Professor Huo Jiazhen, President of the School of Economics and Management, Tongji University, is an expert in logistics and supply chain management, making him the ideal chairperson for the Regional & Urban Forum session at the Pujiang Innovation Forum on innovative urbanisation – Seeking Quality: Upgrading the Quality of Urbanization through Innovation

**Could you give an insight into your role as President of the School of Economics and Management, Tongji University? What is your major focus at present?**

In China, a business school is usually part of a university, so its strategy should answer to and conform with that of the university. Tongji University is committed to cultivating talents that have an awareness of sustainability and serve as social backbones. That being the case, the School of Economics and Management aims at fostering remarkable graduates with managerial expertise and a sustainable and global perspective.

Presently, the School focuses on teaching, research, engagement and internationalisation. We have already built signature advantages with initiatives concerning the latter two aspects.

**How can coordinated innovation and development be achieved in order to upgrade technology innovation capability and accelerate technology transfer and commercialisation?**

The nature of coordinated innovation is the coordination and complementarity between multiple bodies and factors. I believe that most major original innovations are made within universities, and so the cooperation between universities and enterprise plays an essential part in coordinated innovation. At present, we often see researchers and professors in the university dedicate much of their time to the commercialisation of their research output. Therefore, the energy that should be directed to students and teaching activities is greatly compromised. This is a problem for universities not only in China but also in other countries. Another problem is that in many countries, although university professors have conducted thorough research in a certain field and published many papers, development of the specific field is sluggish.

I think to solve the first problem, universities and the business sector need to cooperate more closely and coordinately. Research-orientated universities, with their advantages in technology and well-educated human resources, should facilitate enterprise’s technological innovation and commercialisation by making technological investment, facilitating technology transfer and joining R&D efforts, allowing enterprise, equipped with teams of specialists serving different functions, to commercialise the technology more effectively.
For the second problem, university-enterprise coordination is even more important. Universities usually focus on the results of research instead of the demand of the market. This is exactly where enterprise can help – if customer demands are well accommodated from the very beginning, technology commercialisation will definitely be more rapid.

Can the next generation of scientists and engineers be better prepared for the international, innovation-driven world of tomorrow?

Technological and economic development, particularly the development of the internet, has turned the world into a ‘global village’ where innovation defines the future of human beings. Young Chinese people are supposed to take every possible opportunity to study in foreign countries for a while, even travelling to countries with different social systems and ideologies. This helps them to build their global awareness. In addition, the next generation of scientists and engineers, no matter what fields they are specialised in, should learn a bit about economics and management, since such knowledge concerns every aspect of life.

Which aspects of the Forum did you enjoy the most this year?

Being the host of one of the sub-forums enabled me to command a panoramic view over the speeches. The theme of our session was ‘Seeking quality: upgrading the quality of urbanization through innovation’. Our speakers touched upon various aspects of this topic: for example, the role of culture and the creative industries in improving the quality of urbanisation; sustainable development of resource-dependent cities; the development strategy of the Yangtze River Delta city cluster; and how the spatial scale of transport is related to the quality of city life.

A very important feature of the Pujiang Innovation Forum is that the speakers don’t simply present facts. Instead, they point out problems and even make criticisms which are thought-provoking, thus giving birth to more creative ideas and resolutions. More importantly, with exchanges or even clashes of opinions, experts make constructive suggestions that will greatly help us solve challenges in China.

As a platform to promote exchange and interaction among various Chinese and international stakeholders, how important is the Pujiang Innovation Forum to your endeavours? What have you gained from this year’s event?

One of the visions of my School is to cultivate management specialists with a sustainable and global perspective. The Pujiang Innovation Forum – as a platform for exchanges of innovative ideas and academic thoughts; interaction among government departments, enterprises, universities and research institutes; and the release of new policies – draws the attention of many professors, researchers and students at our School each year. The
speeches delivered by internationally renowned experts in various fields enable them to access the newest research models and cutting-edge information, and also widen their horizons. All of this is conducive to their teaching, research activities and study.

Russia and Heilongjiang were the designated Country and Province of Honor, respectively, at the 2014 Forum. Can you offer your perspective on the opportunities afforded for both regions by this status?

As far as I am concerned, Heilongjiang and Russia have a long history of cooperation due to geographical proximity. As the Country of Honour, Russia organised a delegation of more than 150 participants, which is the first time so many guests have attended from the country of honour. Russian participants took part in nearly all of the Forum’s events; almost every forum had a speech delivered by a Russian speaker. The topics covered such fields as industry, future science, entrepreneurship, politics and culture. This is really a precious opportunity for both to communicate with each other and enhance their cooperation and exchange of minds and culture. I do hope that through this year’s event, we can seek more opportunities to establish partnerships with both of them and build on what we have already achieved.

As neighbours with a long history of strong relations, are there particular advantages to science and innovation cooperation between Russia and China?

I think the first advantage rests upon the fact that China and Russia have a rather long history of amity and good-neighbourliness. The former Soviet Union was the first country in the world to recognise the People’s Republic of China and was also the first to establish diplomatic ties with the New China. Since then, China has learned much from Russia in many sectors, including science and technology, heavy industry, etc.

Moreover, the history of academic exchange between our two countries dates back decades. I have to mention that the project management programme at our School was developed by a group of specialists who were trained in the former Soviet Union, and we had a professor from the USSR who dedicated almost his whole life to the establishment of our School. Many of our distinguished professors are his students.

China and Russia are good neighbours and good friends as well. Both countries benefit from the advantages any friendship and neighbour would offer.

What impact are you hoping the Forum will have on your research on logistics and supply chain management, and your role as President of the School of Economics and Management?

As was pointed out by a recent news article, tertiary industry (the service sector) in China has already overtaken secondary industry (the industrial sector) in terms of proportion of GDP. That is to say, the service sector is gathering momentum, and logistics is part of this sector.

As a president, it is a great honour for me that the School of Economics and Management of Tongji University co-hosted a session at the 2014 Forum on my specialism. As one of the top 10 business schools nationwide, my School is particularly competitive in terms of engineering management, city management and service management. This session, with its theme highly consistent with the basic principles followed by our School, will definitely contribute to our future development in related fields.

Could you provide some examples of how innovation and knowledge transfer at forums and conferences such as the Pujiang Innovation Forum contributed to your research projects or informed your role in the School of Economics and Management at Tongji University?

The School of Economics and Management has unique advantages. Located in Shanghai, one of the most economically developed cities in China, our School leads the way in many fields such as civil engineering, architecture, transport, bridge building and environment, and contributes greatly to the development of megaprojects and cities in China.

As a professor at a business school, I have been involved in research and engagements related to service management for nearly a decade. I have directed, among others, the design of the operation and information management system for China’s largest retail chain – Lianhua Supermarket – and the design of the national logistics layout for China Post. During the process, we cooperated extensively with professors and experts from the US, Germany and Sweden. I hope that in the future we have more opportunities to work together with management specialists from other countries.

As host of the Regional/Urban Forum at the 2014 event, one of the topics we focused on was ‘how to improve the quality of city life’. I am very impressed by many original ideas put forward by our speakers. For instance, the idea that the development of small- and medium-sized cities doesn’t run counter to that of big ones, and that in China urbanisation occurs mostly in the east, different functional areas emerge within cities during the process, urban development becomes more ecology-minded and cities are more multifunctional. All of this inspires me to do further research into the management of city service systems.

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