

# The Opening of Tzu Chi University of Science and Technology

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation

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On November 4 was the official opening of the Tzu Chi University of Science and Technology in Hualien, east Taiwan, the home of the Foundation. This milestone marked the upgrading of an institution which was founded by Master Cheng Yen in 1989 to train nurses and became a college of technology. Now it is the first university of its kind in the eastern part of Taiwan and has become the standard for technical education in the east of the island.

## History of Tzu Chi University of Science and Technology

The college gained its new name on August 1, when the Ministry of Education approved. A ceremony to mark the event was held on November 4; it was attended by a large number of people, including Master Cheng Yen, Lin Bi-yu and Chen Shao-Ming, vice presidents of the Foundation, and Luo Wen-Rui, president of the university. Also in attendance were former presidents Zhang Fu-Mei and Hong Dang-Ming and Wang Ben-Rong, president of Tzu Chi University.

In her speech, Master Cheng Yen emphasized the equal importance of "specialization and technical ability" and "humanist training", to promote education for living, impart morality and achieve merit. She said: "The first group of students at the start of the school was only 107, but more than 20,000 people attended the opening day ceremony. Today it is being named a Science and Technology University. This is a milestone. I hope that the spirit of its foundation will not be forgotten and it will train even more outstanding students and make a contribution to society." Luo Wen-Rui, president of the university, said: "In the future, we will continue to carry out the spirit and purpose of the school – rooted in eastern Taiwan, drawing from the well of humanism and excellence in education. We will improve the level and content of our technical education, deepen our international exchanges and broaden their view."

In the university, the five-year junior college will remain in place. Master Cheng Yen said that the program must retain the class for aboriginals and continue to offer 100 places to aboriginal students, covering the costs of board, meals, uniforms, and books, as well as a monthly allowance of NT\$3-5,000. After graduation, they can join Tzu Chi hospitals, which means a guarantee of employment for them. Since 1996, a total of 1,122 students have received financial benefits, of whom 587 graduated and 535 are still studying; this has involved donations of more than NT\$304 million. Remarkable is the fact that the pass rate for aboriginal students in the national nursing examination is 80.43 percent, against a national average of 50.5 percent. This shows the achievement of the Aboriginal classes.

## Opening of the history museum and aboriginal museum



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At the same time, Master Cheng Yen cut the ribbon to open the college's History Museum and Aboriginal Museum. The History Museum uses the latest multi-media techniques and has 27,260 items, to show the special features and achievements of the college over the last 26 years. The Aboriginal Museum has more than 600 aboriginal artifacts, including the lifelike wax figures of the Bunong, Taiya, Amei, Paiwan and Lukai tribes; that shows the respect the school has given to the culture of the aboriginal people, giving the 765 students from their communities an increased sense of mission.

This college was the birthplace of specialties of Tzu Chi education- "Tzu Cheng and Yi Te Association" and "Humanist Education", an innovation in the world of education. Tzu Chi Science and Technology University not only received awards from the Ministry of Education in 2008, 2012 and 2014 for its moral character but also received a first-prize in 2013 for National Environmental Education. No matter whether it is humanitarian education or the training of moral character, the school from its foundation overcame initial suspicions and misunderstandings to set a new standard and be acknowledged by the educational world.

The Aboriginal Museum was set up in 1999 to allow visitors a place where they could see the exhibits. But, because the space was limited, not all the items could be displayed. Now the museum has 991 square meters, with 600 items from 13 tribes of porcelain dishes, clothes, fishing equipment, religious items, musical instruments, furniture and wax figures made by the Bunong, Taiya, Amei, Paiwan and Lukai tribes. They show their way of life and enable us to study their buildings and how they interacted with each other.

## Foundation of Tzu Cheng and Yi Te Association in school



In the year of its foundation, Master Cheng Yen specially invited 36 experienced commissioners to set up an association to take care of young students away from home for the first time. She hoped that they would work with the students to encourage them and be concerned for them.

The initial response from students and inspectors of the Ministry of Education was skeptical. Students said "These ladies had no Ph.D or Masters degrees. How could they guide us?" However, students did not anticipate that the officials of the ministry would affirm their work, saying "We believe that the future of education in Taiwan will be very good and they (the commissioners) will exert a very positive influence". The ministry started to promote this system of volunteer at every level of education. Later, after the reform of the college, male students came in and Tzu Cheng "uncles" were added, so the name was changed to "Tzu Cheng and Yi Te Association". As of today, 700 of these volunteers each month come to the college and interact with the students; they actively study the social media as Line and Facebook commonly used by the young people to reduce the differences in understanding with them.

Article originated by Hsiu-Ping Yeh