Jack Ma, China's Richest Man, Steps Down From $460 Billion Alibaba Empire

His farewell party is taking place in an 80,000-seat stadium.

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Jack Ma, the flamboyant tech personality and the richest man in China, is leaving his $460 billion Alibaba empire 20 years after founding the company.

Ma is stepping down as the chairman of Alibaba Group on Tuesday, his 55th birthday, as part of a long-planned succession scheme. Alibaba Group is the world's largest e-commerce group, with more than triple the total reported sales of Amazon for 2018.

A former English teacher, Ma founded the company with 17 others in a small apartment in 1999. It began as a company that sold Chinese goods around the world but shifted its focus to the domestic Chinese market as the country's economy boomed. It later expanded into online banking, artificial intelligence and entertainment.

The company's 2014 initial public offering remains the biggest in history, at $25 billion. Ma is worth about $40 billion, according to *Bloomberg*'s Billionaires Index, a net worth higher than anyone else in China and 21st in the world.

Alibaba Group now employs more than 100,000 people, according to *Reuters*.

While he is stepping down from a major leadership role, Ma said he would take a position in Alibaba's "partnership," a

38-person body with an indirect role in the governance of the group.

Image credit: Sean Gallup/Getty Images

Ma has picked Daniel Zhang, the CEO of Alibaba since 2015, to take over, though he is unlikely to match Ma’s famous flamboyance.

Ma starred in a kung fu movie, sang at a music festival, and once performed at a company party while dressed as Michael Jackson.

Ma is also known for the extravagant events he holds for employees during Alibaba’s annual Singles Day shopping event, whose sales last year outstripped Amazon’s Prime Day. The event has featured performers like Mariah Carey and Cirque du Soleil.

And Ma also hasn’t held back for Ali Day, which celebrates employees and their families and has even included Ma officiating a lavish employee mass wedding.

His style is also apparent in his resignation plans, which involve a farewell party at an 80,000-seat stadium in Hangzhou, the city where he founded the company decades ago, *Reuters* reported.

Earlier this year, Ma presided over a mass wedding of 102 couples.

Image credit: REUTERS/Stringer

Alibaba on Monday shared a video of Ma returning to that apartment, where he recalled telling early employees: “This is the place we’re going to work for a year probably. We’re going to eat here. We’re going to sleep here. We’re going to work day and night here.

“And we will probably achieve something. Or probably we’ll have to go out looking for jobs together.”

He said their goal then was to be among the world’s 10 most popular websites and to empower small businesses.

> *Jack Ma Returns to Hupan Garden: Birthplace of Alibaba. Ma’s Hangzhou apartment in 1999 is where it all began for Alibaba. On the eve of the company’s 20th birthday, we took him back to to reflect on those early days and what it took to build Alibaba into what it is today.* ***pic.twitter.com/3WdzjLvhdb***
>
> *— Alibaba Group (@AlibabaGroup)* ***September 9, 2019***

Zhang could face challenges amid the trade war between the U.S. and China and a slowdown in the Chinese e-commerce industry.

Liu Yiming, an analyst at the Chinese tech publishing group 36kr, told *Reuters* that “if Alibaba wants to find new innovations or trends, this is going to be more difficult than before.”

“For Daniel Zhang,” Liu said, “this will be a big challenge.”

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