

LEAVING A LEGACY TO INSPIRE

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WHILE progress has been steady, Tan Sri Dr Jeffrey Cheah believes that there is still a long way to go before realising his dream of establishing Sunway University as ‘the Harvard or Cambridge of the East’.

“I am aware this is unlikely to be realised in my lifetime, but what I am doing is setting the foundation stones to realise my aspirations for the future. Slowly, but surely, we will get there,” he opined.

The immediate milestone he is eyeing is for the university to number among the global top 100 institutions in the coming decade, but that’s not all. Cheah is also actively advocating to empower private universities to operate via the university endowment model.

Endowment funds, sourced from donations and then invested for returns, enable universities to operate in perpetuity by helping maintain academic excellence, advance research and development, cover operating expenses and wages, as well as provide financial aid for deserving students among others.

For instance, the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom, has an endowment of £6.90bil (RM36.91bil), while Harvard University, United States, has US\$40.90bil (RM174.38bil).

Some may say that it is a pipe dream, but the same was said for Sunway City Kuala Lumpur. Similarly, it had its share of naysayers that - as Cheah recalled -

labelled him ‘crazy’ for buying a piece of barren wasteland ‘full of holes’ located in Sungai Way in 1986 with the intention of rehabilitating it into a sustainable and vibrant township.

In line with the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDG) - which Cheah deeply espouses, as evidenced by the establishment of the Jeffrey Sachs Centre on Sustainable Development (JSC) at Sunway University - work is still underway to improve the township through deeper integration of technology to establish it as a model smart sustainable city.

Towards this goal, Sunway recently partnered with Celcom and Huawei in a tripartite collaboration towards advancing smart township solutions encompassing the Internet of Things and artificial intelligence with fifth-generation (5G) connectivity. The Memorandum of Understanding aims to explore the potential for Celcom and Huawei to be the 5G technology enabler for Sunway Group, while Sunway City KL will be the ‘launch pad’ for the groundbreaking partnership.

Striving for the best

The journey of Sunway University thus far is marked by tremendous growth. According to the QS World University Rankings by Subject 2020, Sunway University - despite its relative youth - ranks among the top 500 universities in the world for its business and man-



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agement studies discipline.

Such recognition reflects the strength of the academic institution’s reputation.

When Cheah started the education institution in 1987, then known as Sunway College, it was hard to imagine that a Malaysian academic institution could compete with the best universities globally.

But it has certainly made its mark, pushing the envelope in education through the years. For instance, it was a pioneer of the twinning programme concept. At the time, the country was in recession and parents could not afford higher education for their children overseas, which was when Cheah

came up with the concept.

Cheah also set up the education-focused not-for-profit Jeffrey Cheah Foundation (JCF), to which he transferred the equity and rights of Sunway Education Group’s (SEG) educational institutions worth several billion ringgit into the foundation in perpetuity.

The foundation owns and governs all 16 educational institutions and entities under the SEG, including Sunway University and has awarded more than RM482mil in scholarships and grants to date. It is Cheah’s personal goal to award more than RM1bil in his lifetime.

He said, “What we want to do is provide a helping hand rather than

hand-outs and I believe the best way to do so is through education.

“JCF has come a long way since it was established 10 years ago. And I believe its structure of managing SEG’s operation surpluses and administering it into scholarships and grants will further benefit the education and sustainability sphere towards nation building.”

Today, it has active partnerships with prestigious academic institutions such as the University of Cambridge, Harvard University, the University of Oxford and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology among others, which are certainly

not easy feats

by any measure.

It has also sealed collaborative partnerships with Cambridge in the form of the Jeffrey Cheah Biomedical Centre, which is considered the centrepiece of the largest biotechnology cluster outside the United States, as well as the Sunway-Cambridge joint Clinical Research Centre that will serve as Cambridge’s regional site partner, the first such venture of its kind for Cambridge.

“Sunway University is relatively young, but to be able to gain the recognition and to collaborate with these renowned institutions itself speaks volumes on our quality and dedication,” he opined.



Cheah (standing, right) believes that education is the best way to combat poverty.

