The Pacific Century Beckons: Perspectives from an Explorer-Engineer-Educator

Professor Shih Choon Fong

Friday, 9 October 2015
7:00 pm – 8:00 pm
National University of Singapore
Engineering Auditorium
Blk EA, Faculty of Engineering

Refreshments start at 6:00 pm.
Admission is free.

Synopsis
A road less travelled: My greatest childhood pleasure was exploring the longkangs of Singapore for fish and frogs. I was also captivated by Rediffusion master story-teller Lei Dai Sor’s tales of the Monkey King’s exploits in Journey to the West. They fired up my imagination and ignited my hope that I might one day live such an adventure.

Little did I know that this love of adventure would take me on a journey of discovery and learning, one which is still continuing five decades later. My journey began in North America where I spent 30 years, then back to Singapore, to the Middle East and now in China. I have seen how technology shapes and is shaped by culture and society, how jobs are created, how people live, how cities grow while some decline, and how the life cycle of products and companies is shortening.

Universities are seats of inquiry and learning where critical thinking and creative activity are prized. My initiation into this world came about during my first meeting with my PhD advisor at Harvard. He challenged me: “If you wish to be my student, I expect to learn new things from you too.”

Americans celebrate individual initiative and hard-won success. This distinctive culture, indomitable optimism and confidence underpin the start-up culture, result-oriented meritocracy and the vitality and drive that permeate Silicon Valley.
**Pacific Century:** Fueling the dynamism of the Pacific Century is talent circulation, entrepreneurial capitalism and the enormity of the Pacific market, particularly American and Chinese markets. China’s investment in science and technology – building blocks of an innovation economy – will reach US levels in the coming years. It is the global economy’s mainstay and its modernization is a major engine of growth worldwide.

The next decades will open fresh vistas and opportunities for investment and access to talents, technologies and markets through new models of transnational ventures, such as One Belt One Road initiative, collaborative R&D and technology commercialization. These promise to accelerate economic growth in Asia-Pacific and beyond.

How can we ride this sea change? What traits and experiences will help our younger generation venture beyond safe harbors to ride the changing tide? What mental maps and mindsets can help us transcend boundaries of place, identity and norms as well as bridge diverse cultures and perspectives? Will global minds and Singapore hearts be critical factors for Singapore to flourish in the coming decades?

**Biography**

Professor Shih Choon Fong is currently University Professor at the National University of Singapore, where he was formerly President (2000–2008). He also served as Founding President of King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia (2008–2013). He has advisory roles with Peking University, Legend School, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Universiti Teknologi Petronas, Saudi Aramco, among others. He serves on the judging panel of the Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering and is a foreign member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and US National Academy of Engineering. In 2007, Prof Shih received the inaugural Chief Executive Leadership Award for Asia Pacific from the Council for Advancement and Support for Education.

Drawing from his experiences abroad, Prof Shih promoted NUS as a research-intensive university with an entrepreneurial dimension, modernized the undergraduate curriculum and introduced the modular system, increased overseas students exchange programs, and strengthened international engagements. He was a key driver for the formation of the International Alliance of Research Universities, and led the Association of Pacific Rim Universities for several years.

Prof Shih received his professional diploma in engineering from Singapore Polytechnic and MS and PhD from Harvard University. In the 70’s thru the 90’s, he worked at AS&E (an MIT spin-off) and General Electric R&D before joining Brown University.

Prof Shih divides his time between China, Singapore and US, where he is a Distinguished Visiting Professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara.