

Honorary Fellow A Citation



Dr Chen Fong Ching, BA, MA, PhD

Having excelled in scholarship, he took up leadership roles, and while burdened by administration, he has never for a moment abandoned scholarship. This is an apt summary of Dr Chen Fong Ching's career of 40 years at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Dr Chen is an outstanding scholar, and a distinguished university administrator. Much of the reputation and prestige that the Chinese University enjoys nowadays in the higher education community worldwide must be attributed to the strategic and well-coordinated efforts exercised by Dr Chen in the University's central administration.

Dr F C Chen pursued his studies in the United States and took his first degree in Physics at Harvard University and a doctorate in the same discipline at Brandeis University. In 1966 he joined the academic staff of the Physics Department of the Chinese University and, for 14 years, devoted himself to research in theoretical physics and polymer physics, producing a remarkable range of research papers, at the same time initiating hundreds of students into the realm of physics through his lectures. In 1980 he was appointed Secretary of the University and stayed in office for six years. During his tenure Dr Chen introduced extensive reforms to the University Administration, devising innovative policies and measures beneficial to long-term development of the University in areas such as academic policies and institutional management. Of these the most remarkable and applauded must be the Provisional Acceptance Scheme, whereby the University was able to draw the best school-leavers to its fold and to greatly enhance the academic quality of the undergraduate intake. This measure has had a lasting and profound impact on the development of the University, and to this day the wisdom, foresight and courage of Dr F C Chen in drawing up the Scheme still draw admiration from academic administrators in Hong Kong.

In 1986 Dr F C Chen was appointed by the Chinese University to the post of Director of the Institute of Chinese Studies, and has since spared no effort in "combining tradition and modernity, and bringing together China and the West." To some, Chinese Culture is a simple notion without much substance. To Dr Chen, Chinese Culture may be likened to a large bag of treasures. These treasures interact with each other in constant change, renewal and revitalization. He once said, "If a culture consists only of relics from the past, then however refined these relics may be, they can only be admired in a museum and cannot procreate and renew. A living culture must be able to procreate." With his remarkable vision he established in 1990, with support from his colleagues Professors Jin Guantao and Liu Qingfeng, the bimonthly journal *Twenty-first Century* as a forum for the exchange of views and opinions among Chinese intellectuals around the world. The publication was also intended to bridge the chasm between Eastern and Western cultures, and that across academic disciplines, from the point of view of the humane letters and the social sciences, as a way to foster the continuous growth of Chinese Culture. *Twenty-first Century* soon earned the support of scholars worldwide and, 16 years



later, is still essential reading to Chinese intellectuals all over the world. He then set up the Research Centre for Contemporary Chinese Culture at the Institute, through which eminent academics have been invited to visit and give different kinds of lectures and seminars, the most frequently featured topics being the interface between the traditional and the modern, and the interaction between national cultures and Western civilisations. During this phase of his career Dr Chen continued to publish books and treatises, on subjects related to comparative modernisation processes, the relationship between science and technology and modernisation, theories of nationalism and the philosophy of science.

The advent of the computer is one of the greatest discoveries of the West in the modern age, and electronically processed texts provide an unprecedented tool, comprehensive and accurate, for indexing and compiling ancient works in cultural research. Dr F C Chen working with Professor D C Lau, Professor Jao Tsung I and a number of young academics, set up the Computerised Database of Ancient Chinese Texts at the Institute of Chinese Studies dedicated to the conversion of Chinese classics into the electronic format. The Database now holds works spanning over 3,000 years and amounting to 60 million characters, all readily accessible and searchable through the internet. The collection of works comprises two major categories, i.e., what is generally known as Extant Texts and Texts from Unearthed Artefacts. The computerisation of the Extant Texts began in 1988, and works include classics from Pre-Qin periods, from the two Han Dynasties, as well as the Wei, Jin and the Northern and Southern Dynasties. Work on Unearthed Artifacts began in 1994, and the texts include those inscribed on oracle bones, bronze vessels, silk and bamboo. All material input into the database was subject to the most meticulous editorial and textual studies and the results of such research have been compiled, indexed and published as indices, CDs and electronic versions running to over a hundred titles in all. The Database has also been placed on the internet for easy access. In this project Dr F C Chen integrates traditional bibliographical studies with innovative technology to create a quick and user-friendly search system for ancient Chinese texts, and the influence of his efforts on future research in sinology and Chinese cultural studies is bound to be long-lasting and far-reaching.

Over his four decades at the Chinese University Dr F C Chen has engaged himself in teaching, administration and cultural research. In any of these three positions, his main orientations have remained the extension of his personal learning, and the objectives and direction of the University's long-term development. He has a great passion for the Chinese University and, in 2004, donated to the University a bronze statute of the late founding Vice-Chancellor, Dr Choh-ming Li, in recognition of Dr Li's pioneering contribution to the University and to higher education in Hong Kong. The bronze statue now graces the courtyard of the Institute of Chinese Studies, where in the midst of the meandering ponds and verdant trees, generations of staff, students and visitors can pay homage to Dr Li.

Dr F C Chen comes from a learned family and his wife, Ms Lam Ngar Sheung, was for many years the principal of a leading school in Hong Kong. Together they have taught and



nurtured the growth of countless successful scholars over the course of years. In 2002 Dr Chen retired from the University but did not rest his efforts. He is now an Honorary Senior Research Fellow of the Institute of Chinese Studies, a Senior College Tutor of United College, and an Honorary Professor of the Department of Physics. In 2004, Dr Chen was awarded the Zhu Kezhen History of Science Visiting Professorship by the Institute of History of Natural Science of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Mr Chairman, may I now present Dr Chen Fong Ching for the award of an Honorary Fellowship.