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Innovating today to build a sustainable tomorrow

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INNOVATING TODAY TO BUILD A SUSTAINABLE TOMORROW



Daryl Ng, Deputy Chairman of Hong Kong-based real estate property developer Sino Group, speaks about his ideas and ideals on the built environment, sustainability, and how business and innovation can be a force for good.

As someone who has lived and worked across multiple geographies and cultures, how have these experiences shaped your world views, especially regarding your business decisions and public service involvement?

I was born and brought up in Hong Kong. I've also lived in the US, where I attended boarding school in Connecticut and then studied at Columbia University, New York. In addition, I have served in Singapore's National Service (NS), which is its conscription system. These experiences enabled me to make friends with people from diverse backgrounds, and gain exposure to multiple cultures and systems. In Singapore, everyone serving NS was treated the same, regardless of their background, and that taught me very good life lessons. I am grateful for all these experiences.

I am a firm believer of globalisation and sustainability, which I have experienced first-hand in my studies and work. I also believe that the business community has a crucial role in making our world a better place, from building a more sustainable and resilient world to serving those in need, all while harnessing new technologies and preserving cultural heritage.

From a young age, I have been captivated by how the built environment influences our lives, well-being, and productivity, especially how we interact with the world around us.

I studied economics for my undergraduate degree and real estate development for my postgraduate degree at Columbia University. I joined Sino Group in 2003 and spent the first few years working very closely with the Projects team on development and management. There I learnt from architects and engineers about delivering quality projects, from planning to architectural design and total quality management.

These experiences continue to benefit me today and reinforce my commitment to delivering good spaces for people to live, play, and most importantly, enjoy. In a nutshell, it's about how to make people's lives better. This ethos has been integral to Sino Group's mission of 'Creating Better Lifescapes'—where the community thrives in harmony by embracing green living and wellness, pursuing meaningful designs, and seeking innovation while respecting heritage and culture. This is something we have

been doing for more than half a century, and we will continue to do so for the years to come.

I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to work in Hong Kong and Singapore—both are amazing metropolises connected to the world and have their respective catchments, thanks to their geographical locations and histories. Connectivity is integral to the development of these two great cities, which have been serving as global trading, logistics, and financial centres.

You have advocated for Hong Kong to have “meaningful re-internationalisation” with ASEAN. What has shaped your views towards such a vision? What more do you feel needs to be done?

There have been significant shifts in geopolitics on the global stage. There are new challenges, and at the same time, there are new opportunities. More than ever before, we need to maintain relationships with our partners, and ASEAN, as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations is commonly referred to, is an important area of opportunities. Hong Kong enjoys deep-rooted economic and cultural ties with ASEAN that have spanned more than a century. The numbers say it all. ASEAN was Hong Kong's second largest trading partner in merchandise trade in 2021 while its member states were among the top four destinations for Hong Kong's direct investments in 2020.

It is in this spirit that I founded the Hong Kong-ASEAN Foundation, an independent platform seeking to promote and deepen relationships and exchanges with ASEAN. It is my wish to make use of my network and experiences to contribute and collaborate with like-minded partners.

You are very receptive towards innovation and emerging technologies. How have you brought in innovation to your business and non-profit commitments?

Innovation is key to the sustainable development of our company and community. We are investing in our capabilities to innovate. For instance, we established Sino Inno Lab in 2018 as a sandbox platform for start-ups and technology companies to facilitate co-creation. Earlier this year, we launched the second Sino Inno Lab at One North, the Group's latest

commercial project in Hong Kong's Northern Metropolis. Complementing the second Sino Inno Lab is The Spark, a dedicated exchange platform accelerating the development of innovative solutions and co-creations across a wide spectrum of areas while better connecting Hong Kong to the Greater Bay Area and mainland China. These developments put us in a good position to capitalise on the Northern Metropolis initiative and the innovation ecosystem in the Greater Bay Area, which will be conducive to Hong Kong's growth into an international innovation and technology hub.

