

# CONNECT

MAGAZINE OF THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG BUSINESS SCHOOL • DECEMBER 2018

## Are Leaders **BORN OR MADE?**



*The Science of  
Online Group Buying*

*Taking Customer Service  
to the Next Level*

*Seeing Both Sides  
of the Coin*



**CUHK Business School**  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong



### Dean's Message

In this issue, we start off by taking a look at the human genome, if there are specific genetic markers involved in genetic influences on leadership, answering the question on whether leaders are born or made and how either answer would still make it a mixed blessing with complicated effects.

One of the most popular online group buying e-commerce platform in the U.S. celebrates its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, and we take a look at the science of group buying, comparing it to a China e-commerce company that bears a similar nature. Beyond the simplicities of forming a group of people to enjoy quantity discounts, we find out what other motivations and behaviours should a good coupon model be able to drive and elicit.

On the topic of getting close to consumers, we explore a timely topic on how to take customer service to the next level in order to compete and survive in today's service industry. While creativity and innovation in customer service are not new directives, we try to find out how good is good enough.

Thank you for being our loyal reader this year and supporting our business research. We look forward to the New Year as we revisit and plan for a new directive for our CONNECT magazine. See you in 2019!

*Prof. Kalok Chan*

## Profile: The Chinese University of Hong Kong

- The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) was established in 1963 after the amalgamation of existing colleges which date back to 1949.
- The Vice-Chancellor and President is Professor Rocky S. Tuan.
- CUHK has eight faculties (Arts, Business Administration, Education, Engineering, Law, Medicine, Science, Social Science) and 62 academic departments.
- CUHK is ranked 49<sup>th</sup> in the QS World University Rankings 2019.
- CUHK is based on a collegiate system of nine colleges.
- CUHK has 20,000 students; 4,000 of whom are from outside Hong Kong.

## Profile: CUHK Business School

- The Dean is Professor Kalok Chan.
- The Business School is comprised of two schools – Accountancy, Hotel & Tourism Management; and four departments – Decision Sciences & Managerial Economics, Finance, Management and Marketing.
- It has over 4,400 students (full-time/part-time). Each year, over 500 undergraduate and postgraduate business students enrol in international exchange programmes during the regular school term.
- CUHK Business School is the first business school in Hong Kong to offer BBA, MBA and Executive MBA programmes.
- The MBA programme was ranked 43<sup>rd</sup> in the world in 2018, and the EMBA programme was ranked 29<sup>th</sup> in the world in 2018 by *Financial Times*.
- The School runs dual MBA degree programmes with HEC Paris in France; Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University Rotterdam in the Netherlands; and McCombs School of Business, The University of Texas at Austin in the United States. It also offers joint postgraduate teaching programmes with Tsinghua University and Shanghai National Accounting Institute in China.

### Editorial Team

Marketing and Communications Office  
mco@baf.cuhk.edu.hk

Phebe Loo, Administrative Director

Mabel Sieh, Managing Editor, China Business Knowledge @ CUHK

Jaymee Ng, Principal Writer, China Business Knowledge @ CUHK

Edmond Siu, Senior Public Relations and Communications Manager

Summie Wan, Assistant Marketing and Communications Manager

Subscribe to the monthly digest of research articles by China Business Knowledge @ CUHK via [cbk.bschooll.cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:cbk.bschooll.cuhk.edu.hk).

### The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Business School

Cheng Yu Tung Building, 12 Chak Cheung Street  
Shatin, N.T., Hong Kong

Tel: +852 3943 7785

Website: [www.bschooll.cuhk.edu.hk](http://www.bschooll.cuhk.edu.hk)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/cuhkbschooll](https://www.facebook.com/cuhkbschooll)

LinkedIn: <http://linkd.in/1Oyg6fW>



# Are Leaders **BORN OR MADE?**



*Li Wendong, Assistant Professor  
Department of Management  
CUHK Business School*

*Even if there is a  
particular gene that turns  
us into leaders, it can be  
a mixed blessing with  
complicated effects*



In the new era of genomics, researchers have begun to explore specific genetic markers involved in genetic influences on leadership. The current research by Prof. Li Wendong, Assistant Professor from the Department of Management at The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Business School looks at an age-old question: *Are leaders born or made?* and reveals distinctive pathways linking a dopamine transporter gene to leadership role occupancy.