Aside from working with the best academic institutions in the world, another instance that demonstrates Cheah’s conviction in learning from the best is the appointment of the Jeffrey Cheah distinguished professors.

He explained, “These professors are very accomplished in their own fields and they do not easily lend their name to any institutions. For them to be affiliated with Sunway University shows how much trust and confidence they have in us and our not-for-profit model.”

Aspiring to inspire

As JCF celebrates its 10th anniversary, it is a proud moment for Cheah, who stuck to his goal to provide quality education to students despite the fact that it was loss-making for 12 years.

The reason for this tenacity can be traced back to Cheah’s formative years in Pusing, Perak, where he witnessed first-hand the impact of poverty on families and how it closed off avenues for advancement for children.

“Education is particularly close to my heart. Very early on,

I became convinced that education offers the best route out of poverty and misery. I stayed the course, even when my senior managers advised me to get out of the sector because the losses were hurting our company then.

“I believed that by setting up the college and admitting students, I had made a promise to our children and it was a pledge I was determined to keep,” he shared.

Moreover, Cheah has also contributed much to philanthropic efforts over the years. He is the only Malaysian who has been named three times on Forbes Asia’s annual definitive philanthropy list, Heroes of Philanthropy.

This proves that for Cheah, entrepreneurship, philanthropy and even education are all means to an end: towards nation-building and creating a sustainable future for all.

The most important thing, he said, is to identify the end goal and then plan the journey to achieve that goal accordingly - but before that, he stressed on first having the ability to achieve wealth through entrepreneurship with the right values.

He said, “After all, you need to



Cheah points in the direction of the Sunway Medical Centre, with Sunway Lagoon in the background.

make money first before you can give it out.

“Personally for me, what I want is to build a sustainable future for the next generation to continue to excel and contribute to a progressive and prosperous society. Entrepreneurship, quality education, philanthropy and sustainabil-

ity are the avenues towards reaching my goal.”

Cheah, who above all aspires to inspire before he ‘expires’, added, “I hope what we’re doing at Sunway will inspire other corporations and individuals in this part of the world to do more. We can all do well by doing good.”

Setting the bar in education

Cheah’s belief in working with the best and learning from the best also birthed the appointments of the Jeffrey Cheah distinguished professors.

Under the collaboration between Jeffrey Cheah Foundation and globally acclaimed academic institutions, eminent experts and scholars - who have contributed to solving critical global issues in health, disease and economy amongst others - are appointed to share their knowledge and expertise with Malaysian academics, students and the general public.

Among the prominent names on the list are:

Prof Jeffrey David Sachs

As a world renowned economist and director of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, Prof Sachs is one of the world’s most influential experts on sustainable economic development.

A passionate leader in the fight against poverty and the special advisor to the UN secretary-general on sustainable development, he has advised heads of states and governments on economic strategy for more than a quarter century.

Appointed as an honorary Jeffrey Cheah distinguished professor of sustainable development at Sunway University this year, he is also the chairman of the Jeffrey Sachs Centre on Sustainable Development.



Prof Sir Leszek Borysiewicz

The chairman of Cancer Research United Kingdom (UK) since 2016, Prof Borysiewicz is an Honorary Jeffrey Cheah distinguished professor who is now the emeritus vice-chancellor of the University of Cambridge, after serving as its vice-chancellor from 2011 to 2017.

A founding fellow of the Academy of Medical Sciences, he has been chief executive of the UK’s Medical Research Council since 2007 and was knighted in 2001 for his breakthroughs in vaccines, including developing Europe’s first trial of a vaccine to treat cervical cancer.



Prof Kay-Tee Khaw

Prof Khaw, a leading expert in the field of health and disease, is a Jeffrey Cheah professorial fellow in Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. She is currently one of the principal UK scientists working on the European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition, a Europe-wide project investigating the links between diet, lifestyle and cancer.

Appointed as a Commander of the order of the British Empire in 2003, Prof Khaw has been recognised for developing improved methods for collecting information on people’s diets and levels of exercise and relating this to the number of diagnosed cancer cases.



