

The Chang Family Endowment Fund was established in 2019 by Chi-Kwong (Chris) Chang 張啟光, Class of 1969 Chemistry, and his wife Bonnie 石慧中, Class of 1970 Human Nutrition, along with their sons, Tim and Dan, to create graduate scholarships for the Chemistry Department. Chris earned a PhD at UC San Diego in 1973, did his postdoctoral research at UCSD and University of British Columbia in Vancouver, became a professor in Chemistry at Michigan State University (MSU) and after 38 years, attained the *Emeritus* title in 2014. In the late 1990s, he took intermittent long leaves to serve for two terms as the Head of the Chemistry Department at the newly established Hong Kong University of Science & Technology. He now spends part of the year in Taiwan where he has courtesy appointments as Distinguished Chair Professor at National Taiwan University, as well as at the Chemistry Institute of Academia Sinica. He has also founded a business as an offshoot of his research expertise, named P2 Research (short for ‘Porphyrin and Photodynamic Research’) to supply specialty chemicals to the biomedical research community. Chris received a FJCU Distinguished Alumni Award in 2001. Bonnie, while raising two boys, earned a Masters degree in computer science (1983) from MSU and enjoyed a long engineering career at General Motors before retiring in 2009. She then started a second career at Michigan Scientific Corporation where she now directs China sales and marketing of automotive testing equipment.

FJUF: Chris, how did the idea come to you for establishing the endowment?

Chris: I cherish the memory of my time at FJCU. In those early days, with the buildings still being finished and the laboratories only half-equipped, I was given a great degree of freedom to ‘play’ in the laboratories. The Department also promoted the option to conduct independent research and a senior thesis, which prepared a budding geek like me to later venture into scientific endeavors. I have kept in touch with the FJCU Chemistry Department over the past four decades, as a few faculty members were trained at MSU. I also taught a course there during my sabbatical year (1991). I was impressed by the excellent mentoring that students were offered, with an emphasis on laboratory skills. My impression was further enhanced in recent years when I engaged in collaborative research with my former PhD student, who is now a prominent professor at a national university. We had a rather challenging project that was tackled unsuccessfully by many graduate students on his research team; eventually the person who made the breakthrough was a FJCU graduate. In fact, FJCU has a reputation of producing well-trained undergraduates welcomed by all national universities in Taiwan.

We all know that a successful undergraduate education depends upon active research professors who in turn are attracted to and sustained by a strong graduate program. It’s my observation that higher education in Taiwan is facing a grave and uncertain future due to the dwindling number of young people bound for college, as well as the uncontrolled proliferation of poor quality schools. The difficult truth is that there has been such a shortage in graduate students to the point that even venerable national universities find their quotas unfilled. In a hard science discipline such as chemistry, FJCU is probably the last private institution to still be able to run a viable graduate program – thanks in large part to the graduate fellowships we alumni have helped set up in the past. In order to be more competitive against reputable (and less expensive) public schools, the Department has dispensed ~ \$2 million TWD of fellowships annually to recruit and retain its top undergrads for in-house graduate programs, and this strategy has proven to be effective and fruitful. The money mostly comes from one-off donations, which of course depend upon the vagaries of economy and individual circumstance, and can hardly be taken for granted. I spoke to the Chemistry department and listened to their plan to develop a sustainable support scheme for the future. The endowment idea would be a smart and necessary approach for this purpose.

FJUF: How did you engage your sons to join in this effort?

Chris: Well, it’s simple pragmatism. They are better off than we are, by the grace of God: Tim is a seasoned venture capitalist in Silicon Valley; Dan is a radiation oncologist and chaired professor at Stanford. This also means they have worse tax burdens than we have. At combined tax rates exceeding 50%, they are eager to let Trump chip in half the amount for a worthwhile cause! Numbers aside, the name ‘Chang Family Fund’ is also for the purpose of honoring my late grandparents and parents who in their time also made substantial donations to churches, museums, schools, etc. Tim in his spare time routinely performs music with bands for charities and, in fact, first came up with the name. I believe it’s important to put the biblical teaching “better to give than to receive” to practice.

FJUF: Can you tell us the specifics of the endowment?

Chris: Over a decade ago, I asked the faculty in the Chemistry department “given the choices, what would be your first priority needs that could make a real difference?” They replied that it would be the aforementioned fellowships. Apparently, this message has been conveyed to many alumni whose generosity and combined efforts have raised a sum sufficient to last perhaps 5-6 more years at an annual expenditure of ~\$2 million TWD. My plan is to build up an endowment in six years, to the tune of ~\$670,000 USD, to cover ½ of the outlay from investment returns (targeted at 4-5% multiyear average, which is the norm of college endowment funds in the US). There will be no distribution during the set-up years so that the pot can be bigger when it begins dispensing income. What about the other ½, or 1 million TWD? That should be the privilege of other alumni groups or individuals. Given the track record of FJCU Chemistry alumni, I am not worried.

FJUF: Any comments on future plans and outlook?

Chris: This would be the first project of the Chang Family Charitable Trust (Tim’s idea). We certainly have other agendas, but no concrete plans yet. It will take time to develop. I don’t know how many more years this sojourner still has on earth, but if my immediate ancestors could be any indication (grandpa lived until 102; my father until 97); then God willing, I could look forward to some more productive and purposeful years. Getting older is no fun physiologically, especially these days. It’s a struggle to not feel distraught and depressed with all that’s going on in the world today: boomer remover, pandemic lockdown, riots on streets, falsehood and moral bankruptcy in leadership worldwide. Yet I find solace in a hymn, called out during our last Sunday fellowship on Zoom, just when I was preparing this blurb - by A.L. Waring, 1850; *Father I know that all my life:*

There are briers besetting every path
.....

But a lowly heart that leans on Thee
Is happy anywhere.
Be Happy!