### The Study

Conducted by Prof. Li and his collaborators at National University of Singapore and Arizona State University, the research examines how a dopamine transporter gene, DAT1, is involved in genetic influences on leadership role occupancy, or the extent to which people hold leadership roles, formally or informally.

### DAT1 Gene and Its Influence on Us

Initially, researchers used twin studies to address this question. Few studies have examined which specific DNA markers are related to leadership.

The DAT1 gene, which is the focus of his study, represents a specific genetic marker related to human dopamine systems which play a pivotal role in modulating human behaviours, such as motivation, self-regulation, and reward systems. According to the study, these functions have been found to play important roles in shaping leadership among us.

"In our study, we found that DAT1 was positively related to moderate rule breaking, which was positively associated with leadership role occupancy.

However, the findings suggested that the pathways linking specific genes to leadership are complex – this DAT1 gene also has an indirect negative effect on leadership role occupancy through proactive personality, a form of self-regulation.

"We found that the gene was also negatively related to proactive personality, which in turn bore a positive relationship with leadership. In other words, having this gene seems a mixed blessing for one's becoming a leader, through two distinctive paths," says Prof. Li.

"One positive path was through mild rule breaking: This gene was positively related to mild rule breaking, which in turn was positively related to leadership. On the other hand, such gene was negatively related to proactive personality, which was also positively related to leadership."

### Rule Breaking and Leadership Role

Recent perspective of leadership has suggested the significance of rule breaking to leadership emergence. Individuals who take moderate risks and are bold to break moderate rules will likely assume leadership roles.

"Leadership researchers have reported that individuals who showed moderate rule breaking behaviours in adolescence are more likely to occupy leadership positions at adulthood."

It is worth noting that such rule breaking behaviours do not include any serious antisocial criminal behaviours such as engaging in violent acts and/or using weapons.

So, why is there a positive relationship between rule breaking and leadership role?

"Mild rule breaking may enhance individual learning and development. Such behaviours would stretch abilities and skills in exploring uncharted areas, and consequently provide opportunities to develop capabilities required by future leadership," he explains.

Also, people who break rules are often seen as charismatic, and are more likely to be perceived as leader-like, which in turn may contribute to their leadership emergence.

"While breaking rules is risky and may even lead to punishment by others, it offers rule breakers access to the freedom and privileges of adulthood. Hence, rule breakers tend to be admired by adolescent peers, which increases their popularity and promotes chances of them emerging as group leaders in adolescence," he says.



"Popularity and early leadership experiences in adolescence may cultivate leadership identity, which further facilitates leadership emergence at adulthood."

### The Role of Environment

Obviously, the environment has a role to play, Prof. Li notes.

"For example, research done by my advisor Prof. Richard Arvey found that, on average, about 30 percent of individual differences in leadership role occupancy can be explained by the individual differences in our genes, which means the remaining 70 percent can be accounted by environmental influences."

Prof. Li explains that although there has been no direct research on genetic influences on leadership development or leadership effectiveness, it is very likely that they are also influenced by genetic factors.

*"Having a particular gene will not magically turn you into a leader. As our study revealed that the DAT1 gene wasn't positively related to proactive personality which has been considered as an important trait among leaders."*

**Prof. Li Wendong**  
**Department of Management**

"A crucial reason is that they are affected by individual differences such as intelligence, personality traits, and physical characteristics (e.g., height, weight, and attractiveness). These individual differences have been shown to be related to genetic influences."

