LAW" written on it. The background is a solid yellow color.

# Public Policy Dialogue Series

Hong Kong and the World:  
Still Connected and Valued  
Internationally?

Education and Science: Does  
STEM Education Matter in Hong  
Kong's Move into an Innovation  
and Technology Hub?

# Hong Kong and the World: Still Connected and Valued Internationally?



On February 11, 2023, the Policy Dialogues Series invited an esteemed panel of speakers Professor Anthony B. L. Cheung, GBS, JP, Chair Professor of Public Administration at EdUHK and former Secretary for Transport and Housing in the HKSAR Government; Professor Tai-lok Lui, JP, Chair Professor of Hong Kong Studies at the Department of Asian and Policy Studies and Director of the Academy of Hong Kong Studies at EdUHK; and Mr. Brian Wong, a Rhodes Scholar and DPhil candidate in Politics at Oxford University, who is also the Founding Editor-in-Chief of the Oxford Political Review. The discussion was expertly moderated by Professor Kira Matus from the Division of Public Policy at HKUST to discuss the topic "Hong Kong and the World: Still Connected and Valued Internationally?"

Prof. Cheung initiated this dialogue series by posing two thought-provoking questions: firstly, is Hong

Kong returning to a world that is as friendly and appreciative as it once was? And secondly, do Hong Kong people possess unwavering confidence in the city's future and its impact on the global stage? Prof. Cheung then proceeded to delve into the historical narrative of Hong Kong, highlighting its post-WWII success and its unique role as a result of its historical and geopolitical positioning. He emphasized how Hong Kong served as a buffer zone between the US and China during the decline of the British Empire and the rise of Pan-Americana. Furthermore, he discussed Hong Kong's interconnectedness with both the Western camp and China during China's early reform in the 1980s and 1990s. The remarkable economic success of Hong Kong was evident as being one of the Four Asian Tigers in the 1980s and was hailed by Time Magazine in early 2008 as the "Ny-lon-kong."

However, Prof. Cheung astutely observed that since the late 2010s, there has been rising hostility within Sino-American relations. With the termination of the Hong Kong Policy Act and the passing of the Hong Kong Autonomy Act in July 2020, Prof. Cheung noted that Hong Kong has transformed from a buffer zone to a hotspot in US-China relations. Consequently, Hong Kong has suffered collateral damage in the deteriorating relationship between the two superpowers verging on the New Cold War. Prof. Cheung lamented that Hong Kong, once the epitome of the "Best-of-Both-Worlds," now finds itself in an unflattering situation. While acknowledging Hong Kong's significant challenges in maintaining its status, Prof. Cheung adopted a philosophical perspective, asserting that no great world city is immune to decline. He drew upon historical examples of once-great cities such as Venice, Lisbon, Amsterdam, Liverpool, and Detroit, all of which have experienced varying degrees of decline. In Prof. Cheung's view, there is no reason why Hong Kong should be an exception. He emphasized that Hong Kong's strategic value has always been its role as an interconnection between China and the rest of the world.

Approaching the question of internationalization, Prof. Lui cautioned against complacency, highlighting the distinction between regional headquarters, regional offices, and local offices. He presented data indicating that while the number of local offices has been increasing, regional headquarters and regional offices have reached a plateau and have been declining in recent years. Furthermore, when

comparing the composition of regional headquarters from 30 years ago to present figures, Prof. Lui noted a significant decrease in the dominance of US regional headquarters and those from other Western countries, with mainland Chinese companies taking their place. According to Prof. Lui, the status of Hong Kong in the eyes of the world is shaped by evolving international relations and geopolitics. He emphasized the need to find ways to enhance Hong Kong's relinking with the world, while acknowledging the advantage of its institutional depth.

Mr. Brian Wong asserted that Hong Kong's competitiveness faces its greatest risk in its inability to adapt to a post-Covid and post-Sino-US rivalry geopolitical landscape. He cautioned against the extremes of those wishing to transform Hong Kong into just another mainland Chinese city. Conversely, Mr. Wong advocated for a departure from binary dichotomies when examining the world, urging us to transcend the limitations of a nation-state mentality. Prof. Matus, on the other hand, encouraged us to have faith in the people and culture of Hong Kong. She expressed optimism about Hong Kong's future and urged us to appreciate the vibrant and unique elements that distinguish Hong Kong from any other place in the world.



