

**DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF SOCIAL SCIENCES,
*honoris causa***

Dr Charles CHEN Yidan



Mr Chairman,

Perhaps the best words to describe Dr Charles CHEN Yidan, a world-renowned entrepreneur and philanthropist, is his Chinese name, Yidan, *yi pian dan xin*, which means a faithful heart. For decades, he has forged ahead unreservedly with a faithful heart for the public good. His passion for technology advancement and his life-long commitment to philanthropy, in particular in regard to education, have helped shape the future of our country and the world at large. Among the beneficiaries of his faithful heart are billions of people, local and afar.

Dr Chen's ancestral home is Chaoshan, he came from an ordinary family in Huizhou and grew up in Shenzhen. His grandmother influenced him profoundly. Though illiterate and poor, the humble lady believed in the power of education and championed the joy of giving. She raised Dr Chen's father to become the very first college graduate in their hometown village. She readily shared what she had with needy neighbours though often having barely enough for her own family.

Inspired by his grandmother, Dr Chen worked hard for China's highly competitive *gaokao* university entrance examinations and was admitted to Shenzhen University. He received a bachelor's degree in applied chemistry, went on to study economic law, and was awarded a master's degree from Nanjing University. In 2019, he received a doctorate in business administration from Singapore Management University.

In 1998, despite having a stable job, the entrepreneurial, far-sighted Dr Chen decided to start an internet business with his schoolmates, including Ma Huateng. They founded Tencent, China's internet pioneer, and Dr Chen served as the company's Chief Administration Officer (CAO). Tasked with the responsibility of ensuring the company was optimised for growth and diversification, he did an excellent job. Tencent soon became one of the most successful and

impactful internet companies in the world, revolutionising the way human beings interact with each other by making information technology accessible to everyone. It connects billions of people around the world, helping them keep in touch with friends and family, access transportation, pay for daily necessities, and even enjoy leisure and entertainment.

While the business has amassed a fortune for the founders, they have not forgotten the mission at the core of Tencent: use technology for good. Indeed “corporate social responsibility” and “sustainable development of society” were central to Tencent’s values from the beginning. The Tencent Charity Foundation, the first charity foundation in the internet industry, was established in June 2007 to use a portion of the company’s profits to support various charitable initiatives. Dr Chen, as a founder and the first chairman of the Foundation, developed a new philanthropy site, called Tencent Charity, for its WeChat social media platform, which soon become one of the world’s busiest and most effective platforms of its kind. Through Tencent Charity, he has empowered internet users to get involved in charity work and share the joy of giving. This initiative worked miracles in the fund-raising campaign for Wenchuan earthquake victims. It facilitated digital donations totalling more than RMB 23 million towards relief efforts.

Despite having a great profit-making business at hand, the low-key billionaire discovered his calling, perhaps inherited from his grandmother, to devote more time and energy to philanthropic activities, in particular education. Dr Chen believes that education unlocks endless possibilities and is the ultimate driving force for social progress. He is keen to do his part to improve education around the world to help people realise their dreams.

In 2013, Dr Chen stepped down as Tencent’s CAO, but remains Advisor Emeritus of Tencent, and Honorary Chairman of the Tencent Charity Foundation. He set up his own philanthropic organisation, called the Chen Yidan Foundation, to strive for diversity in the education ecosystem, which in turn, will contribute to the sustainable development of society.

The Foundation actively advances educational research to generate insights and foresights that can shed light on educational practices. It also proactively explores educational innovations and works closely with a variety of stakeholders to strengthen co-operation among schools, families and the rest of the community. In 2013, the Foundation jointly founded the Shenzhen Mingde Experimental School with the Futian District Government of Shenzhen City. The school is praised as a model of comprehensive education reform. Dr Chen has made continuous investments totalling RMB 2 billion in Wuhan College, which in 2015, was converted into

a private, non-profit-making university, focusing on “whole-person development”. Dr Chen believes that it is vitally important to explore new pathways to empower young aspiring university graduates to pursue their dreams. In 2018, he became a Founding Member of the Council of West Lake University.

Among all his philanthropic initiatives, Dr Chen is most proud of the Yidan Prize, the world's most-endowed education award. He recalls that on May 24, 2013, he wrote in his diary his wish to establish a prize that would transcend religion, race and borders, and which encourages deep reflections on our understanding of the universe and make positive contributions to humanity. This finally came true in 2016 when he launched the Yidan Prize Foundation, funded by an independent trust of HK\$2.5 billion.

With the mission of advancing global social development and creating a better world through education, Dr Chen hopes the Prize will inspire more innovative minds and change-makers from around the world to come together to shape the future of education through research and best practices. There are so far 13 awardees, and many impactful initiatives have been launched. For example, research by a winner in the field of literacy, neuroscience and education has enabled transformative educational interventions to benefit millions of children worldwide. Another winning project called Play Labs will enable some of the poorest and most vulnerable children in developing countries to have access to high-quality, affordable early education. Through his dedication to education, Dr Chen brings hope to many, lighting their way, nourishing their souls and turning their dreams into reality.

Dr Chen's contributions are not limited to education. In 2006, he initiated the setting up of the Shenzhen Copyright Society and became its Founding President. Now he is its Lifetime Honorary President. Besides professional involvement in the intellectual property sphere, Dr Chen has taken up positions in a number of community ventures, including that of Vice Chairman of the Copyright Society of China, Deputy President of the Committee of Corporate Citizenship, the China Association of Social Workers, and Member of the Policy & Resource Working Committee of the Internet Society of China. Since 2018, Dr Chen has been the Chairman of the Organising Committee of the China Internet Good Summit.

For his charity work, Dr Chen has received many accolades. To name just a few, he was the first internet entrepreneur to win the ‘China Charity Award’, ‘The Most Compassionate Philanthropist’, the ‘Top Ten Philanthropists of China’, the ‘Godfather of Internet Philanthropy

in China', and 'The Pioneer of China's Internet Philanthropy'. He appeared on the cover of the May-June 2017 issue of *Forbes China* magazine as China's most charitable man. In 2017, Dr Chen made it to the top of the Forbes China Philanthropy List, donating RMB 2.3 billion to charitable causes.

Dr Chen was conferred the degree of Doctor of Humanities, *honoris causa*, by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University in 2017, and of Doctor of Social Science, *honoris causa*, by The Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2020.

Mr Chairman, as we all know, education matters. Dr Chen sees education as the foundation of progress and growth, for individuals, society and the world. Hong Kong Metropolitan University indeed shares the same vision. The University's new motto, "Transcendence through Erudition and Renewal", echoes Dr Chen's focus on life-long learning, students' all-round achievement, and the sustainable development of society. We keenly look forward to partnering with Dr Chen in the future to create a better world through education.

Mr Chairman, in recognition of Dr Chen's outstanding contribution to technology and education, which has significantly benefited mankind, I feel privileged and honoured to invite our President to present Dr Charles Chen Yidan for the conferment of the degree of Doctor of Social Sciences, *honoris causa*.

Citation to be delivered by Professor Amy Lee Wai-sum