Anxiety and performance: 
What's attention got to do with it?

Date: June 21, 2011 (Tuesday)
Time: 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
Venue: Room 624, Knowles Building, HKU
Speaker: Professor Michael Eysenck
Emeritus Professor
Birkbeck College, University of London

About the Speaker:
Michael Eysenck was Lecturer and then Reader in Psychology at Birkbeck College University of London between 1965 and 1987. Between 1987 and 2009 he was Professor of Psychology (Head of Department 1987 - 2005), and is now Emeritus Professor there. In addition, he has an appointment at Roehampton University that started in 2010. His main research area is anxiety and cognition, an area in which he has published approximately 100 journal articles and book chapters plus two research monographs. Overall, he has written 42 books, many of which are in the area of cognitive psychology, and have a grand total of over 200 publications. He is visiting our Department as an External Examiner.

Abstract:
What are the effects of anxiety during the performance of cognitive tasks? Various answers were suggested by me in Attentional Control Theory (Eysenck et al., 2007). The most important notion is that anxiety has less of an adverse effect on performance effectiveness (the quality of performance) than on processing efficiency (the relationship between performance effectiveness and the use of processing resources). More specifically, anxiety impairs the efficiency of two major executive functions: (1) the inhibitory function concerned with inhibiting task-irrelevant stimuli and responses and (2) the shifting function concerned with optimal allocation of attention within and between tasks. Several recent neuroimaging studies provide support for the theory. Future directions for research will be discussed.