28 Jan 2008 Time Magazine Cover

## Education and Science: Does STEM Education Matter in Hong Kong's Move into an Innovation and Technology Hub?



On March 18, 2023, the fifth Public Policy Dialogue Series invited Professor Anthony B. L. Cheung, GBS, JP, Chair Professor of Public Administration at EdUHK, former president of EdUHK and Secretary for Transport and Housing; Professor Tai-lok Lui, JP, Chair Professor of Hong Kong Studies at the Department of Asian and Policy Studies and Director of the Academy of Hong Kong Studies at EdUHK; Professor Naubahar Sharif, esteemed authority on Innovation and Technology Policy, Acting Head and Professor of the Division of Public Policy at HKUST. The panel was moderated by Professor Peter T. Y. Cheung, Head and Professor of Practice in the Department of Social Science at EdUHK. The dialogue focused on STEM education and its role in propelling Hong Kong towards becoming an innovation and technology hub.

Prof. A. Cheung opened the Dialogue Series by stating the objectives of science education and the prominence of innovation and technology in national policies, and drew figures from worldwide studies to illustrate the rapidly changing labor market and structure, Prof. A. Cheung deduced that what is important is not the specific skills, techniques or knowledge, but how to nurture the critical mind. He advocated a stronger government role in reshaping the innovation and technology ecosystem, and fostering collaboration among government, industry, and universities stating that innovation should be collective and not just depend on university research alone. Prof. A. Cheung emphasized the significance of the human mind and its capacity for adaptation, reflection, and invigoration, referring to these qualities as the Newton spirit.



Prof. A. Cheung prompted educators to reflect on their approach to education, emphasizing the importance of imparting knowledge and wisdom. He argued against a dichotomy between science and arts, stating that both stem from liberal arts and that education should focus on understanding nature, human society, and humanhood, instead of just skills and knowledge. He acknowledged that perennial problems such as conflicts, violence and prejudice cannot be solved solely through innovation and technology (I&T). Prof. Sharif agrees with Prof. A. Cheung pointed out that STEM education is related to the need to maintain economic competitiveness or the “lever for riches”, but the challenge lies in the tendency for STEM subjects taught in isolation, with insufficient connection to Arts and not being helpful to make the world a better place. Prof. Sharif delineated the history of STEM in other countries and made a comparison, he advocated for a broader societal context for STEM education, referencing the Humboldt Model of Higher Education. Prof. Lui perceived that STEM or STEAM education would be quite demanding on the teaching skills without pre-manufactured teaching materials, and its demand on knowledge integration moving from one domain of knowledge to another, Prof. Lui invited us to rethink the necessity of STEM education suggesting that talents can be hired from elsewhere and warned the inevitable time-lapse in nurturing future STEM talents



to address existing issues, he proposed a business ecosystem that rewarding and incentivizing innovation without seeking short-term returns is key for Hong Kong to become a successful I&T hub.

During the discussion session, Prof. A. Cheung posed three questions: the possibility of innovation without STEM, the necessary ecosystem for non-

STEM individuals, and whether I&T can sometimes limit wisdom. Prof. Sharif's suggested that other channels can contribute to Hong Kong's innovation ecosystem and expressed the same skepticism as Prof. Lui about the necessity to have Hong Kong's own STEM talents. Prof. Lui added that innovation should not be restricted to hardware; focusing too much on STEM can restrict our imagination. Prof. P. Cheung emphasized that the ecosystem is a result of various factors that the government cannot easily manipulate. He stressed the importance of critical thinking and freedom of expression for creativity and exploration of ideas. In response to a question about STEM branding, Prof. Sharif suggested customizing STEM or STEAM education to make it relevant and applicable, building on the characteristics that have made Hong Kong successful as a first-world city.