The Sino Inno Labs are part of the holistic innovation ecosystem we're seeking to build through the Hong Kong Innovation Foundation, a not-for-profit platform I established in 2018. Taking a holistic approach, we seek to serve different sectors of the community. For example, the coding classes and activities at Olympian City (OC) Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Lab target young students by supporting their education and facilitating their upward mobility, while Sino Inno Lab supports corporate innovation and co-creation. In addition, the Hong Kong Science Fair showcases innovative creations by primary and secondary school students to the public.

We have also been running Sinovation, a corporate incubation programme for Sino Group staff. Through Sinovation, we scale solutions provided by our colleagues to address daily

operations issues. I continue to be impressed by their creative ideas.

Other tech-for-good innovations we have been working on include EcoBricks and Archireef. We have worked with Hong Kong local start-up EcoBricks on a breakthrough solution to upcycle all seven major types of plastic into sustainable construction materials, thanks to its proprietary process and formula. The low-energy, 100-percent cold production process entails no heating or melting of waste plastic, eliminating harmful emissions or pollutants. Up to 50 percent of aggregates in concrete bricks can be replaced with plastic waste, meaning that up to 2,000 kg of plastic waste can be diverted from landfills for every 100 square metres of EcoBricks produced, which is equivalent to 200,000 plastic bottles. EcoBricks have been used at OC, Gold Coast Piazza and The Fullerton Ocean Park Hotel, with more to come. We shall also encourage the participation of tenants and stakeholders to drive a circular economy.

CORAL REEFStoration is our collaboration with the University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Ocean Park, and local start-up Archireef. It is also the first cross-sector coral conservation and restoration project in Hong Kong. The project features the world's first specially designed 3D-printed terra cotta reef tiles. Once attached to the tiles, corals will begin to grow, and the organic structures will provide habitats for more organisms, thus supporting marine biodiversity. We plan to regrow 20 square metres of coral habitat in the southern part of

Hong Kong Island. So far, we have made good progress with the first batch of 7.5 square metres of coral habitat regrown and deployed.

Most people associate 'urban sustainability' with simply planting more trees and overlook the social and economic aspects. What more can we do to promote a better understanding of this term?

Sustainability is how we create value, grow more resilient, and thrive together; it is more than planting trees or reducing the consumption of resources. In fact, it is an attitude.

Green is integral to sustainability, and indeed an important part. We are observing reports of extreme weather with torrential rain, floods, and storms in many parts of the world, and in well-established cities such as Hong Kong, we are seeing the impact first-hand. For instance, we're experiencing warmer and shorter winters, heavier rain, and more frequent and stronger typhoons, so there is a pressing need for sustainability efforts.

At Sino, we integrate sustainability into all aspects of our business and operations, as we seek to create long-term value for stakeholders and communities, as well as ensure that we grow more resilient together. By harnessing new technologies to enhance construction productivity, and optimising power consumption through the use of renewable energy and green transport, we are doing our bit to contribute

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to a more sustainable built environment. For instance, we have installed more than 4,000 solar panels at properties under our management in Hong Kong, generating more than 1.04 GWhr per annum, which is enough to support the power consumption of 315 three-person households.

I established Sino Group's Sustainability Committee in 2010, which became the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Steering Committee in 2020. Comprising executives from various business units, the ESG Steering Committee formulates sustainability strategies and assists the Board in the execution. We continue to make strides on the sustainability journey with the publication of our Sustainability Vision 2030 and Decarbonisation Blueprint, as well as the development of climate risk assessment tool, and the earning of a green building

certification. Other initiatives include harnessing renewable energy, driving digitalised property development, enhancing operational efficiency with the help of Artificial Intelligence-powered solutions, and joining global calls-to-action such as the United Nations Global Compact and Business Ambition for 1.5°C, among others.