### Does THE Leadership Gene Exist?

Prof. Li is aware of the common misunderstanding that many people believe there is THE leadership gene, meaning that, having this gene, you will be more likely to become a leader. Without this gene, you are unlikely to become one.

"Even if certain specific genes can influence leadership, there may be many thousands of such genes interacting with each other as well as many environmental factors in shaping leadership. Thus, there is no genetic determinism," he says.

And the influence of one gene on leadership is very complex, as the study has already shown.

"Having a particular gene, therefore, will not magically turn you into a leader. As our study revealed that the DAT1 gene wasn't positively related to proactive personality which has been considered as an important trait among leaders. So in a way, having the gene is a double-edge sword," he says.

"Individual differences, including genetic influences, are important for leadership. Yet, individual differences alone cannot explain all the differences in leadership since environmental influences are also important," he adds.

Although this has not been directly studied in this research, Prof. Li and his researchers do not advocate using findings of genetic research directly in selection.

"On the contrary, we believe that it is useful to use the findings in human development, that is, to provide the right intervention to the right people to optimise their development and realisation of human potential. This has been done in the field of medicine where people receive individualised or personalised medicine according to their different genetic makeup."

### Are Leaders Born or Made?

"The answer is both, obviously," says Prof. Li. "There are many different types of leaders in our society. In this sense, everyone can be a leader. However, to lead effectively, you need to find the right way (i.e., environment) that fits yourself and capitalise on your individual differences," Prof. Li concludes.

**By Mabel Sieh. This article was first published in China Business Knowledge @ CUHK, the knowledge platform of CUHK Business School.**

Reference:  
W. D. Li, N. Wang, R. Arvey, R. Song, S. M. Saw, and Z. Song (2015), "A mixed blessing? Dual mediating mechanisms in the relationship between dopamine transporter gene DAT1 and leadership role occupancy," *The Leadership Quarterly*, 26(5), 671-686.

# The **SCIENCE** of Online Group Buying



*Mandy Hu, Assistant Professor  
Department of Marketing  
CUHK Business School*



*What can we learn about  
consumer behaviours behind  
two popular e-commerce  
platforms in U.S. and China?*

**S**avvy internet shoppers should be familiar with Groupon, an American e-commerce marketplace founded in 2008 that offers group-buying deals (or social coupons), which are substantially lower than market prices. However, there is one condition in getting these lucrative deals – there must be a certain number of people to purchase the coupon before one can redeem the deal. To reach the so-called ‘tipping point’, one would think that buyers who are interested should try to spread the deal to as many people as possible. Is it really the case?

“Surprisingly, we found that people were not that motivated to refer Groupon deals to other consumers, even when the deal was not yet tipped,” explains Prof. Hu, Assistant Professor of Department of Marketing at CUHK Business School.

“We’d expect that if a customer notices the deal is not yet tipped when he purchases it, he is more likely to refer it to others than when the deal is already tipped. However, that was not the case as in our study,” she adds.

Her study titled “The ‘tipping point’ feature of social coupons: An empirical investigation” was conducted in collaboration with Prof. Russel S. Winer, William H. Joyce Professor of Marketing at the Stern School of Business, New York University. It is the first empirical study using individual level online browsing data to investigate consumer behaviour in a group buying website.

### The Business Model of Groupon

Previous studies have identified the business model of Groupon as a combination of two features: daily deals and group-buying deals. The early Groupon website contained three crucial pieces of information to drive sales growth: first, the ‘tipping point’ – the number of buyers needed to make the merchant honour the discount; second, prior purchase – the number of people who have purchased the deal before; and third, referral links which allow users to share the deal with others.

The use of ‘tipping point’ and the information of deal purchase status form a kind of assurance contract – a mechanism proposed by former game theory studies in which people voluntarily contribute specific amount of money or private good to a public good, and the decision to provide the public good is made if and only if contributions are sufficient to reach a minimum amount. Otherwise, the contributions are refunded.

