

Welcome Prof. Han ZHANG Dean of School of Business



Collective Efforts, Shared Success: Our Journey Begins

An Interview with Dean Prof. Han ZHANG

The HKBU School of Business warmly welcomes Prof. Han ZHANG, who stepped into the role of Dean on 1st January, 2025. With his extensive leadership experience and distinguished academic accomplishments, Prof. ZHANG is poised to lead the School into a dynamic new chapter.

Prior to joining the School, Prof. ZHANG was the Steven A. Denning Professor of Technology & Management and Professor of Information Technology Management (ITM) at the Scheller College of Business, Georgia Institute of Technology. There, he also served as the Faculty Director of the Denning Technology & Management (T&M) Programme. Prof. ZHANG holds a Ph.D. in Information Systems from the University of Texas at Austin, and Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Peking University. He is internationally renowned for his groundbreaking contributions to the field of information systems. His research on online trust and reputation, user-generated content, online healthcare, and human-AI interaction has been extensively featured in top-tier journals and has earned him numerous accolades, including the Association for Information Systems (AIS) Fellow Award (2023) and the Emerald Citations of Excellence Award (2017).

Prof. ZHANG's extensive academic experience is complemented by a deep understanding of higher education in Hong Kong and Mainland China, along with a strong international perspective. He has served as an external reviewer for the Research Grants Council (RGC) of Hong Kong and as a panel member of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2020. Additionally, he co-founded the China Summer Workshop on Information Management (CSWIM) and has served as its president since 2010, contributing to its status as the most influential workshop on information systems in China.

Read on to learn about the leader who will shape the future of business education at HKBU.



First Impressions and Aspirations

What are your initial impressions of the School, and which aspects are you most excited to develop and cultivate?

I started my first day at HKBU School of Business on 2nd January, 2025. I immediately took a trip to Zhuhai and Shenzhen for our MBA alumni events on 3rd – 4th January. Our alumni gave me my first impressions of the School. I was impressed with the following three points: First, our alumni are strongly attached to HKBU School of Business. They love HKBU. Second, our alumni organisation is well organised. Third, our alumni emphasise social responsibility. My first impression of the MBA alumni reflects my first impression of the School: young, dynamic, responsible, with tremendous potential and many opportunities.

One of my primary aspirations is to cultivate an inclusive and supportive community where every member—be it academic and teaching staff, research staff, administrative staff, or students—is respected and valued. I envision the School of Business as a place where everyone feels proud to work and is motivated to contribute to our collective success.

By fostering a culture of mutual respect and shared purpose, we can harness the full potential of our diverse talents and drive the School towards greater achievements. I am excited to work with our dedicated team to build on our strengths, embrace new opportunities, and take the HKBU School of Business to new heights.

The Journey to Hong Kong and the School

After a distinguished career in the United States, what aspects of this role and Hong Kong itself captivated you the most, prompting this significant move? What unique opportunities at HKBU and the School of Business do you find particularly compelling?

I feel very fortunate and humbled to have been selected as the Dean of the School of Business. Why did I make the move? Opportunities and impacts! As a business school situated in Hong Kong, we are uniquely positioned to leverage tremendous opportunities not only locally but also in the Greater Bay Area, across China, and globally. The potential for growth and impact here is incredibly exciting to me.

Additionally, moving to Hong Kong, one of the most beautiful and dynamic cities in the world, is an opportunity in itself. The city's vibrant business environment and unique blend of cultures make it an ideal place to live and work.

Bridging East and West

Your background has spanned leading institutions in Mainland China, the United States, and now Hong Kong. How have these diverse experiences shaped your perspective on leadership? What cross-cultural insights will you integrate into cultivating the School's culture?

While each place has its own customs and cultures, I have found common themes in leadership and business education across these diverse environments. One of the most influential concepts for me is “servant leadership”. As the Dean, I see myself as a servant first, dedicated to serving my colleagues and helping them succeed.

My goal is to ensure that everyone in the School of Business feels highly valued and appreciated. When individuals feel proud of their work environment, they are naturally motivated to contribute to the collective success of the School.

By fostering a culture of respect, support, and shared purpose, I believe we can create an environment where all members of the School, both staff and students, enjoy working together and thrive. This approach not only bridges the cultural differences but also leverages the strengths of each to build a cohesive and dynamic community at HKBU.



