TAN CHIN TUAN FOUNDATION BOOSTS LIBERAL ARTS LEARNING

The Tan Chin Tuan Foundation (TCTF), established in 1976 by the late banker and philanthropist Tan Sri (Dr) Tan Chin Tuan with the objective of sharing with society the rewards of a highly illustrious career, has been unwavering in its support of the National University of Singapore (NUS). The Foundation most recently became a Founding Benefactor of Singapore’s new undergraduate liberal arts college when it made a gift to establish the Tan Chin Tuan Professorship in Chinese Studies as well as the Tan Chin Tuan China Culture and Civilization Programme for undergraduate students. One of the many elements of the Programme will be Chinese language immersion courses in China and Taiwan in 2014. Here, Ma Chow Gek Kim (VM), Deputy Chairman of the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation, talks about why the Foundation supports Yale-NUS.

**What prompted the Foundation to support Singapore’s first liberal arts college?**

We believe that a liberal arts education is very beneficial to the individual. In the early years, Singapore had a high unemployment rate and the key focus was on securing that there would be jobs for our people. At that time, our people needed to have specific technical, vocational and professional skills in order to be employable. Today, many other countries provide similar technical, vocational and professional skills, and in an increasingly international competitive market we need to ensure that in addition to those technical, vocational and professional skills, our people must be able to offer something extra. This extra something should, hopefully, come with the provision of a liberal arts education - the ability to think creatively and critically, to be able to solve issues when they arise and have a macro perspective of the issues, as well as to be able to grasp and handle complexity.

**Why did the Foundation feel that Yale-NUS was a suitable place for a Chinese studies programme and Professorship?**

Yale University was the first US university to offer Chinese studies because of its links with Peking University. Consequently its links with China and Singapore studies go back over a long period of time.

One of the key tenets of our giving is that there should, ideally, be a multiplier effect. Given that TCTF has historically supported Chinese studies in Singapore and beyond, we thought that this gift would not only leverage Yale’s strengths but that the Foundation might be able to create a multiplier effect by focusing on Chinese studies at Yale-NUS in conjunction with different tertiary institutions supported by the Foundation. The Foundation has gone on to link the people involved in the projects we support so that they might collaborate, mutually access and share information, thus benefiting the students and faculty in all institutions involved.

**What are the Foundation’s hopes for graduates of Yale-NUS?**

We hope that Yale-NUS will produce well-educated individuals who, in turn, will contribute to society to make the world a better place. We also believe that this philanthropic support will give women an equal opportunity in social and economic development. Yale-NUS was a suitable place for the Foundation to make a gift to establish the Tan Chin Tuan Professorship because of its links with Peking University. Consequently its links with China and Singapore studies go back over a long period of time.

**Why support the liberal arts?**

A liberal arts education is a broad-based education that cultivates intuition, inspires innovation, and opens capacity to fully learn with the development of critical thinking and creativity. It encourages active learning and the study of culture and society, besides other related liberal arts subjects.

The Tan Chin Tuan Foundation gives priority to female students. Why did the Group decide to do this? We hope that our contribution and preference will give women an equal opportunity in education and provide them with tools they need for self-hold and empowerment. They form approximately 50 to 55 percent of the population, so engaging them is important. Shirin Ebadi, a 2003 Nobel Peace Prize winner and leading campaigner for the rights of women and children has this to say: “Knowledge is a window to freedom. An educated woman will not put up with oppression.”

Please share some of the Group’s thoughts on giving back through philanthropic support.

Philanthropy has always been at the core of our ethos. We have been mindful that the benefits of our success should be shared with the local communities where our businesses operate and flourish. We have engaged in social work primarily in health care and education programmes. Our philanthropic efforts are aimed at helping to empower the less fortunate. The initiatives must be well-targeted, measurable and evaluated to ensure the highest efficacy.

Do you think that philanthropy is crucial to the advancement of education? Yes, philanthropy is very important because it contributes to the financial resources and ensures continual access to education for the underprivileged in society. It facilitates the creation of more and greater opportunities for learning to meet the needs of the community.

Do you have any advice for the recipients of the Kewalram Chanrai Scholarship? This is the beginning of a new and exciting learning journey that will help energise and shape your life. We hope this new endeavour will stimulate your curiosity, enhance your ability to develop new skills and deepen your capacity for connectivity, to help you solve problems that humanity faces. We encourage you to seize the opportunity to make an impact on society. May you be passionate about sharing what you have learned and giving back to society what you have received.

The Kewalram Chanrai Scholarship is awarded to a small number of students. I think it will primarily be the student body. I have long taught in a liberal arts environment, and I think it will be different. I would like to make Yale-NUS a focal point for academic conferences and workshops related to the fields of expertise of our Chinese studies faculty.

If you had one great hope for students at Yale-NUS apart from your capacity as the Tan Chin Tuan Professor of Chinese Studies? It was a tremendous honour. With its vast and generous contributions to the social welfare and sustained development of Singapore and Malaysia, Yale-NUS is an important Foundation in an organisation of tremendous renown, and its establishment of a programme for Chinese studies at Yale-NUS which will further propel academic conferences and workshops related to the fields of expertise of our Chinese studies faculty.

If you had one great hope for your students at Yale-NUS, what would it be? That, like Confucius himself, they be inspired to pursue a lifetime of educational learning. So long as they have that, everything else is possible.