

# 'Asian Nobels' will bring prize-giving up to date

The founder of the Tang Prizes explains why scientists will be making the selections.

Jane Qiu

30 January 2013 | Corrected: 31 January 2013

Taiwanese tycoon Samuel Yin stunned the world on 28 January with the announcement of the Tang Prizes: awards that will offer bigger winnings than the Nobel prizes.

Yin contributed 3 billion Taiwanese dollars, the equivalent of roughly US\$100 million, to set up the [Tang Prize Foundation](#). The prizes are named after the Chinese Tang Dynasty (ad 618–907). They will be awarded every two years starting in 2014, to global leaders in the fields of sustainable development, biopharmaceutical science, Chinese studies and the rule of law. Each prize will consist of 40 million Taiwanese dollars (US\$1.34 million) as well as a 10-million-Taiwanese-dollar research grant.

Yin, head of the Taipei-based Ruentex business empire, is known for his generous donations to education in Taiwan and mainland China. *Forbes* magazine estimates his worth at around US\$3 billion. He has an undergraduate degree in history and a doctorate in business management, and made his fortune in property, finance and retail investment. He talks to *Nature* about his vision for the 'Asian Nobel prizes'.



Pichi Chuang/Reuters

Samuel Yin put US\$100 million of his own money into the Tang Prize Foundation — but recipients of the prizes will be picked by Taiwan's national academy.

## Why did you decide to set up the prize?

I have pledged to give most of my assets away, and setting up the Tang Prize has been one of my biggest dreams. The world was a very different place when the Nobel prizes were established more than a century ago. I wanted to found a prize to reflect the new challenges faced by humanity — such as climate change, energy shortages, emerging diseases, clashes of cultures and ideas, and shifting world orders. I hope that the prize will encourage more research to meet those challenges, promote Chinese culture and make the world a better place.

## How is the Tang Prize different from existing awards?

It targets areas that have become increasingly important in modern society but are not covered by the Nobel prizes and other prestigious awards. In addition to the originality of the research, we will place significant emphasis on its contribution to wider society, with the ultimate goal of improving human life. Finally, most prizes offer just cash awards, but winners of the Tang Prize — either individuals or institutions — will not only get the 40-million-Taiwanese-dollar prize money, but also receive 10 million Taiwanese dollars for their areas of research.

## Why did you name the prize after the Tang Dynasty?

The Tang Dynasty was renowned for its sophisticated cultural and scientific achievements. It was a time when the fusion of different cultures — Western and Eastern — and the exchange of ideas gave rise to enormous prosperity and self-confidence, and when creativity thrived in a pluralistic, inclusive and peaceful society. These are the ideals not only of Chinese civilization, but also of humanity at large. That is what the Tang Prize seeks to promote.

## How are you going to ensure that the prize will acquire international credibility?

The Academia Sinica, the most prestigious scientific institution in Taiwan, will be in charge of the nomination and selection process. The international committee in each prize category will consist of two dozen or so world-leading experts. Together, they will ensure that the process is fair and transparent and entirely meritocratic. Only the best candidates, regardless of their nationality or ethnicity, will be selected. Even in the category of Chinese studies, Chinese scholars may not have an advantage. There are a lot of excellent sinologists in Europe and the United States.

## Do you have other projects that support and fund science?

I am a firm believer in higher education and scientific development. I set up the Kwang-Hua Education Foundation, which since the

1990s has offered scholarships to about 120,000 students, including science majors. I am also a key donor to the Kwang-Hua Science and Technology Foundation, which has a number of prizes for research and engineering excellence. There will be new projects to support studies in life sciences and civil engineering.

*Nature* | doi:10.1038/nature.2013.12333

## Corrections

---

**Corrected:**An earlier version of this article stated that Samuel Yin endowed the Tang Prize Foundation with US\$3 billion; the actual amount was 3 billion Taiwanese dollars.