“An assurance contract also prompts customers to act as sales agents of the product, as they want to redeem the deals that they’re interested in,” says Prof. Hu.

After the company went public in 2011 and a website revamp in 2013, Groupon phased out the information about the ‘tipping point’, a feature that once people thought to have played a prominent role in motivating consumer behaviour. The exact prior purchase number was also replaced by an approximation.

“These changes prompt one to wonder whether those strategies were just marketing gimmicks and whether, in particular, the ‘tipping point’ strategy can significantly affect consumer behaviour,” Prof. Hu says.

### The Study and Results

Setting out to find the answer, the researchers utilised a large proprietary dataset supplied by a third-party online marketing research firm consisting of the complete clickstream within the browsing sessions of people who used the Groupon website between January and March 2011 in the U.S. The team used social computing techniques to extract the detailed information on the retrieved web pages based on the Groupon URLs to observe individual customer behaviour.

The researchers constructed three datasets based on the data: behaviour, deal characteristics and demographic. The overall data is 28.2 GB in size, containing 156,425,702 records. There were 186,756 unique individuals who have visited the Groupon website at least once during the sample period. However, the majority of the people did not make any purchase.

Surprisingly, when studying the referral behaviour in relation to the ‘tipping point’, the researchers found that the number of referrals for Groupon deals was not high at all: There were only 872 referrals out of the total 114,459 deal views (0.76%). And among the 10,989 purchases, there were only 207 referrals (1.88%).

In addition, the team found that among the 114,549 deals viewed by customers, only about two percent of the deal views were referred by personal recommendations through emails, Facebook or Twitter while almost half of them (49.7%) came from a daily e-newsletter sent by Groupon to its subscribers.

“These results indicate that the ‘tipping point’ status does not lead consumers to refer the deals to others,” says Prof. Hu, adding that there could be two possible explanations.

“A good social coupon model is not just forming a group of people to enjoy quantity discounts. It is about motivating the customers to voluntarily form a group to enjoy quantity discounts.”

**Prof. Mandy Hu**  
**Department of Marketing**

“Given the customers’ knowledge that most Groupon deals will be fulfilled, they do not worry about the ‘tipping point’. Also, they may worry about referring a bad deal to their friends since making a referral suggests a vouch for the deal’s quality,” Prof. Hu explains.

The study also reveals that some deals are more likely to be referred more than others, such as featured deals with limited quantities and deals that came from personal recommendations via emails and Twitter since “personal recommendations seem more trustworthy than recommendations from Groupon e-newsletters,” she says.

“More experienced Groupon users are more likely to refer a deal to others as they are more confident about their judgement of the quality of the deal.”

So, the ‘tipping point’ information may not affect referrals; however, it does affect the likelihood to make a purchase and the time leading to a purchase.

Through examining the purchase probabilities during each hour before and after the ‘tipping point’, the researchers found that the average purchase probability steadily increased until it reached the peak, which was about two hours after the tipping point. After that, the purchase probability decreased but still maintained at a higher level than before the ‘tipping point’.

“After the ‘tipping point’, people generally spend less time from the first view until they purchase the deal. Hence, the ‘tipping point’ information helps to speed up the purchase process,” Prof. Hu says. “Although it doesn’t change consumers’ referral behaviour, access to information about the ‘tipping point’ still encourages purchasing and decreases consumers’ consideration time.

### **Contagious Purchase Behaviour: Conformity and Social Learning**

Previous studies have stated two mechanisms that can explain the contagious purchase behaviour: conformity and social learning. Conformity refers to people who behave similarly to their peers if a large number of the peers are

acting the same way. For social learning, a person may decide to make a purchase if he or she believes the action will improve his or her current condition by learning the experiences from prior buyers.

In conformity, the purchase depends solely on the popularity of the deal, whereas social learning relies on how good or desirable the deal proves to be.

