

# Honoured for Devotion and Contributions to International Education

## YCIS Director Dr Betty Chan Receives HKIED Honorary Fellowship



YCIS Director Dr Betty Chan receives HKIED Honorary Fellowship for distinguished contributions to international education

“Diligence, thrift, modesty and honesty”, simple words with such modest, yet reverberating resonance; these four words encompass the founding motto of Yew Chung International School (YCIS), which reflects the ethos of the school and the legacy of its founder, Madam Tsang Chor-hang.

Madam Tsang founded the school in 1932 and rooted its humble values in the Christian faith, as well as the belief that China would one day become the country of the future. Madam Tsang’s daughter, Dr Betty Chan Po-king, recently conferred with an Honorary Fellowship from the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIED), has preserved her mother’s bequest, but has also paved the way for her own lasting legacy.

Dr Chan’s long-standing commitment to education and YCIS has garnered masses of admiration and respect. Her list of achievements and contributions continues to grow, and her innovations to early childhood education (ECE) have been transformative. Ask anyone who knows of Dr Chan’s accomplishments, and they will undoubtedly say she is an upstanding individual who never ceases to amaze.

Her first feats in education began in the early 1970s, when she took over as Director of YCIS during her mother’s later years. At that time, Hong Kong’s education system was bogged down in exam and textbook oriented teaching, no doubt a tired and outdated pedagogy.

Farewell to dusty textbooks and tedious exams, Dr Chan began her radical overhaul of the ECE, in which “play-based” and individualised learning became the heart of education. The child is the centre of education; freedom, growth and spontaneity are some of the key ingredients in nurturing YCIS’s global citizens of

tomorrow. What seemed unorthodox at the time eventually became avant-garde, and soon enough it came to be the formula for modern day pedagogy.

Dr Chan was among the first to integrate music into the school system, as a means of intellectual development for children, a move that was largely unrivalled at the time. Now at YCIS, violin lessons are provided to all the four- and five-year-old children in its whole-day programme.

Today, scientists have discovered that music training at a young age can significantly enhance a child’s spatial-temporal reasoning skills, all of which are the hallmarks of strong mathematical skills, memory span and cerebral development. It’s plain to see how ahead of the curve Dr Chan was, and it is this very innovation that sets Dr Chan apart, and thus YCIS from many schools.

Dr Chan earned her first two degrees in education from the University of Hawaii, and was awarded a scholarship from the American Association of University Women. She went on to study for her PhD at the University of Illinois, but had to return to Hong Kong due to unforeseen circumstances. She subsequently completed her doctorate at the Union Institute and University.

Dr Chan’s accomplishments aren’t limited to YCIS and Hong Kong; her name and reputation have spanned the United States, where she manages and directs a wide array of education associations. In 2010, she also received an honorary degree from University of Illinois, one of her alma maters, in recognition of her work on early childhood education and contributions to all tiers of education.

Even YCIS has an international presence, with multiple sites in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing, Chongqing, Qingdao and Silicon Valley of US, of which over 6,000 students spanning 50 nationalities make up the student body.

Multiculturalism at YCIS may very well be Dr Chan’s lasting legacy, as the school has worked hard to maintain its cultural balance of the East and the West in its curriculum, thus creating a strong bilingual environment for its students.

However, its curriculum not only focuses on creating bilingual students, but on creating a holistic syllabus that is an equal blend of Western and Eastern educational models. This pioneering model serves to ensure that students are immersed in both the language and the culture of these two forces.

As well as instilling the importance of cultural diversity, YCIS offers courses of study in Eastern and Western philosophy to its students. Students are encouraged to act as global citizens, and imbue a sense of competitiveness and modesty, just as Madam Tsang envisioned for YCIS all those years ago.

On the subject of Dr Chan’s conferment, the HKIED has said, “Dr Betty Chan Po-king has dedicated her life to education. Thousands of young minds in Hong Kong and beyond have

benefited from her wealth of experience and knowledge of pedagogy which she has shared with legions of teachers... Despite her heavy responsibilities and demanding schedule, Dr Chan devotes herself to serving the education and wider community.”

Dr Chan continues to establish educational precedents even today. In 1989, she chaired UNICEF’s first international conference on “Childhood in the 21st Century”, which was certainly a landmark event. In 2004, she was the first keynote speaker of Chinese origin at the Alliance for International Education conference in Dusseldorf, Germany. Later on in 2006, she founded the Hong Kong Chapter of the Pacific Early Childhood Education Research Association and was elected as the International President the previous year.

It is Dr Chan’s passion, drive and commitment that have been the key ingredients to her success, as well as YCIS’s advancements. The school continues to grow by embracing the favourable qualities of its leader. In its inception and early years, it prided itself on its diligence and humility, and under Dr Chan’s leadership, it has adopted her infectious sense of commitment, drive and global-mindedness.

She shared her vision for YCIS’s future in the next decade. “Over the next decade, I hope that YCIS will firmly establish itself as a globally recognised network of top-quality international schools, with a strong reputation for bilingual and multicultural education. We would like to share our unique philosophy and pioneering educational model more widely, and for it to be adopted by different countries and cultures.”

She further added, “Global education should not be confined to international schools alone. All schools should strive to provide the best possible education for the next generation, and at YCIS, we will continue to push boundaries, and aim to remain at the forefront of the industry.”



YCIS ensures that students are immersed in both English and Chinese, as well as the Eastern and Western cultures



Dr Chan’s innumerable achievements and contributions to education, earned her the respect from around the world