Ethical Leadership in a Complex World

Ethical considerations are paramount in today's business landscape. How will you foster a culture of ethical leadership and social responsibility within the School?

Ethical leadership and social responsibility are deeply intertwined and essential in shaping a positive and impactful organisational culture. Ethical leadership involves guiding our Business School with a commitment to integrity, fairness, and respect for all stakeholders. Social responsibility extends this commitment by ensuring that our Business School's actions contribute positively to society and the environment. Together, we need to ensure that our decisions are made not only for the benefit of our School but also for the greater good of the community and the world at large.

Let me elaborate on ethical leadership. Ethical leadership is essential in today's business environment. At the core of ethical leadership is integrity. We must ensure that all our decisions are made with integrity as our guiding principle.

Additionally, I want to emphasise the importance of communication and transparency. Effective communication with all stakeholders of the School and maintaining transparency in our actions are crucial. These practices help us build a community where everyone feels fairly treated, sincerely respected, and significantly valued.

Through cultivating a culture of integrity, open communication, and transparency, we can create an environment that upholds ethical standards and promotes social responsibility.

Future Trends in Business Education

The business world is in constant flux. What are the three most significant trends you foresee shaping the future of business education, and how will the School adapt its programmes to remain at the forefront of innovation?

There could be many significant trends shaping the future of business education. I would rank the following three trends as the most crucial:

First, the relevance of curriculum: To stay current, it is essential to integrate the latest technological advancements, including artificial intelligence (AI), big data, blockchain, and so on, into our curriculum. For instance, in the age of AI, incorporating cutting-edge technology and its applications in business is essential. This ensures that our students are equipped with the knowledge and skills that are in high demand in the modern business landscape.

Second, blended learning models: The future of education will likely see a greater integration of online and offline learning. We must adopt a blended learning approach that combines the flexibility and accessibility of online education with the engagement and interaction of traditional classroom settings. This hybrid model can cater to diverse learning preferences and needs, enhancing the overall educational experience.

Third, lifelong learning: Emphasising lifelong learning is critical. We need to provide ongoing learning

opportunities and benefits to our students, viewing them not just as students but as lifelong members of our learning community. This can include offering continuous education programmes, workshops, and access to resources that help them stay updated throughout their careers.

Essentially, it is imperative that we ensure our programmes deliver substantial value to our students. By staying relevant, adopting innovative teaching methods, and fostering a culture of lifelong learning, we can provide an education that prepares our students for long-term success.

The Human-AI Partnership

While technology is rapidly reshaping business, the human element remains essential. What specific aspects of human-AI interaction will be most crucial for future business leaders? How will the School's curriculum cultivate not only technical proficiency but also crucial soft skills—critical thinking, creativity, communication, and adaptability—to thrive in the age of AI?

In November 2022, ChatGPT was introduced to the world, marking a significant milestone in the development of large language models (LLMs). Since then, numerous other LLMs have emerged, profoundly transforming our lives and work. Similar to past technological advancements like cars, telephones, and the Internet, AI has become an integral part of our world and is here to stay. Our responsibility is to educate our students to not only accept AI but also to use it ethically and responsibly.

However, it is important to recognise that AI can never replace crucial soft skills. Critical thinking, creativity, communication, and adaptability remain fundamental and indispensable. While AI and other technologies can assist in the decision-making process by providing data-driven insights and automating routine tasks, it is the soft skills that enable individuals to excel in competitive environments and lead with empathy and innovation. By integrating these elements into our curriculum, we will ensure that our students are not only proficient in leveraging AI but also excel in the soft skills that are essential for thriving in the age of AI. This balanced approach will prepare them to navigate the complexities of the modern business world with confidence and ethical integrity.



Cultivating a Thriving Research Ecosystem

Your experience founding and leading the China Summer Workshop on Information Management (CSWIM) demonstrates your remarkable ability to build vibrant research communities. What strategies will you implement to enhance research output, foster collaboration, and further enrich the overall research culture at the School?