In their study, the researchers found that conformity, rather than social learning, played a more dominant role in driving contagious purchases.

“We found that the majority of sales occurred on the first half of the day when the deals were shown, which means people would check the social coupon websites immediately and make quick purchase decisions at the start of their working day. If social learning had played an important role, the sales should have occurred later on to allow the information to accumulate,” Prof. Hu explains, adding that the majority of U.S. consumers, including new and experienced subscribers, make their purchase decisions within 30 minutes of the first view.

### **Fall of Groupon and Rise of Pinduoduo**

In recent years, Groupon has seemed to lose its appeal to customers with tumbling revenues. The company reported a 7 percent year-on-year decline in revenues on 3 August after reporting a similar decline in the first quarter of this year.

While things are not looking good for Groupon in the U.S., the Chinese e-commerce company Pinduoduo went public in July this year, raising US\$1.6 billion through an IPO in the U.S.

Prof. Hu believes there are a number of reasons for the three-year-old Chinese company to “emerge quickly as the third largest e-commerce website in China”.

“First, Pinduoduo fully utilises the largest social network in China by partnering with WeChat [owned by Tencent], which makes referrals much easier. Second, its product selection is different from that of Groupon with cheaper products. The average price of their products is also much lower than that in [Alibaba’s] Taobao and JD.com [the two fastest growing retail brands in China]. And low price seems to appeal to a fairly large group of customers in China,” Prof. Hu comments.



While her study has proven that social coupons under Groupon's model couldn't lead to more referrals, it seems to be working exceptionally well in Pinduoduo's case. Why?

She explains that in Groupon's case, it is the platform (i.e., Groupon) that determines the group-buying opportunity for the customers. Groupon negotiates with retailers who decide whether they want to work with Groupon or not and under what terms. From the consumer's perspective, they either take the offer or not. So they are not motivated to refer the coupon to their friends.

"However, Pinduoduo allows its consumers to decide which product they want to form a group to get the discount. This gives them the sense of control and responsibility. The 'leader' who initiates a group is motivated to get his friends to purchase the same product together. And next time, when he is asked by his friends to purchase their deals, he can't say no easily. This effect of social network creates the real 'social' coupon, which didn't happen in the Groupon model."

"A good social coupon model is not just forming a group of people to enjoy quantity discounts. It is about motivating the customers to voluntarily form a group to enjoy quantity discounts. In Pinduoduo's case, everyone acts *voluntarily* as a 'salesperson' of the product to their friends or acquaintances. That is why I consider Pinduoduo a successful model creating real 'social' coupons."

Lastly, culture also plays an important role in Pinduoduo's success, the professor notes. "China has a culture of collectivism and conformism, which makes Chinese people willing to purchase the same products as their friends," she says.

**By Jaymee Ng. This article was first published in China Business Knowledge @ CUHK, the knowledge platform of CUHK Business School.**

Reference:  
Mantian Mandy Hu and Russel S. Winer (2016), "The 'tipping point' feature of social coupons: An empirical investigation," *International Journal of Research in Marketing*.



# Taking **CUSTOMER SERVICE** to the Next Level



*John Lai, Senior Lecturer  
Co-director, MSc in Management Programme  
Department of Management, CUHK Business School*

*To compete and survive in  
today's service industry, leaders  
need to think outside the  
mentality of 'one size fits all'*



**W**hat makes one buy so much from one shop but not the other, especially when the market is full of similar quality products? As consumers ourselves, we know that good customer service is key in attracting and maintaining customers. But, how good is good enough?

Standardisation and personalisation are two approaches in customer services. Many international retail companies are adopting standardised service operations in order to increase efficiency and reduce costs in their businesses. However, as our world is shifting from a manufacturing economy to a service and knowledge economy, one size may not fit all, anymore. Industry leaders need to step up their game by offering innovative customer services.

