Professor Yu XIE
Citation

Family life, marriage, social standing and cultural behavior form the basic fabric of every one of our lives. Yet how can we understand these phenomena in order to make the best decisions regarding both individual life courses and public policies? And how can we collect the solid evidence to inform our choices? To these globally significant issues, Professor Yu Xie, a pioneering sociologist at the University of Michigan, has devoted his life. The answers he has arrived at have created new perspectives and quantitative methods with which to study the "world of reality", as he has termed it.

Demonstrating the wide applicability of his work, Professor Xie has published on intercultural friendship, income inequality, educational expectations and attainment, intergenerational social mobility, marriage and cohabitation, and the immigrant experience in the United States, among other important and often sensitive subjects. A 2003 co-written book, *Women in Science*, became a worldwide talking point after it was controversially interpreted at a conference in 2005 by then Harvard President Lawrence Summers.

Professor Xie's own life story is a notable case study in charting the impact of social change on individuals. Born in Jiangsu, he grew up during the Cultural Revolution. After being sent down to the countryside with his parents, his education was largely put on hold. But the experience lit the flame of curiosity about the workings of society and its impact on people, a passion that continues to drive him onward today.

Unusually for a sociologist, he graduated in 1982 from Shanghai University of Technology with a degree in metallurgical engineering. This was in line with the demand for technical expertise in China as the country pursued its "open-door" policy of economic development. However, the nuts and bolts of society were where Professor Xie's heart lay, and when he was selected for graduate studies overseas, he chose history of science as well as sociology as his new direction in the United States. He ended up with two master's degrees and a PhD, all from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

After completing his doctoral studies in 1989, the young academic moved to the University of Michigan. There he developed his multidisciplinary outlook to advance social research methods, exploring the differences between social science and natural science. As all individuals differ both inherently and responding their environments, human beings cannot be properly understood through the "typological" thinking that characterizes natural science. Instead, Professor Xie has distilled the type of "population thinking" that he favors into three basic principles of social science research: variability, social groupings, and social context.

As Director of the Quantitative Methodology Program at Michigan's Survey Research Center, he has undertaken rigorous, evidence-based studies that apply these three principles, leading to the development of discrete choice models for friendship choice and causal inference based on observational data, while his log-multiplicative layer effect model has proved particularly valuable for comparative tabular analysis.

Attesting to the significance of his work, he is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Academia Sinica and, an unusual accolade for a sociologist, the US National Academy of Sciences.

In the past decade, Professor Xie has striven to satisfy the need in today's China for higher quality data on the immense social changes of recent times. Working closely with Peking University as the Principal Investigator of the China Family Panel Studies (CFPS), he has been deeply involved in building the infrastructure for social science research, designing and overseeing a ground-breaking national study. The study, launched in 2010, follows nearly 15,000 households and more than 42,000 individuals each year to track areas such as migration, health and family life and provide the data vital for policy decisions and future research.

Professor Xie is also doing his part to foster the new generation of social scientists in the US, China, and at HKUST, where he is an Adjunct Professor in the Division of Social Science. A kind and patient teacher, he constantly seeks to share his enthusiasm, expertise and far-reaching network with the students he supervises. In

another significant venture for HKUST and Hong Kong, he is working with the University's researchers on a similar household panel study in Hong Kong, a project that can generate solid data for social science and public policy research on education, healthcare, and employment among other essential areas of our community.

Mr Acting Council Chairman, on behalf of the Council of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, I have the high honor of presenting to you, Professor Yu Xie, Otis Dudley Duncan Distinguished University Professor of Sociology, Statistics and Public Policy at the University of Michigan for the award of Doctor of Social Sciences *honoris causa*.