

## Honorary Fellow A Citation

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### Mr Choi Park-lai

In ancient China, soothsayers were called *rizhe*. In the 'Biographies of Soothsayers' in the *Historical Records*, divination was described as a study of astronomy, time of the day and the seasons, and that it was rooted in honour, morality and virtues. The soothsayer had to understand his methods truly to be able to predict, foresee and enlighten. It required great knowledge and great virtues to be a soothsayer.

A native of Shunde, Guangdong province, Mr Choi Park-lai was born in the town of Longjiang in 1922. His grandfather Choi Chui-ba was a student of *Xue Hai Tang*, a college in Guangdong in the late Qing dynasty. He was particularly outstanding in astronomy and mathematics. He was known for his research into Chinese astronomy and calendars. He compiled the calendar *Qi Zheng Jing Wei Li Shu* and founded the soothsaying establishment Gen Po Tong. Choi Chui-ba was known as the foremost among Guangdong's three most respected soothsayers. He passed his knowledge onto his eldest son Choi Lim-fong, who later succeeded and led Gen Po Tong. Choi Park-lai, the son of Choi Lim-fong, later inherited the family's soothsaying knowledge. Choi Park-lai was privy to the family's specialism from childhood, learning astronomy and mathematics from his father. He also assisted in the compilation of calendars. Later, he mastered both mathematics and astronomy, studying under the famous mathematician Zhang Zhaosi as well as the astronomer Professor Zhang Yun, who was the President of the Sun Yat-sen University and the head of its astronomy department. Choi Park-lai inherited the mantle of Gen Po Tong from his father, and his compilation of the Chinese almanac *Tung Shing* has been immensely popular. He moved to Hong Kong in 1952 and carried it forward.

*Tung Shing* has long been popular in Hong Kong. In Mr Choi's version, on the opening page is inscribed, 'Choi Gen Po Tong, compiled by Choi Park-lai'. In Hong Kong, Mr Choi's *Tung Shing* is the only edition available. The book is an almanac featuring two sections – calendar and predictions. The calendar section includes both Western and Chinese calendars: the former is based on one rotation of the earth around the sun to outline the climate and the seasons and the latter is based on the cycle of the moon to demarcate the first and fifteenth day of the lunar month. Mr Choi's extensive knowledge unites both the Chinese and Western calendars. He also draws from astronomy and the seasons as well as his deep understanding of the concepts of five elements and eight trigrams. His great knowledge and long-term devotion to compiling calendars and almanacs ensure the quality of his *Tung Shing*,

which is sold by the millions each year, with readers from every corner of the world. Traditionally in Chinese societies, people consult the *Tung Shing* to choose a date and time for marriage, moving, burial or other important events. Mr Choi's short annotations compiled in the *Tung Shing* often give his readers useful guidance. His *Tung Shing* is hugely influential among Chinese communities today, contributing much to the continuation of traditional Chinese culture. In 2013, *Choi Gen Po Tong Chinese Almanac* was named an intangible cultural heritage by the People's Government of Guangdong Province, for its 'research value in science, astronomy, folk culture and history and its influence on Chinese communities'. The provincial leadership was proud of the *Tung Shing* and commended it highly. Mr Choi's knowledge and insight are greatly valued and he is considered as teacher and master by many. Mr Choi is often consulted on the commencement or opening date of major construction projects by the government or commercial developers, including the opening of Tsing Ma Bridge and the placement of the bronze lions outside the The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited Main Building. In 2004, Mr Choi was invited by the China Architectural Culture Centre of the Ministry of Construction of the People's Republic of China to give a lecture on the relationship between traditional *feng shui* and modern architecture at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. Mr Choi's contribution to the promotion of traditional Chinese culture is significant.

Morals and virtues are important to soothsayers. As Mr Choi's knowledge brings him wealth and influence, he looks back on his difficult childhood and is greatly involved in providing for children, the elderly and communities in need. Driven by the mission of 'helping the poor, promoting education', Mr Choi set up the Hong Kong Shun Lung Yan Chak Foundation in 2006 and has since been acting as its Chairman. Since its establishment, the foundation has provided necessities to the aged and those in need as well as outpatient subsidies to the poor. It also supported the construction of two hospitals in rural areas in Guangdong province, and a number of non-profit schools in Hong Kong, Yunnan province and Cambodia. The foundation is also active in promoting traditional Chinese religions and culture, encouraging academic research and deepening general knowledge in these areas. His contribution to charity and cultural continuation has benefitted many in our society.

Mr Choi places great emphasis on education and has been a staunch supporter of The Chinese University of Hong Kong and its development. Over the years, he has made generous donations to the University and Wu Yee Sun College, establishing multiple scholarships and bursaries. He has also supported student internship programmes, I-CARE Programme and the purchase of educational equipment, benefiting students and staff. He also gave his time and expertise generously to many different charities, including as an Academic Adviser for the Tung Wah Group

of Hospitals, a President of the Kowloon Central Lions Club, Chairman of the Hong Kong Shun Tak Fraternal Association and the Federation of Hong Kong Guangdong Community Organizations, among others. Mr Choi's outstanding contribution to Chinese communities around the world was recognized by the World Outstanding Chinese Award, presented by the United World Chinese Association in 2008, and an Honorary Citizenship granted by the People's Government of Foshan Municipality, Guangdong Province in 2011.

Mr Choi is a learned specialist in calendar and almanac. He is a respected geomancer among Chinese around the world and a charitable person of great virtues. He has made outstanding and long-lasting contribution to the continuation of Chinese culture and has touched lives of Chinese communities internationally. He is devoted to improving the situation of those living in poverty in Hong Kong and mainland China, as well as donated generously to the city's educational bodies. His generosity in sharing his knowledge and resource has won the society's admiration and honour. Mr Chairman, it is my great honour to present to you Mr Choi Park-lai for the award of an Honorary Fellowship of the University.