This has been the subject taken on by Dr. John Lai from The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Business School. His research entitled “Does standardised service fit all?: Novel service encounter in frontline employee-customer interface” explores the nature of novel service encounter, referring to frontline employees’ creativity and innovation when interacting with customers. The study was conducted in collaboration with Prof. Steven Lui, Associate Professor at the University of New South Wales Business School and Prof. Alice Hon, Associate Professor at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

“A standardised service does not fit every situation today. Improvisation by frontline employees at the service encounter is crucial to innovation,” says Dr. John Lai, Senior Lecturer and Co-director of Master of Science in Management (MiM) programme at CUHK Business School.

### The Study

For the purpose of the study, the researchers developed an observation template and collected data from multiple sources by conducting interviews, surveys and field observations.

The data were collected from a large international apparel retailer operates in Hong Kong and Mainland China, which had just undergone a major brand revamp. “The firm has adopted bold and innovative training strategies to revitalise its brand. These factors make the company an especially fitting choice for a service innovation study,” says Dr. Lai.

The study took place in three stages: The first stage involved interviews with corporate and store managers. The second stage involved field observations measuring the creative acts of frontline employees during service encounters in each shop using the observation template. Finally, the third stage consisted of a survey of shop managers, which measured the adoption of service innovation and key contingencies using standard questionnaire items.

Past research on service innovation largely focused on new products and technologies or even new business practices. What sets their study apart is that it examines the creative process of frontline employees when there are no new practices or products within the business. The researchers believe staff’s improvisations in dealing with customers can be a vital source of innovation for the entire company.

### Defining Innovative Customer Service

So, what defines an innovative customer service? How does it differ from service adaptation to fulfil a customer’s request?

According to past and this research, creative acts are often unplanned and localised, meaning that they are simultaneously done by the frontline staff of one specific store to their customers and these actions would not be considered as innovative by another store.

“Creative acts during a service encounter are more than just an adaptation to customer or tourist requests,” Dr. Lai explains. “Being creative means actively anticipating the needs of customers and seeking new solutions, currently unavailable, to address them.”

For example, a standard customer service behaviour may entail the shop staff politely greeting the customer when he or she enters the shop while an innovative staff may greet the customer according to his or her nationalities or even provide holiday greetings. It is not uncommon for shop employees to provide suggestions to customers in fitting. But, offering mix and match advices takes the service to another level and would be considered as an innovative customer service behaviour.

“Briefing customers on the latest trends and products is more than adaptive behaviour as such a service goes beyond immediate needs and requires staff to equip themselves with the latest professional knowledge,” Dr. Lai comments. “Such an approach taps into new solutions (providing information) for old problems (indecision).”

He believes these creative acts could be easily adopted by storewide.

“Although these encounters do not involve radical changes, small differences in service can create a more personalised experience for the customers, hence allowing the staff to better address individual client needs. With standard protocol in place, allowing more task autonomy for frontline staff could help forging innovative ideas.”

Overall, the results showed that the shops in Shenzhen and Guangzhou had the highest level of novel behaviour, while those in Shanghai and Beijing had the lowest, and these differences were found in three stages – when customers were entering the shop, deciding to buy or reject and leaving the shop.

“As for shops in Hong Kong and Macau, they showed the most innovation at the points when customers were entering and leaving the shop, whereas those in Shenzhen and Guangzhou were the most innovative when customers were deciding to purchase or reject the goods.”

These results are consistent with the argument from previous research that geographical location does affect innovation. As previous research reveals, regional differences may be attributed to multiple factors, such as culture, market structure and the availability of skilled workers.

“During our interviews, we also noticed that managers from different locations interpreted the ideas of competition and shop management autonomy in different ways. These could have affected the extent to which they encouraged novel service encounters in their stores,” he says.

