

Do we understand Hong Kong?

Cheng Kai-ming

- Chair Professor, Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong

“After SARS: Education and Research Agenda for the Future”
Joint HKU/CUHK/CPU Academic Seminar on July 2, 2003

The unprecedented epidemic has brought about experiences as well as lessons that would never be available otherwise. The most valuable among such experiences and lessons is about *society*. Both strengths and weaknesses of the Hong Kong society are made more visible than ever during SARS. Such strengths and weaknesses should form the basis for the deliberation of our future, and hence the agenda in education and research.

My attention is attracted to one ironical phenomenon. The Hong Kong society is never structurally as organised as Shanghai or Beijing, sometimes even infamous for its looseness, yet its citizens have their own ways of facing the challenge, in a manner that could be envied by many. We are not known for a strong government and are not short of internal territorial fights, yet Hong Kong is appreciated as heroic in the international arena.

The question is then: *How would Hong Kong organise itself?* The question could be turned both descriptive (*How does?*) and prescriptive (*How should?*). It is an exploration, but it is also a way of education. I would take this as the fundamental issue where our research attentions should concur. I am not referring to research projects, but a gross umbrella research agenda to which many projects could contribute.

Such an agenda could entail research efforts in almost all areas of social sciences and other cognate disciplines such as Education, Law, Health and Architecture, but will bring fruit only when the research endeavours cross disciplinary borders. Such an agenda would also entail integration of diverse research conventions, and would anticipate participatory efforts from the community.

The research agenda is essential for Hong Kong's future. The almost unique elegant blend of cultures and the enviable equilibrium between individuals and the community, that Hong Kong has been so proud of, are now being challenged because of the changing environments, economic and political, local and global. Hong Kong has to evolve to a new level and mode of organisation. That is perhaps what “One country, two systems” is about. Hong Kong has to move forward, but the way forward has to be created. In order to do that, Hong Kong has to understand itself, and this is where research and education should come in.