

Speech by CE at Yidan Prize Awards Presentation Ceremony 2021 (English only)

Following is the speech by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at the Yidan Prize Awards Presentation Ceremony 2021 today (December 5):

Dr Chen (Founder of the Yidan Prize, Dr Charles Chen), laureates, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening. Let me first welcome this annual award presentation ceremony of the Yidan Prize back to its face-to-face form, since the last one held in 2018. Thanks to the Hong Kong community's concerted efforts in combating the COVID-19 pandemic, we are resuming normalcy in daily social activities and for me, it has been such a pleasure these days attending summits and conferences as well as going to concerts and visiting museums. Unfortunately, because of stringent quarantine rules, especially in preventing this new variant of Omicron from spreading into the community, our two recipients of the Yidan Prize could not join us in person tonight.

The Yidan Prize was inaugurated in 2017 – the year when I took office as the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. I have been attending the annual award presentation ceremonies since then in whatever form it took, because I share the vision of the Yidan Prize and admire the dedication and commitment of Charles in creating a better world through education. Indeed, in his letter inviting me to present the Yidan Prize to laureates this year, Charles thanked me for being a believer in the mission of the Yidan Prize.

Since becoming the Chief Executive, I have been advocating a vision for education which is to ensure that our children will grow up to be persons with a sense of national identity and a love for our nation, and to become honest and sincere persons with a good character and a sense of responsibility towards society. Following my belief that expenditure on education is the most meaningful investment of the Government for the future, my Government has boosted recurrent education spending by 26 per cent over the last four years, now amounting to over HK\$100 billion, and accounting for about one-fifth of the Government's total recurrent expenditure. The additional money has benefited the education system at all levels, from kindergarten to senior secondary and post-secondary education.

However, events during the riots in the latter half of 2019 with over 4 000 students arrested for illegal acts, and many more students chanting slogans attempting to subvert the State and intimidating people holding different opinions have caused us, our senior education officials in particular, to recognise that the role of Government in education is not only confined to the provision of resources; Government has a vital and

indispensable role in various aspects of education. I am therefore much enlightened by the work of the two recipients of the 2021 Yidan Prize – Professor Eric A. Hanushek, and Dr Rukmini Banerji, and wish to first express my gratitude to members of the judging panels who had to conduct their deliberations online in view of the restrictions posed by the pandemic.

Professor Hanushek is this year's laureate in Education Research. He is a leader in bridging the fields of economic analysis and education. He has identified connections between improvements in the quality of education and long-term economic and social progress, and translated high-quality data into strategies that policymakers can employ, including how to think about, how to manage, and how to finance their education systems to improve learning outcomes. His exemplary research has helped countries around the world develop better and fairer education systems. I am particularly attracted to his focus on teacher value-added and the importance of teacher quality. In Hong Kong, we too believe teachers are critically important to quality education. Since the 2020/21 school year, we have put in place a more structured and robust programme to strengthen professional development amongst our teaching staff on a wide range of areas, including professional values and conduct, worldwide education development, as well as national education. We have achieved an all-graduate teaching force since the 2019/20 school year. But evaluation of these measures is clearly something we would benefit from education research that Professor Hanushek has been engaged in.

The winner of this year's Yidan Prize for Education Development is Dr Banerji. She is a celebrated champion of equality in education and literacy for all. As the Chief Executive Officer of Pratham Education Foundation, she leads her team in developing the "Teaching at the Right Level" approach to help children learn better by grouping them according to their learning needs rather than age or grade and focusing on foundational skills rather than the curriculum. This student-centric approach has worked its wonders in many parts of the world, consistently improving the outcomes of teaching and learning.

The impacts of the work of Professor Hanushek and Dr Banerji are a call upon other researchers and educators to unmoor themselves from established perspectives and break new grounds with perseverance and dedication. I wish our laureates every success in their future quests, and it will indeed be my honour to witness more breakthroughs from these great minds in the years to come.

Finally, my sincere gratitude goes to Dr Chen and all those associated with the Yidan Prize for yet another successful edition of the Prize. As a new year is approaching, may I wish you all a most rewarding year ahead.

Thank you.