Thank you for the compliment about CSWIM. As a research institution, one of our primary responsibilities is to conduct outstanding research. To achieve that, we must design effective mechanisms that motivate our



faculty members to enhance their research quality and productivity. For example, HKBU School of Business currently awards individual research budgets to strongly encourage our faculty members to publish in top-tier journals. That is excellent. However, we can do much more. For example, we may set up School-wide research awards to recognise research excellence; we may start an internal seminar series within the School so that faculty members from different disciplines can share research ideas and findings; we may systematically promote and broadcast our new research findings on social media to increase the social impact of our research; we may use research centres to bring new data to facilitate research for our faculty members and students.

In the past weeks, I have learned more about Hong Kong's Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). RAE plays a crucial role as part of the University Grant Committee (UGC)'s efforts to promote world-class research and responsibly distribute research funding. I plan to collaborate with my leadership team to create and implement strategies that not only help our faculty members achieve their personal career goals (e.g., publishing in top-tier journals and obtaining tenure and promotion) but also excel in the RAE, which is important for the success of the School and the University.

Fostering Interdisciplinary Excellence

HKBU and the School have a strong commitment to interdisciplinary research and education. Which areas of interdisciplinary research are you most eager to cultivate and further develop?

Research in business schools is inherently interdisciplinary. As an information systems researcher, I engage in interdisciplinary research that spans information systems, marketing, and psychology. Many of our faculty members are involved in interdisciplinary research areas such as Fintech, health informatics, sustainability & corporate governance.

Interdisciplinary research is crucial for addressing complex challenges and driving innovation. In the age of AI, business schools are uniquely positioned to engage in interdisciplinary research and can play a pivotal role in harnessing the potential of AI to drive innovation, solve complex problems, and create value across various sectors. There are numerous exciting areas of interdisciplinary research, such as behavioural economics and AI, smart cities and urban innovation, FinTech and financial inclusion, and ethical AI in business.

While discussing interdisciplinary research, I also want to express my admiration and pride in HKBU's efforts to promote transdisciplinary research and education (the crossing of disciplines and of sectors). This approach is undoubtedly one of the most significant trends in higher education today.

I am thrilled to see that HKBU has taken a step further by identifying seven Transdisciplinary Second Majors (TSMs). I am proud that the School of Business will host the TSM in Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management and play a pivotal role in the other six TSMs as well.

I see tremendous opportunities with transdisciplinary programmes. For instance, I recently discussed with Prof. ZHONG Bu, the Dean of the School of Communication, the idea of launching an Executive MBA (EMBA) programme focused on social media, AI, and communication. By collaborating with our outstanding School of Communication and non-academic experts, we can significantly enhance the likelihood of success for such transdisciplinary programmes.

By embracing and advancing these interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary initiatives, we can foster a vibrant, innovative research environment that addresses complex global challenges and prepares our students for the dynamic future ahead.

A Personal Touch: The Dean Beyond the Office

What passions and interests do you enjoy doing outside of academia? How does this personal dimension inform your approach to leadership and your vision for the School?

I am a die-hard sports fan, particularly passionate about the NBA and college football. Specifically, I have been a loyal San Antonio Spurs fan for over two decades. What draws me to the Spurs is their exemplary approach to basketball. Their 2014 NBA championship perfectly illustrated that basketball is a team sport where every player is a crucial component. Everyone contributes, and everyone is valued and appreciated.

This philosophy deeply resonates with me and informs my approach to leadership at the HKBU School of Business. Just like the Spurs, I believe that our success hinges on teamwork. At HKBU School of Business, we are all integral parts of the team. We win together, and we face challenges together.

By fostering a culture of collaboration, mutual respect, and shared goals, we can achieve great things as a united team. This team-oriented mindset is at the core of my vision for the School, where every member's contribution is valued, and everyone works together towards our common objectives.

A Message to the School of Business Community

What message of inspiration and hope would you like to share with the students, faculty, staff, and alumni of the School as you begin your tenure as Dean?

As I begin my tenure as Dean, I am deeply inspired by HKBU's commitment to interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research and education. Together, we are building a vibrant and innovative academic environment where every member's contribution is valued. Let's embrace the spirit of teamwork, much like my beloved San Antonio Spurs, knowing that our collective efforts will drive us to new heights. I am excited about the opportunities ahead and confident that, united, we will achieve remarkable success. I need your support—let's embark on this journey together and make a lasting impact.