Another finding has to do with resources. The study revealed that more novel behaviour was observed in the shops with larger teams than in those with smaller teams. Specifically, the number of employees was positively and significantly related to the novel service encounter at three stages of the customer-service interface: entering the shop, fitting, and leaving the shop, with the highest correlation in the fitting stage.

“Creative acts during a service encounter are more than just an adaptation to customer or tourist requests. Being creative means actively anticipating the needs of customers and seeking new solutions, currently unavailable, to address them.”

**Dr. John Lai**  
**Department of Management**

“We found that staff in shops employing larger teams was more creative than their counterparts in less well-staffed shops when customers were trying on the merchandise,” he says. “Their employees were less occupied with routine work and had more time to engage in new ideas to improve customer contact,” he adds. This finding is also consistent with the argument from previous research that slack resources are required for innovative activities.

In addition, there are fewer creative acts in larger apparel stores in the stages of when customer enter the shop, in fitting and when they leave. Hence, he suggests “the company may consider strengthening these three stages of customer service based on the results.”

### The Value of Observation Template

The researcher believes that the template developed in their study will be applicable to the study of service encounters in the retail and hospitality industries, because both industries provide high-contact and transaction-based services. However, it may not be suitable for services involving less extensive customer contact and labour involvement, such as the financial or consulting sectors.

“The observation template we have developed enables a rich account of the creative acts carried out by frontline employees during the service encounter to be recorded. As such, this paper lays a foundation for setting out a structured way to study the novel service encounter among frontline employees and its potential link to service innovation,” Dr. Lai concludes.

**By Mabel Sieh and Jaymee Ng.**  
**This story was first published in**  
**China Business Knowledge @ CUHK,**  
**the knowledge platform of CUHK**  
**Business School.**

Reference:  
John H. W. Lai, Steven S. Lui, and Alice Hon (2014), “Does Standardized Service Fit All? Novel Service Encounters in Frontline Employee-Customer Interface,” *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 26(8), 1341-1363.



# Seeing Both Sides of the Coin



*Venus Tse, Class of 2009 MBA Programme  
Vice President – Digitalisation Strategy & Fintech Partnership  
Credit Suisse*



**V**enus Tse Weithaeuser was a trained hardware engineer prior to pursuing an MBA. She now works at Credit Suisse, responsible for the overall definition and development of the bank's strategy as well as executing partnerships with financial technology companies. It is hard to imagine someone with a technical background strives and thrives in the banking industry as the industry has always been extremely traditional, jammed with legacies from the 'old banking world'.

"This is why a position like mine within the Digital Banking segment of the bank is so disruptive and controversial – which makes it exciting. There is a lot to be changed and the financial industry is finally at a stage where they are ready for the revolution."

One might ask how could this shift in career made possible? Venus has long decided to pursue an MBA, she has always felt that she had only seen one side of the coin – the technology side. Through her experience, she understood the importance of learning both the business and technical side of things so as to get a holistic view of managing a business. She also mentioned witnessing quite a lot of conflicts between the technical teams versus the business teams in areas like strategy, marketing and communications.

"Engineers always want to build products with the most advanced technology. However, in order to ensure the product sells, it's not only about how advanced the technical part is, but rather, if it fits the needs of customers and the market."

An MBA helped her gain a business and strategic mindset where she was able to excel in the role as Strategic Business Development Consultant at Dell after graduation.

Venus chose CUHK for her MBA for a number of reasons. One of the most important reasons was the fact that her father was an alumnus of the CUHK part-time MBA programme back in 1983.

"Seeing what my father has achieved after his education at CUHK is one of the biggest drivers for my decision to also pursue my business education from CUHK."

The dual degree programme was another appealing factor for picking CUHK. Born and raised in Hong Kong and then later educated in the United States, it became natural for her to pursue an MBA in Hong Kong where she could spend time in Hong Kong – her home town and gateway to China, whilst being closer to the U.S. where she did her undergraduate degree, and on top of that, a place

where some of the largest and most successful corporations are located.

