

Speech by SCED at 2013 Hong Kong Management Association Quality Award Dinner  
(English only)

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Following is the speech "Be Water" by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Gregory So, at the 2013 Hong Kong Management Association (HKMA) Quality Award Dinner tonight (July 22):

Dr (Dennis) Sun (HKMA Chairman), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening. It is my pleasure to join you here at the HKMA Quality Award Dinner.

Excellence is what sets Hong Kong apart from our competition, and is one of the most important forces to drive organisational success and growth. The Quality Award recognises those organisations that have attained a level of excellence deserving our recognition. Tonight, we gather here to celebrate that excellence and I would like to congratulate the many award winners on the due recognition of your achievements. Your efforts have contributed significantly to the success of Hong Kong's economy.

Usually at this junction of my speech, I would notice that some of the dinner guests may begin to tune out and branch off in their conversations. The Golden Rule seems to go something like this:

- \* Those who reside at the head table will cooperate to endure the speeches; while
- \* those who reside elsewhere will enjoy the evening conversing with their friends.

This is a fair game, because Hong Kong is a free economy. It has been recognised by the US Heritage Foundation as the freest economy in the world for 19 consecutive years. So you are free to talk, when the speeches are not enticing to you.

But this does not need to be the case. In fact, I often thought that dinner functions such as tonight's present the golden opportunities for the Government to engage with people, provided we rise to the challenge of being "not boring".

Speaking of which, I would like to present to you one of the most interesting and favourite sons of Hong Kong: Mr Bruce Lee.

I love Mr Bruce Lee and his philosophy. I love how he sees things:

"Empty your mind, be formless, shapeless, like water. Now, you put water into a cup, it becomes the cup, you put water into a bottle, it becomes the bottle, you put it in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Now, water can flow or it can crash! Be water, my friend."

Don't you love that quote? In contrast, last Wednesday at the Legislative Council I was asked an oral question about Mr Bruce Lee's former residence and this is how I rose to answer that question.

I was not like water. In fact, I was pretty stiff. But frankly inside, I felt like I need to do Mr Bruce Lee more justice by saying it in this manner.

What does it tell me? There are obviously conventions and expectations and cultural barriers within which we are to behave and perform in the community, in our jobs, and in our respective roles. But the challenge is to rise above the convention, and make a difference, like Mr Bruce Lee did.

In fact, it was Mr Bruce Lee's relentless quest for excellence, diligence and innovation which introduced kung fu to the modern world, moving it up the value chain, bridging the East and the West.

In a like manner, this is and has been what Hong Kong's role in the past decades: introducing many initiatives to the world, moving it up the value chain, bridging the East and the West. Hong Kong had the foresight to be the first mover into many things in the past, seizing opportunities and turning them into reality. The vision of "One Country, Two Systems" still allows us to rise above our competitors in many respects.

Hong Kong is, in particular, renowned for our low and simple tax system; rule of law; free flow of capital, people and information; excellent infrastructure with good connectivity to the rest of the world; etc.

Hong Kong has been consistently ranked among the highest in the world in all sorts of business and innovation rankings. This shows that Hong Kong is one of the most attractive places for doing business. All these are our competitive advantages.

But there is no room for complacency. And we must take pains to sharpen our edge

as an international city. I think you would know what I mean by that.

In an interview with Mr Pierre Berton back in 1971, Mr Bruce Lee said, "I do think that things of the Chinese will be quite interesting in the next few years...I mean once the opening of China...you know...that it will bring more understanding and more things that are, hey, like...different, you know, that may be in the contrast or comparison some new things might grow. So, therefore, I mean, it is a rich period to be in."

That is foresight. Mr Bruce Lee had it. And Hong Kong thrived on it. And the rest is our recent history.

To end my sharing tonight, I would like to exhort you to:

"Be water, irrigate your resources to tap the vast blue ocean of opportunities under 'One Country' and flow under 'Two Systems' to connect it to the world, bringing prosperity to all. Be water, my friend."

Thank you.

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