



The New Silk Road

HKU As A Path To China, A Path To The World

By Professor Lap-Chee Tsui
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At the end of 2004, Vice-Chancellor Lap-Chee Tsui toured the United States and Canada, visiting alumni chapters and giving public lectures on the role of HKU as a vital educational link to China. In speeches in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Toronto and Vancouver, he outlined his vision for the University.

In ancient times, the Silk Road was China's link to the outside world. It was primarily a trade route, but it also enabled cultural exchanges for music, religion, art and, of course, the art of silk making. Today, Hong Kong, and the University of Hong Kong, in particular, stands astride a New Silk Road, linking China to the world and the world to China. At the centre of this new road, in my view, is education, and I want to make use of this metaphor to suggest how one can continue to exchange with China culturally through education.

There has been growing interest all over the world in Asia, and especially China, in the past decade. This is hardly surprising, because in the last quarter of a century, China's reforms and open door policy have led to one of the fastest

periods of economic growth in history. China's GDP has quadrupled in this period, and many now predict that, by making the most of foreign trade, investment and technological advances, China's GDP will again quadruple in the next two decades. By then, China will have overtaken the United States to become the largest economy in the world, thereby regaining a position she has held for much of human history.

Dunhuang 敦煌 is a city on the old Silk Road, and because of its historical importance, it is sometimes

synonymous with the Silk Road itself. It is located where the northern and southern routes of the road met. It was from there that cultures from Europe, the Middle East and India entered China. I would argue that Hong Kong occupies an equally important location on the New Silk Road to China. It has a unique position in Asia as a natural gateway, where East meets West, to new economic opportunities in China and the rest of Asia. After all, one-third of the world's population lives in our region, and half of the world's population lives within a five-hour flight from Hong Kong.



Professor Lap-Chee Tsui addresses the Canadian Club, Toronto

But, Hong Kong is different from Dunhuang. It is more than just a transportation gateway. It is what we could call a "value-added gateway." Hong Kong transforms, translates, adapts, or perhaps even buffers the cultures of the East and the West as they meet. It is the "SmartLink to China," in the words of John Gilbaugh, Senior Vice President of Wells Fargo HSBC Trade Bank and director of the HK Association of Southern California. Favorable policies, an advanced politico-legal institutional

framework, sophisticated management systems, deep business knowledge, respect for intellectual property, and overall transparency in business practices are the hallmark of Hong Kong.

When you think about the traditional mode of transportation on the old Silk Road, the image of a camel springs to mind. It was a slow, ponderous vehicle, and certainly not a suitable means of travel in this day and age. When I talk of traveling on the New Silk Road,

HKU TAKES SPOTLIGHT AS EDUCATOR ON WORLD TRADE

As government officials from 31 countries in the Asia-Pacific region gave their last thanks and chanted their last cheers (something government officials don't do too often) on August 27, the 3-month WTO Regional Trade Policy Course (RTPC) of 2004 came to its climax and fruitful end. It was the first such course in the Asia-Pacific

approached by the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD), in collaboration with UNCTAD, to run a regional dialogue on intellectual property rights, innovation and sustainable development. The regional dialogue took place November 8-10, 2004 at the University. The participants

and regional trade agreements between countries of vastly different bargaining power, and the imposition of TRIPS-plus obligations on the developing countries, have affected innovations, public health, the economy, and public interest R&D in these developing countries.

Even more encouraging is the news that we are close to signing another Memorandum of Understanding with the ICTSD under which HKU and the ICTSD will jointly organise a trade and sustainable development symposium which will run parallel to the 6th WTO Ministerial Conference to be held in Hong Kong in December 2005.

In terms of collaboration with the commercial sector, we are discussing with various other partners the possibility of running trade policy training courses in Southeast Asia, as well as collaboration on a major research project on rating corporate governance and social responsibility of private corporations in Hong Kong and China.



region and our University was designated as the training centre.

But, it turns out, this was only the beginning. WTO headquarters in Geneva has just sent us the delightful news that they would like an *encore* from us – to run the RTPC again in April 2005.

The success of our first RTPC has already generated a number of other high-level initiatives. We were

comprised representatives from the Geneva missions, policy makers, NGOs and top academics across the region. It provided a valuable forum to consider the policy implications of international regimes to protect intellectual property rights. In particular, it gave participants a chance to discuss how the TRIPS agreement, the recent trend toward bilateral

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The Old Silk Road that linked China to the world

though, I have in mind something different from a physical mode of transportation. I believe the indispensable vehicle for the New Silk Road is education. It is a powerful vehicle for bringing the East and West closer together. Education brings together cultures and fosters relationships, builds networks of trade and economy, and perhaps even contributes to world peace by promoting understanding and reducing conflicts.

But education, like a camel, is not necessarily a speedy vehicle, either. We have a Chinese proverb that says, "It takes 10 years to grow a tree, but 100 years to educate a person." Education as a vehicle will be slow but it will surely provide a prosperous future as we journey on the New Silk Road.

China has certainly been putting great emphasis on education, especially higher education. China has a population of 1.3 billion. The one-child policy has heightened parents' demand for a suitable education, including university education, for their children to ensure a better life. But as we are all acutely aware, university education does not come cheap. With over 2,000 higher education institutions in China, resources must be focused.

Therefore, the Chinese government decided to create 100 leading universities fit for the demands of the 21st century. The

idea is to focus resources on a small number of world class, comprehensive and research-led universities. The strategy will cater to the 1.1 million new entrants to higher education institutions each year. This is a huge number.

