

RE: Dr. Yuanyuan Zhang – Letter of Recommendation for the Hong Kong Laureate Forum

To whom it may concern,

I am Professor Nicholas Lord, Director of the Centre for Digital Trust and Society (CDTS) at the University of Manchester, where I act as Dr. Yuanyuan Zhang's line manager and postdoctoral supervisor. It is with great enthusiasm that I provide this letter of strong recommendation in support of her application to the Hong Kong Laureate Forum 2025.

Dr. Zhang is an outstanding early-career researcher with a growing international reputation in the fields of AI trust, fraud detection, and digital finance. Her work applies innovative statistical and AI-driven methodologies to complex, real-world problems, including the detection of illicit behaviour in blockchain networks. Her work has been published in respected peer-reviewed journals across finance, healthcare, and digital crime, and has already gained notable academic attention. She has also been highly active in academic dissemination, presenting her research at numerous international conferences and seminars. Her research is both technically robust and deeply interdisciplinary, bringing together advanced mathematical approaches with a clear commitment to addressing real-world challenges and generating meaningful societal impact.

In addition to her research output, Dr. Zhang has played a key leadership role in organising major academic events. Most recently, she has been instrumental in coordinating the upcoming 2024 CDTS Forum, bringing together international experts from across disciplines to address challenges in digital trust and technology. She is also Chair and Lead Organiser of the 2024 conference "*Investigating the Blockchain: Forensic Approaches to Digital Crime Analysis.*" Her organisational skills, energy, and collaborative mindset have been key to the success of these initiatives.

Dr. Zhang is extremely hardworking, productive, and goal-oriented. She proactively seeks interdisciplinary collaborations, currently working with colleagues from institutions such as Universidad Carlos III de Madrid and the American University of Sharjah to extend her work into new application areas, including fintech and digital governance. She has also developed practical tools, including an R package titled "*Wrapped*", published alongside a paper in *PLOS ONE*, and built several R Shiny applications to support blockchain forensic analysis.

One especially notable achievement is her award of the 2019 Institute of Mathematical Statistics (IMS) New Researcher Travel Award—granted to only 11 recipients worldwide, and she was the only recipient from the UK. This award recognized her innovative work on high-frequency cryptocurrency data, a testament to both the technical excellence and timeliness of her research.

Yuanyuan is not only an excellent researcher but also a positive and collegial presence within the Centre. She is cheerful, thoughtful, and deeply committed to advancing trustworthy, impactful research. I have every confidence that she will make an exceptional contribution to the Hong Kong Laureate Forum and represent both our Centre and University at the highest level.

She has my strongest support and highest recommendation.

Yours faithfully,

N. J. Lord

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