Prof Rema Hanna

A highly distinguished economist, Prof Hanna is the Jeffrey Cheah professor of South East Asia Studies and chair of the Harvard Kennedy School International Development Area, as well as the faculty director of evidence for policy design at Harvard’s Centre for International Development and the co-scientific director of the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab South East Asia office in Indonesia.

Her focus is on improving overall service delivery, understanding the impacts of corruption, bureaucratic absenteeism and discrimination against disadvantaged minority groups on delivery outcomes.



Prof Sir Alan Fersht

World leading protein scientist Prof Fersht, also an honorary Jeffrey Cheah distinguished professor and life fellow of Gonville and Caius College Cambridge, is widely regarded as one of the main pioneers of protein engineering, which is a process to analyse the structure, activity and folding of proteins.

His current research involves a fusion of protein engineering, structural biology, biophysics and chemistry to study the structure, activity, stability and folding of proteins, as well as the role of protein misfolding and instability in cancer and disease.

Prof Ketan J Patel

Prof Patel is a Jeffrey Cheah professorial fellow in Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge and the principal research scientist at the famous MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology in the University of Cambridge.

His research, which focuses on the molecular basis of inherited genomic instability and the role it plays in the biology of stem cells, has been recognised through prestigious awards and prizes, including being elected as a fellow of the Royal Society of London, a member of the European Molecular Biology Organisation and a fellow of the Academy of Medical Sciences UK.



Prof John Todd

The Jeffrey Cheah fellow in medicine at Brasenose College, Oxford and professor of precision medicine, Prof Todd is a leading pioneer researcher in the fields of genetics, immunology and diabetes. His research areas include Type 1 diabetes genetics and disease mechanisms with the aim of clinical intervention.

In his former role as a professor of human genetics and a Wellcome Trust principal research fellow at Oxford, he helped pioneer genome-wide genetic studies, first in mice and then in humans.



Prof William Swadling

Prof Swadling, a Jeffrey Cheah professorial fellow, is a senior law fellow at Brasenose College, Oxford and Professor in the Law of Property in the Oxford University Law School.

An expert on the Law of Restitution, he is a contributor to Halsbury’s Laws of England, wrote the section on property in Burrows (ed) English Private Law and is widely cited in the British courts.



Prof William James

A Jeffrey Cheah professorial fellow emeritus and fellow in medicine at Brasenose College, Oxford, Prof James is a virologist with a background in genetics and microbiology.

As the professor of virology with the University of Oxford, he is the principal investigator at the Stem Cell Research Institute of Oxford, running a research lab studying HIV-macrophage biology using stem cell technology.



Prof Mark Wilson

Prof Wilson, the dean of Brasenose College, is a Jeffrey Cheah professorial fellow at the college and the professor of physical chemistry in the University of Oxford’s physical and theoretical chemistry department.

The primary focus of his research interest is on the construction, development and application of relatively simple potential models to assess a wide range of systems with potentially unique properties.



Prof Jarlath Ronayne

Appointed in 2010 as the first Jeffrey Cheah distinguished professor, Prof Ronayne is a key member of Sunway University’s board of directors and has played a pivotal role in establishing links between Sunway, Oxford and Cambridge.

Under his leadership, the Jeffrey Cheah Professorial Fellowships at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge as well as Brasenose College, Oxford and the Jeffrey Cheah Scholar-in-Residence programmes in both colleges were established, alongside the prestigious Oxford University-Jeffrey Cheah Graduate Scholarship launched by the British High Commissioner in 2018. All these initiatives are in perpetuity.



Prof Sibrandes Poppema

A medical expert on Hodgkin’s disease, Prof Poppema has published more than 200 articles that have been cited more than 17,000 times.

The Jeffrey Cheah distinguished professor is also the co-owner of 12 patents and the founder of two biotechnology companies, as well as the advisor to the chancellor at Sunway University, especially on the establishment of a new medical school at the university.



Being able to gain the recognition of renowned institutions such as Oxford is proof of Sunway University’s quality, says Cheah (right).