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# Chen Yidan: Educating for the future

28 Jun 2019

*Tencent's co-founder commits to education and calls for increased collaboration between academia, policymakers and industry to tackle future challenges*

What do Google, Cisco, and Netflix have in common? Other than being Silicon Valley heavyweights, these companies were all founded by graduates of Stanford University.

While the exploits of Sergey Brin and Larry Page – and Peter Thiel (eBay), Jerry Yang (Yahoo!) etc. – are often celebrated as examples of innovation, Tencent (腾讯) co-founder **Charles Chen Yidan** (陈一丹) urges the need to look beyond “a single lightbulb moment”.

“Innovation is never a solo endeavor,” said Chen in a speech at the recent SMU Visionary Series event titled “*Zero to infinity: How education unlocks possibilities* (从零到无限: 教育如何开拓无限可能)”. “Great innovation does not take place within one field of expertise but is the product of cross partnerships between different domains.”

Chen, who launched the [Yidan Prize](#) in 2016 “to create a better world through education”, held up Stanford’s role as the “farm system” for Silicon Valley as “a perfect example of how schools and the private sector thrive together and reinforces innovation in each other’s DNA”. He adds:

*“That is why if education is to fulfil its role as the mother of innovation, educators and policy makers need a clear picture of what inputs are being fed to the education ecosystem. How do we create a collaborative environment that supports visionary new ideas? We need to increase cross-pollination between industry, academia and the public and third sectors. We need to create a pipeline of young people who are ready to take the lead in an increasingly interconnected world.”*

## IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

Among the skills needed for youth to excel in the 21st century, the Yidan Prize Foundation lists the following:

- Leadership
- Entrepreneurial
- Interdisciplinary
- Digital & Technical
- Creative & Analytical
- Global Awareness & Civic Education

To that end, The Yidan Prize Foundation created the Worldwide Educating for the Future Index (WEFFI) “to facilitate an actionable way forward for a better, more equitable future: A future where young people are ready to tackle the evolving challenges of work and society”.

“The goal of the index is to provide a useful benchmark, comprehensive data and independent analysis for policymakers and educators around the world,” Chen explained. “The index measures three pillars of education systems—policy approaches, teaching conditions and broader gauges of societal openness. It remains the only major ranking to assess a wide range of inputs to the education ecosystems, instead of a narrow focus on outputs such as examination results.

“The index is not designed to offer a ranking of superior education systems, but a tool for assessing the complex functioning of the key ingredients that make up a future-proof education ecosystem. This is how the success of one country’s work can benefit many.”

While pointing to three countries – Singapore (policy), New Zealand (teaching), and Finland (socio-economic) – that do particularly well in educating for the future, Chen stressed that “it is important to also note that future-oriented education is not exclusive to wealthy economies”.

“Based on the index results,” Chen revealed, “Ghana leads among low-income economies, based on the strength of its strategy to teach future skills and adoption of supportive assessment frameworks.

“On the other hand, the UK provides an example on the importance of investing in the continuing education of teachers, as the quality of teacher education bears the brunt of less government expenditure on education.” Additionally,

*“The Index reinforces that in order for economies to adopt more holistic approaches to learning, the following things are critical: strengthening assessment frameworks, regularising reviews of curriculums and improving teaching conditions.*

*“Looking at the results of the Index, it is clear that there are gaps in the provision of future-ready education for the youth of our times. That is why the Yidan Prize exists to speed up the bridging of that gap by celebrating and investing in the work of educators with exceptional foresight.”*

## THE GROWTH MINDSET

As The Yidan Prize Foundation prepares to name its third pair of laureates, one each for Education Development and Education Research, Chen cited the work of the inaugural Yidan Prize for Education Research laureate, Carol Dweck of Stanford University.

Referring specifically to Dweck’s concept of the growth mindset, the former Tencent Chief Administrative Officer said thus: “Professor Dweck’s research has demonstrated that students’ mindsets can be changed. Barriers can be broken when our fixed mindset is transformed into a growth mindset.

“The implications of her work are far-reaching: she has shown us not only the generative potential of education for students in schools, but also the limitless potential for humanity.”

He concludes: “But just like innovation is never the work of one person, we should never forget that every one of us has the unique potential to unlock the infinite possibilities that education provide.”

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