

Honorary Fellow Mr Francis Ngai Wah-sing

Citation written and delivered by Professor Linda Wong Lai Yeuk-lin

Pro-Chancellor, Chairman of the Council and President:

Mr Francis Ngai Wah-sing is an illustrious social entrepreneur dedicated in venture philanthropy, and first and foremost a marathon runner in Hong Kong. Having endured the hardship of the 7-day trek across the Gobi Desert in 2012, he took up the challenge of the North Pole Marathon in April this year. He ran for 42 kilometres in sub-zero temperatures and, with a record of 7 hours and 2 minutes, he became the first runner from Hong Kong to cross the finishing line in the 11-year history of the race. His seemingly insatiable appetite for physical pain is variously greeted with wonder, awe, disbelief and cynicism, but to Mr Ngai, running a marathon is not just a sport, or a challenge to the body and the spirit. It is a philosophy of life that guides him in his adventures into the world of social entrepreneurship and philanthropy.

Mr Ngai graduated from City University of Hong Kong in 1994 with a bachelor's degree in Quantitative Analysis for Business. After graduation, he worked in various businesses until 2000 when he joined the PCCW Group as Assistant Vice-President in Strategic Development and Head of Strategy of its China ICT Operation. There he remained for seven years until he resigned in 2007 to start a new chapter in his life. He gave up the work of maximising profits for powerful corporates to realise social significance by making use of his business experience.

This new chapter has already benefitted the lives of many people. With the support of his family and like-minded friends who joined the 30S Group which he supported, Mr Ngai has devoted himself full-time to the work of social innovation and social entrepreneurship. He is the founder and CEO of Social Ventures Hong Kong, a venture philanthropic organisation that supports and promotes social entrepreneurship development with more than 400 affiliates joining as professional volunteers.

Under Mr Ngai's leadership, Social Ventures Hong Kong is now involved in more than 10 social enterprises, many of which are recognizable not only for the benefits that they bring, but by the creative thoughts that go into their design and operation. Dialogue in the Dark, for example, puts seeing people in a completely dark setting in order for them to appreciate the abilities of the blind; the Light Home programme motivates property owners to lease out living quarters below the market rate to needy single-parent households; while Green Monday promotes environmental consciousness by designating the first day of each week to the eating of vegetarian food.

Yet, the most novel aspect of his philanthropic engagements is the underlying idea that social enterprise can and should be commercially viable. Mr Ngai combines entrepreneurship with philanthropy in such a way that the latter can produce economic returns, which can then be used to drive further social change. Through the accumulation and investment of capital raised from various sources and the active engagement of experienced business people in the running of social enterprises, he has made it possible for many tottering social enterprises to gain a steady foothold in Hong Kong's competitive economy.

Mr Ngai gives himself selflessly to public service. He is a Board Member of Asia Venture Philanthropy Network and the Core Organiser of The 30S Group. He has taken up a number of advisory positions with the Hong Kong government, including associate membership in the Central Policy Unit. Through his regular contributions to major newspapers in Hong Kong as a columnist and an op-ed writer, he has added his voice to the public discourse on community and social issues. He was named one of Hong Kong's Ten Outstanding Young Persons in 2011 for his many contributions to society.

Mr Ngai has declared in an interview that for all his accomplishments, he has only taken baby steps towards a distant goal. But steps, one at a time, are precisely what it takes to finish a marathon, a fitting metaphor for his efforts in social entrepreneurship and social innovation.

Mr Pro-Chancellor, Mr Chairman of the Council and Mr President, Mr Francis Ngai sees beyond personal gain to work diligently for the welfare of needy groups and the creation of a more compassionate society. His entrepreneurial know-how and social innovation have pointed out a viable path of development for philanthropy just as his social idealism will inspire us for a long time to come. May I request that CityU grant him the title of Honorary Fellow of the University.