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Three Renowned Scholars share their Research Breakthroughs at HKUST 25th Anniversary Distinguished Speakers Series

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The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) hosted three 25th Anniversary Distinguished Speakers Series talks over the past week, featuring Prof Robert Langer, Prof Elizabeth Perry and Prof Ingrid Daubechies, latest honorary doctorates recipients at the 24th congregation ceremony of HKUST.

In his talk titled “Biomaterials and Biotechnology: From the Discovery of the First Angiogenesis Inhibitors to the Development of Controlled Drug Delivery Systems and the Foundation of Tissue Engineering”, Prof Robert Langer talked about how his research has evolved from the first controlled release systems for macromolecules and the isolation of angiogenesis inhibitors, which has led to numerous new therapies, to new drug delivery technologies including nanoparticles and nanotechnology, which have led to studies in vaccine delivery and new treatment for illnesses like cancer. He also discussed approaches for future treatments of diseases in the areas of cartilage, skin, blood vessels and spinal cord repair, such as synthesizing new biomaterials, or by combining mammalian cells with synthetic polymers.

Prof Elizabeth Perry, meanwhile, shared her views on the relationship between higher education and authoritarian regimes in her talk “Higher Education and Authoritarian Resilience: The Case of China, Past and Present”. She challenged the western social scientists’ common belief that state support for higher education is usually associated with liberal democratic regimes. Using the case of China – “the most enduring authoritarian system” in world history, she argued that it thrived through both its imperial and contemporary era largely due to the state’s continuous sponsorship of higher education.

Yesterday, Prof Ingrid Daubechies inspired the audience with her talk “Mathematicians Helping Art Historians and Art conservators”, which covered how mathematical algorithms have helped art historians and art conservators by restructuring famous frescos like those by Mantegna, which were left fragmented by war bombings. She also explained how mathematics has helped removing artifacts, determine the time of paintings and uncovering hidden paintings behind visible ones.

Prof Robert Langer is the David H Koch Institute Professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He first made his name with a polymer-based research breakthrough on controlled drug delivery in the mid-1970s, after graduating from bachelor and doctoral chemical engineering degrees at Cornell University and MIT. Prof Langer’s lab is now the world’s largest academic biomedical engineering facility, exploring drug development, novel biomaterials, tissue engineering, stem cells and nanoscale drug delivery. He has written over 1,350 articles, received over 220 major awards and has 1,100 issued and pending patents worldwide. He was named by *Forbes* Magazine as one of 15 innovators worldwide who will reinvent our future.

Prof Elizabeth Perry is the Henry Rosovsky Professor of Government at Harvard University and Director of the Harvard – Yenching Institute. She is a comparativist with special expertise in the politics of China. A fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the recipient of Guggenheim fellowship, she sits on the editorial boards of nearly a dozen major scholarly journals and has served as the President of the Association for Asia Studies. She was amongst the first group of American visiting scholars to head for open-door China in 1979.

Prof Ingrid Daubechies is James B Duke Professor of Mathematics and Electronics and Computer Engineering at Duke University. Her work has contributed to faster and safer medical scans, spotting forgeries through digital analysis for art historians, and reducing the storage needs for the FBI’s huge e-database of fingerprints. She has received numerous lifetime honors and awards, including the Leroy P Steele Prize for Mathematical Exposition from the American Mathematical Society and the MacArthur “Genius Grant” Fellowship. She is an elected member of the US National Academy of Sciences, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Philosophical Society and the National Academy of Engineering. In 2012, she was made a Baroness by the King of Belgium.

Speakers of the HKUST 25th Anniversary Distinguished Speakers Series include Nobel Prize laureates, corporate leaders, entrepreneurs and key financial policy shapers. Prof Steven Chu, Nobel Laureate in Physics in 1997 and former US Secretary of Energy, was the inaugural speaker of the series. For more details please refer to <http://25a.ust.hk/eng/dss.php>.



HKUST President Prof Tony F Chan (left) and Prof Robert Langer



HKUST Head of Social Science Prof Kellee Tsai (left) and Prof Elizabeth Perry



President Prof Tony F Chan (left) and Prof Ingrid Daubechies

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