

Mainland's higher education reformed, academic leaders nurtured as "Cheung Kong Scholars Programme" Celebrates 10th Anniversary

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(Beijing and Hong Kong, 5 December 2008) Mainland China's higher education standard and competitiveness have been enhanced, while society's respect for knowledge and scholars heightened, thanks to a bold move made 10 years ago that purported to appeal and recruit renowned research and academic intellectuals from all around the world.

The Cheung Kong Scholars Programme, established by the Li Ka Shing Foundation (LKSF) and the Ministry of Education (MoE) in 1998 to help support the country's pressing need to foster innovation and higher education reform, celebrated its 10th anniversary today at the Great Hall of People in Beijing, with LKSF Chairman Mr Li Ka-shing officiating at the award presentation ceremony.

Also attending today's ceremony were State Councilor Liu Yandong, Education Minister Zhou Ji and esteemed officials from the Ministry of Education.

The Programme has helped attract and retain talent and cultivated innovation. Mr Li was pleased with the programme's accomplishments and had high hopes for the contributions the scholars would make to the country.

Speaking at the presentation ceremony, Mr Li said, "I cannot share with you how happy I am that the promise embodied by this programme was fully realised. The immense change it ignited, as witnessed in society's heightened respect for knowledge and scholars, and in academia's invigorated enthusiasm and towering achievements, could never have been fully imagined."

Mr Li also took the opportunity to praise the great achievements that the Cheung Kong scholars had brought to the country. He compared the efforts of the programme's scholars to a powerful turbine, powering new discoveries and new possibilities to extend the boundaries of science in universities and research organisations throughout the Mainland.

Urging the pursuit of "personal dedication", Mr Li said, "In our quest for success in our own micro-world, we must never lose sight of the contributions we can make to the macro-goals of our country and mankind. It is where we are doing what we can with the capabilities we have and willingly fulfilling our duties and obligations to our nation and mankind that we will bring forth true hope and effective change to forge a fair, just, creative and harmonious society."

This year saw three renowned scholars awarded Cheung Kong Scholar's Achievement Awards – Professor Chan Hsiao-chang from the Department of Physiology of the Chinese University of Hong Kong was given the "Life Science Award", Professor Ma Jun from the Municipal and Environmental Engineering Department of the Harbin University was given the "Engineering Science Award", while Dr Jiang Guibin, Director of the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Research Center for Eco-Environmental Sciences was granted the "Environmental Sciences Award".

The three award-winning scholars have made terrific achievements in their respective fields. Professor Chan is a leading authority in epithelial cell-related multidisciplinary research and has contributed significantly to a number of important discoveries. These discoveries have not only shed light on the understanding of how epithelial secretions affect our bodily functions, reproduction in particular, but have also provided leads to the development of new strategies for diagnosis and treatment of infertility as well as for contraception.

Professor Ma has provided some highly efficient solutions for drinking water treatment and polluted water treatment, while Dr Jiang has conducted systematic researches on pollutant substances, conversions, metabolisms and toxications.

The Cheung Kong Scholars Programme was jointly established by the MoE and the LKSF to groom young intellectuals to become academic leaders of international standards. The total investment in this Programme approximates RMB454 million over the past 10 years, of which RMB124 million was funded by Mr Li and RMB330 million from the ministry.

The Programme has been responsible for setting up specially appointed professorship posts in various universities throughout the country and has attracted a large group of overseas Chinese to return to the Mainland to work in academic and research positions. It has also created the Cheung Kong Scholar's Achievement Awards to give recognition to academics for outstanding achievements in their fields of research.

Beginning in 2005, the Programme has been expanded beyond the Mainland to cover tertiary institutions in Hong Kong and Macau, with past awardees including Professor Joseph Sung, Professor Dennis Lo and Professor Chan Hsiao-Chang of the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

The Programme was changed from an integrated rating system to a specialised award system in 2007. First prizes of RMB 1 million each are awarded to the winners of their disciplines that include Environmental Sciences, Information Sciences, Engineering Sciences, Mathematical Sciences and Life Sciences.

Currently, 1,308 Cheung Kong scholars are recruited for 115 higher education institutions in 24 provinces, of which 905 are specially appointed professors and 403 are lecturing professors. Among them, 17 Chinese scholars have received Cheung Kong Scholar's Achievement Awards.

As of last year, 38 Cheung Kong scholars were selected as academicians of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Chinese Academy of Engineering, of which six were awarded the Third World Academy of Science academicians, two were awarded the United States National Academy of Science academicians. Another 81 scholars became chief scientists heading national projects.

Cheung Kong scholars have also made tremendous achievements in research. About 93 research results have won National Natural Science Awards, 27 have been given National Innovation Awards and 132 were granted National Technology Progress Awards. Meanwhile, 42 Cheung Kong scholars have been given a total of 65 Higher Education's Humanities and Social Sciences Achievement Awards and many scholars have won prestigious international awards.

Over the past 10 years, the Cheung Kong Scholars Programme has achieved international acclaim as it has supported the nation's development and utilised international experience to keep pace with society's changing needs.

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