

A Humble but Great Medical Scholar

Tseng Wen-Pin

Honorary Superintendent
of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital

By Hana You & Chiang Chia-Yu



One of the World's Career-Long
Top 2% Scientists 2020



Honorary Superintendent Tseng Wen-Pin of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, winner of the 15th Medical Contribution Award in 2005, passes away peacefully at home on November 22, 2020, at the age of 98.



In 1958, Tseng Wen-Pin(far left) joins the blackfoot disease research group of the National Taiwan University School of Medicine. The picture shows the research group traveling along the southwest coast on a bamboo raft, taking off their muddy shoes on the shore and all becoming “barefoot doctors”.

While blackfoot patients feel inferior because of mobility problems or amputation, Tseng Wen-Pin opens their hearts with sincerity.

A Good Doctor Met a Good Teacher for Life

In 1980s, Dharma Master Cheng Yen was looking for talents for the establishment of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital. Introduced by a Tzu Chi commissioner, the Master came to the home of Tseng Wen-Pin, then Executive Vice President of the National Taiwan University Hospital, and listened to his

story about his research on the “blackfoot disease” when he was young. After learning how Dr. Tseng went to the homes of blackfoot patients, carried them outside, washed their feet, and then treated them during his research, and that he stayed with them for years in order to find the cause of the disease, the Master decided, “He is really a good doctor and exactly the person I am looking for.”

In September 1981, Tseng Wen-



Professor Tseng Wen-Pin along with Dharma Master Cheng Yen, volunteers, and other volunteer doctors pose for a group photo in front of the free clinic on Ren-Ai Street in Hualien City in 1983.



The first board of directors meeting of Tzu Chi Hospital in 1984 elects Prof. Tu Shih-Mien(right), Administrative Vice President of NTU Hospital at the time, as the founding superintendent of Tzu Chi Hospital, and Prof. Tseng Wen-Pin as the vice superintendent.

Pin joined the “Buddhist Tzu Chi General Hospital Preparatory Committee”. He spent one Sunday morning a month at the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation’s Free Clinic for the Poor on Ren-Ai Street in Hualien City, and in the afternoon, he accompanied the Master to inspect the site for the hospital. The process of finding land before building the hospital was very difficult, and had to go through land changes, two groundbreaking ceremonies, building plan reviews, design changes, and so on. Whenever the Master traveled to

Taipei, Superintendent Tseng was sure to attend the meetings and together they reviewed every design drawing, often until midnight.

In her teachings, the Master often pointed out, “No one believed in me at that time, but Superintendent Tseng believed in me. He was not afraid that I might not have money or people, or that I might not succeed. From the first design drawing, Superintendent Tseng was always there with me on the path of building the hospital.”

An Expert in Blackfoot Disease, He Examined the Feet of 40,000 People

Superintendent Tseng Wen-Pin is a model of Taiwan's medical profession and a model of benevolent medicine. In 1958, he was a part-time attending physician in the Department of Internal Medicine at National Taiwan University Hospital and joined the blackfoot disease research group at the National Taiwan University School of Medicine, where three professors, Chen Kung-Pei, Chen Wan-Yu, and Yeh Shu, from the Departments of Public Health, Clinical Medicine, and Pathology, all requested him to work with them on this research.

In those days, a strange disease appeared in the coastal area of Chia-Nan area of Taiwan, which local residents called the "black dry snake". Like a snake crawling up from the bottom of a patient's foot, the black gangrene extends upward from the ends of the limbs. The ulcers do not bleed, but are so painful that they can only be treated by amputation.

Superintendent Tseng Wen-Pin once saw a child with an ulcerated finger at age three, an affected foot at age four, and another foot with lesions at age five. After having both feet amputated, the patient still died of pneumonia,

ending a tragic and immature life. He described the disease as "like a murderer 'dismembering' a living human body!" This strengthened his determination to find the cause of the disease and relieve the patients' suffering.

Epidemiologist and former Vice President Chen Chien-Jen also wrote a tribute to Professor Tseng Wen-Pin, mentioning that back then "it was very difficult to investigate and study the blackfoot disease in Taiwan because the patient's feet were already necrotic, the smell was very unpleasant, and the patient was in great pain. Yet, Prof. Tseng Wen-Pin was able to examine 40,000 people one by one. Even with a large team effort today, I am afraid it is not easy to do as well as he did."

The Arsenic Poisoning Prevention Standards Followed by Countries around the World

Former Vice President Chen Chien-Jen also wrote that in 1968, Professor Tseng published an article in the international journal *Environmental Health Perspectives* on the relationship between arsenic levels in drinking water and the incidence of blackfoot disease. He found that the higher the arsenic level, the higher the incidence of blackfoot disease. This article has been cited more than a thousand times. Consequently, based on such data, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the World Health

Organization both lowered the standard for arsenic in drinking water to 50 ppb (less than 0.05 ppm).

