

Tan Sri Dato' Seri Michelle YEOH Choo-Kheng

Citation

Ms. Michelle YEOH Choo-Kheng, a true icon and inspiration to many, has made history as the first Asian to be awarded the coveted Academy Award for Best Actress, putting Hong Kong movies in the global limelight. Yet, it is not just her groundbreaking achievements that make her a true marvel. Her can-do spirit and commitment to promoting equality and sustainable development are a testament to her unrelenting dedication to creating a better world for all, aligning seamlessly with the values of HKUST.

Born into a Chinese family in Malaysia, Ms. Yeoh began learning ballet at the tender age of four. Sadly, a back injury during her study at the Hammond School of Ballet in England ended her pursuit of dance. But this setback unknowingly set the stage for her future success. Returning to Asia, she was crowned Miss Malaysia in 1983, embarking on a journey that would culminate in her latest landmark achievement - winning an Oscar.

Ms. Yeoh's big break in the movie business came when she shot a TV commercial in Hong Kong and landed a starring role in *Yes, Madam!* (1985). Despite having no prior martial arts training, her dance background proved to be a valuable asset for her to learn moves quickly on set. Her relentless training in the gym enabled her to perform most of her own stunts. Further

success in local blockbusters such as *Police Story 3: Super Cop* (1992) followed. Soon, she was also stealing scenes in international megahits like the James Bond movie *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997), and Ang LEE's martial arts epic, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000).

Refusing to settle for stereotypically Asian roles, Ms. Yeoh boldly held out for more fully rounded parts such as dimension-hopping laundromat owner Evelyn WANG in *Everything Everywhere All At Once* (2022). Garlanded with not only an Oscar but also Golden Globe and Screen Actors Guild Awards, her superb performance in that film has blazed a trail for Asian acting talent of both genders. But her contributions extend beyond her profession. In her Oscar's acceptance speech, she courageously urged other women not to "let anyone tell you you're past your prime," inspiring countless individuals to pursue their dreams.

Ms. Yeoh's dedication to inclusiveness and diversity resonates with the core values of HKUST. After experiencing firsthand the devastating earthquake that struck Nepal in April 2015, she began tirelessly advocating better protection for the poorer families, women, and girls disproportionately impacted by such disasters.

Appointed as a Goodwill Ambassador for the

United Nations Development Program the following year, Ms. Yeoh has been mobilizing support for the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with a focus on ending inequality, promoting gender equality, and fighting poverty. Equally passionate about wildlife and public health, she traveled to the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding in China to help launch the Pandas for the Global Goals campaign in 2016.

When the COVID-19 pandemic reached its peak in 2020, she appeared in the *Nations United: Urgent Solutions for Urgent Times* film, calling for immediate action to address the pandemic and its impacts. This resonated strongly with HKUST's resounding efforts to combat the pandemic through groundbreaking research and community services to help the most vulnerable during these trying times. Her recent appointment as a member of the International Olympic Committee in October 2023 has endowed her with the power to promote global understanding and goodwill through sports.

Ms. Yeoh's illustrious career has been marked by over 70 prestigious Asian and international acting honors. Her tireless promotion of SDGs also saw her presented with the Humanitarian of the Year Award from the United Nations Association of New York in 2016.

Ms. Yeoh's deep appreciation for her cultural heritage in Malaysia and Hong Kong, which served as the launchpad for her rise to international stardom, is a testament to her gratitude towards the places and people that have shaped her journey. Throughout the years, she has been giving back to Hong Kong by supporting various charity organizations and elevating Hong Kong's film industry to new heights of global recognition.

In her own humble words, "Learning to fall teaches you how to land. And learning to land gives you the courage to jump higher." Her journey is a shining example of the transformative power of resilience and compassion, a true inspiration and role model for our students.

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, Ms. Michelle Yeoh, the Oscar-winning actress, for the award of Doctor of Humanities *honoris causa*.