She chose Finance and Management as her concentrations at CUHK and The University of Texas, Austin respectively. Venus was able to gain fundamental financial knowledge on how businesses are run. The practical application of business knowledge through classes enabled her to do real projects at large corporations. The 6-month practicum at Procter & Gamble ended with a howling success.

Venus has previously worked in the United States, Germany and now Switzerland. Her sensibility in cultural differences put her in a faster track to success. In spite of her knowledge and personal interests in what she has been doing that drive her to move forward in jobs across multinationals like Procter & Gamble, Dell, Deutsche Telekom and now Credit Suisse, she said she would not have gone that far if there have not been the right people that believed in her and gave her the platform to perform. The other key success factor, which is also seen as her challenge, is to ensure she stays abreast of all the new trends and technologies since the market moves so quickly.

"Reading news about financial technology, market trends, attending events to see the newest topics, and engaging myself in expert groups and start-up environment to learn."

Last but not least, the friendship and network she gained through the programme were invaluable, both professionally and personally. She also met an extremely important person in her life, her other half, Aaron Weithaeuser, classmate turned husband. They were in the same 2009 class and got married in Hong Kong in 2016.

Venus advises prospective MBA students to ask themselves what they want to achieve after the course. It could either be a career change or a career advancement in the current field. It is important to know what kind of experience they expect themselves to be getting before making such an investment in the midst of a career but in any case, it definitely is going to bring growth opportunities.

***This story was first published in MBA Connect in August 2018.***



# School of Hotel and Tourism Management Celebrates 20th Anniversary

**O**n 20 November, The Chinese University of Hong Kong's School of Hotel and Tourism Management hosted a Gala Cocktail at the Peninsula Hotel, celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary with over 200 guests that included government officials, industry leaders, academia, alumni and many more.

Prof. David Chan, Director of School of Hotel and Tourism Management opened the evening by welcoming distinguished guests, colleagues, and alumni, followed by remarks by The Hon Matthew Cheung Kin-chung GBS JP, Chief Secretary for Administration, HKSAR; Ms. Sonia Cheng, Chairman of Advisory Committee on Hotel and Tourism Management, CUHK, CEO of Rosewood Hotel Group; and school founder Prof. Kam-hon Lee, Emeritus Professor of Marketing at CUHK; as well as Prof. Kalok Chan, Wei Lun Professor of Finance and Dean, CUHK Business School.

Apart from congratulating the School on its 20 years of successful development, these four speakers also acknowledged and thanked former and current programme directors,

professors, students, and staff members for their outstanding contribution that has made the School what it is today.

Ms. Sonia Cheng remarked about how new hotels and brands have injected some much-needed vibrancy into the markets, while existing hotels face further rate pressure and manpower constraints, calling for the industry to continue to innovate in all aspects, and acknowledging how the School has been grooming leaders for the industry.

Prof. Kalok Chan added that the School of Hotel and Tourism Management was established in 1998, a year that most will remember as one of Hong Kong's toughest years when the Asian financial crisis swept through, yet also opened up new opportunities. Two decades later, establishing the School is now seen as a far-sighted action. Prof. Chan expressed confidence that under the leadership of Prof. David Chan, the School of Hotel and Tourism Management at CUHK Business School is poised to expand its regional global reach and reputation.

*By Phebe Loo*

## The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Business School

Address	15/F, Cheng Yu Tung Building 12 Chak Cheung Street, Shatin, Hong Kong
Telephone	+852 3943 7785
Email	bafac@cuhk.edu.hk
Website	<a href="http://www.bschool.cuhk.edu.hk">www.bschool.cuhk.edu.hk</a>
Facebook	<a href="https://facebook.com/cuhkbschool">facebook.com/cuhkbschool</a>
Linkedin	<a href="https://linkd.in/1Oyg6fW">linkd.in/1Oyg6fW</a>



香港中文大學  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