In addition to developing China's own higher education system within the country, the government

has also made use of the educational Silk Road by reaching out to the world. During the past 25 years, China has changed its totally closed door policy to one that supports overseas studies. Under this open door policy, some 700,000 Chinese students have studied abroad, especially in North America and in Europe. Of these, over 600,000 have returned home. These figures are growing exponentially. Each year, some 120,000 students (spending RMB 4-5 billion yuan) continue to study abroad. This is an enormous talent pool that will contribute to China's future development.

Let me come back to how Hong Kong can contribute. After more than 150 years of colonial rule, with over a hundred years' history of higher education, Hong Kong is ready to take up the challenge of being an educational hub through which Western societies can find a way into China, and vice versa.

The University of Hong Kong is in a unique position to play a major role

HKU'S GLOBAL FACE

935 Teachers
54% Non-local

11,974 Undergrads
5% Non-local

8,877 Postgrads
20% Non-local

45 NATIONALITIES

HKU'S INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH PARTNERS

- WTO
- Pasteur Institut
- World Bank
- ADB
- UNICEF
- UNESCO
- WHO
- UNDP
- NIH
- Chinese Academy of Sciences

“Hong Kong is ready to take the challenge of being an educational hub through which western societies can find a way into China, and vice versa”



HKU TO SET UP STATE KEY LABORATORY

The University's excellence in research on infectious diseases burst onto the front pages of the world's newspapers during the SARS crisis in 2003. More recently, the research capabilities of the Faculty of Medicine in this area were acknowledged when the University announced November 11, 2004 that the Ministry of Science and Technology approved the establishment of a State Key Laboratory of Emerging Infectious Diseases at HKU.

This is the first and only State Key Laboratory among the more than 100 such labs in China that will be located outside the mainland. The laboratories focus on individual research areas, and are a critical part of China's science and technology infrastructure. The labs provide the foundation for top level basic and applied research development.

The HKU State Key Laboratory will target research on emerging viruses, bacteria, fungi and anti-microbial resistance. "Establishing a State Key Laboratory at HKU will not only benefit research development in Hong Kong, it will also give us strategic advantages in playing a leading role in the control of emerging diseases for China and the world," said Professor Lap-Chee Tsui.

as an educational vehicle on the New Silk Road, from its research and teaching activities to its deliberate outreach to international students and faculty. I need only mention the role HKU's Microbiology Department played in unraveling the mysteries of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, or SARS. Colleagues in the Microbiology Department were the first to identify the causative viral agent, which happened to be a new strain of coronavirus. Later, they also identified the animal sink where the virus originated.

These contributions and many others were due to the fine research tradition at the department. You may recall the bird flu incidents in 1997 and 2001. It was the lessons from our experience of the bird flu that saved Hong Kong, and made possible research results that have benefited the world. Our colleagues are now frequently asked to help solve similar problems in nearby countries. For example, they were asked to look at the recent bird flu situation in Thailand.

On the educational programme side, HKU has been designated the regional training centre for the World Trade Organisation. In that capacity, we will play an important role in the successful development of the WTO in Asia. It was indeed memorable to see government representatives from 32 countries gathered at HKU to study WTO law and trade relations at the opening ceremony earlier this year.

Our Journalism and Media Studies Centre has also been exemplary in fostering international exchanges. The JMSC has brought distinguished editors and reporters from America to Hong Kong, Beijing and Shanghai. It has also arranged for mainland journalists to go the other way – starting in Hong Kong and visiting North America.

These activities in the area of research and educational programmes are complemented by our continuing efforts to deepen the international

THE GLOBAL REACH OF JOURNALISM STUDIES AT HKU

HKU's Journalism and Media Studies Centre, founded in 1999, has been international in character since its inception, bringing distinguished journalists and scholars to HKU and participating actively in student and faculty exchanges throughout the world. The JMSC's mission is the pursuit of excellence in journalism and fostering Asian voices in the international media. The Centre's programmes aim to nurture and institutionalise the press freedoms that are the hallmark of Hong Kong.

The JMSC has held joint seminars, workshops and conferences with a wide variety of organisations, including Tsinghua University and US-based organisations such as the Woodrow Wilson Institute, the Open Society Institute, and the Freedom Forum. Research projects and



character of HKU, so that we can perform our role as a vital vehicle on the New Silk Road. We work hard to make sure that at least 20% of our students have a chance to engage in exchange programmes worldwide; this is consistent with our whole person training agenda at the University. We plan to increase our proportion of non-local students from 10% currently to 20% in 5 years. Although only 25% of our non-local students currently come from countries other than

faculty and student exchanges have involved Harvard University, Stanford University, Columbia University, the University of Southern California, the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Missouri, the University of Maryland, Oxford University, Shanghai University, Shantou University, Peking University, the European Union, and many others.

The programme's international summer internships for its post-graduate students span the globe – from Shanghai to Capetown, from New York City to Sydney. JMSC students have interned at television stations in Seattle, international news agencies in Bangkok, and radio stations in Beijing.

“The JMSC is in a unique position at the crossroads of China, Asia and the West,” said Ying Chan, professor and director of the JMSC. “We

leverage our position to bring together the world's best minds in journalism, and in doing so serve as a bridge between local and international media.”

The Centre's faculty include veteran journalists who have worked at the *New York Times*, the *New York Daily News*, the *San Jose Mercury News*, the *National Law Journal* (USA), *Asiaweek*, the *South China Morning Post*, the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, and *Yazhou Zhoukan*.

China, we hope to increase the proportion further in the coming years.

As China and the rest of Asia continue to grow to become the largest economy in the world, HKU as the premier university of the region will take its rightful place among the top echelon of world-class universities. This is the best way we can contribute to the development of China, and make the New Silk Road as significant as the old one. 