We endeavour to serve those in need to make our community a more compassionate place. The Ng Teng Fong Charitable Foundation was established in 2010 in memory of my late grandfather. The Foundation focuses on supporting education, arts and culture, medical services, heritage, and other charitable causes across mainland China, Hong Kong, Singapore, and other parts of the world. Recent efforts include the Community Living Room initiative led by the Hong Kong Government, with the Pilot Programme launched in

December 2023. Feedback is very positive, with work on the second Community Living Room underway, demonstrating the possibilities of tripartite collaboration among the government, the business sector, and the community to support underprivileged families.

Sino Group and the Ng Teng Fong Charitable Foundation have also worked on Wellness Lodge, a transitional housing project for underprivileged families that are on the waiting list for public housing in Hong Kong. Wellness Lodge provides 85 units ranging from 125 to 190 square feet (11.6 to 17.7 square metres) in size at preferential rents. Each unit is equipped with an open concept kitchen, a bathroom, and a living and dining room. Accessible facilities are provided to cater to the needs of elderly residents and the physically challenged. The project also provides a farming area and cosy space for families to engage in various activities, in addition to a multi-purpose room for classes and STEM-related activities for children. The first batch of residents moved in earlier this year.

Heritage is another crucial part of our sustainability efforts. It defines who we are and bridges to the future. We have worked on a number of memorable heritage revitalisation projects, one notable example being the conversion of the historic Fullerton Building in Singapore into the beautiful hotel now known as The Fullerton Hotel Singapore, as well as The Fullerton Heritage project to develop the surrounding area into a world-

class and vibrant cultural and entertainment waterfront precinct.

In Hong Kong, our family set up the Hong Kong Heritage Conservation Foundation in 2008 to help preserve the city's collective memories and foster stronger community bonds through the revitalisation of historic buildings. One project that is particularly close to my heart is the revitalisation of the Old Tai O Police Station. Originally built in 1902 and now designated as a Grade II historic building, i.e., a building deemed by the Hong Kong Antiquities Advisory Board to be of special merit and should therefore be selectively preserved, the former marine police station has been given a second life as Tai O Heritage Hotel, an architectural gem that is uniquely Hong Kong. The hotel, which opened in March 2012, operates as a not-for-profit social enterprise, using local culinary specialities, and providing jobs for Tai O and Lantau residents. It has welcomed more than two million visitors from Hong Kong and overseas, and won over 30 local and international accolades, including the Award of Merit from the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation in 2013, making it Hong Kong's first UNESCO-awarded hotel.

Who has shaped your life, especially how you lead? As a third-generation business leader, what are your thoughts about your legacy?

I am humbled by the guidance of my grandfathers, my father, and

my uncle, as well as the trust they have placed in me. They have all shown exemplary leadership. My paternal grandfather, the late Ng Teng Fong, an outstanding businessman with foresight, had founded Sino Group and Far East Organization, and laid the foundation for our development. My maternal grandfather, the late Professor Yeoh Ghim Seng, Singapore's longest-serving Speaker of Parliament to date with a tenure of 19 years, taught me the importance of public service, especially helping the underprivileged. My father, Robert Ng, who is Chairman of Sino Group, imparted to me important values such as integrity, discipline, the quest for excellence, attention to detail, customer-centric ethos, and walking the extra mile. My uncle Philip Ng, CEO of Far East

Organization, is my mentor on the business landscape in Singapore and Southeast Asia.

We must hold on to our common vision of being inclusive, caring, cooperative, efficient, and hardworking. It is how our pioneers built our societies and launched one miracle after another. I see the staggering achievements and innovations our youth are capable of when given suitable opportunities. I am keen to pass on these family values to my children, and I share our family philosophies and my own experiences with my son to help prepare him for the future.

Our future lies in leveraging our strengths while building new capabilities and being connected to the world. Co-creating this future requires all of us to take the initiative together. [AMU](#)

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