Superintendent Shinn-Zong Lin pointed out that as Superintendent Tseng Wen-Pin and the Taiwan Blackfoot Disease Research Group found that the blackfoot disease was

related to the high arsenic content of the deep well water used by residents, the government allocated 800 million NT dollars to complete the installation of water pipes in endemic areas to increase the penetration of tap water in order to prevent and control the blackfoot disease. It is estimated that



Passing the torch from Superintendent Tseng Wen-Pin (second from the right of Dharma Master Cheng Yen) to President Chen Ing-Ho (first from the right of the Master) and Superintendent Lin Shinn-Zong (left of the Master). Photo taken at the celebration of Tzu Chi Hospital Medical Center accreditation in 2002.

about 150,000 people in four townships benefited from this at that time.

Since 1990, chronic arsenic poisoning epidemics have been increasing in more than a dozen countries and regions worldwide, including Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, the Philippines, and Poland. This groundbreaking study by Superintendent Tseng Wen-Pin not only contributes to global control efforts, but also enhances Taiwan's international academic status.

A Pioneer in Promoting the Control of Hypertension and Coronary Heart Disease

In addition to his research on the blackfoot disease, Superintendent Tseng Wen-Pin also went to the United States in 1966 to study at Harvard University and was deeply influenced by Dr. Paul Dudley White, the “Father of American Cardiology” and a pioneer

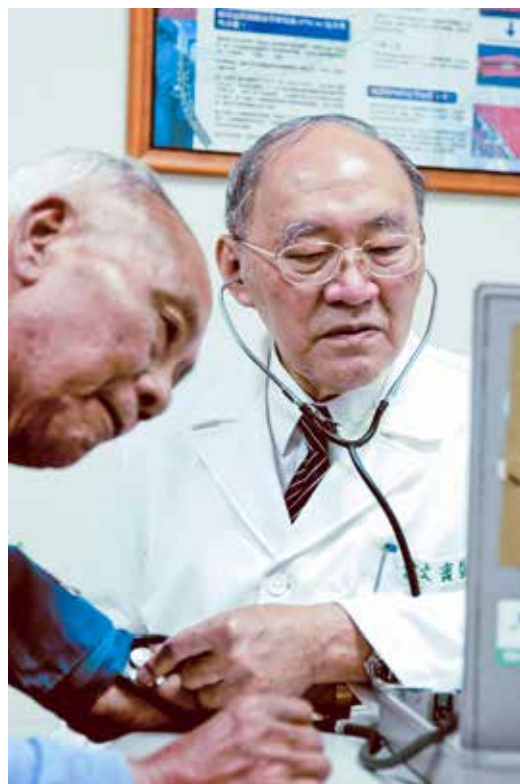


Group photo of the cardiology team of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital in August 2011. Honorary Superintendent Tseng Wen-Pin (front row, center), Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Foundation CEO Lin Chin-Lon (front row, first from left), and Vice Superintendent Wang Ji-Hung of Cardiology (back row, third from left). The legacy of benevolent medicine is continued and passed on to future generations.

in epidemiology. After returning to Taiwan, Superintendent Tseng raised the importance of preventing hypertension and coronary heart disease in middle and old age adults in Taiwan in 1969 and 1970, and conducted epidemiological surveys of cardiovascular disease in the Taipei City, the Sanzhi Township in Taipei County, and the aboriginal communities of Wufeng Township in Hsinchu County; the relevant reports have become the most original data on the incidence of cardiovascular disease in Taiwan.

The Establishment of Tzu Chi Medical Foundation and the Passing of the Torch

Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital was opened in August 1986, with Tu Shih-Mien, who had also served as a Vice President of NTU Hospital, as the Superintendent. Tseng Wen-Pin was appointed Vice Superintendent and soon afterwards moved to Hualien with his wife, Chou Tsui-Wei. He became the Superintendent of Tzu Chi Hospital in 1989. During his tenure he constantly set new goals for the Hospital and completed the planning of Tzu Chi Nursing College and the opening of Tzu Chi Hospitals in Yuli, Kuanshan, Dalin, Taipei, and Taichung. In 1999, he handed over the baton to the young Superintendent Chen Ing-Ho and served as an Honorary Superintendent



Retired and in his 90s, Dr. Tseng Wen-Pin continues to care for his old patients in the outpatient clinic.

since then.

Looking back at the development of the hospital from preparation, establishment, to growth, Superintendent Tseng and his wife could be seen everywhere. They have been affectionately referred to as “Papa Tseng and Mama Tseng” by colleagues at the hospital. In 2005, Superintendent Tseng Wen-Pin, who had been practicing medicine for 52 years, was awarded the Special Contribution Award of the 15th Medical Contribution Award for his

achievements from long-term devotion to epidemiological research.

Superintendent Lin Shinn-Zong recalled that after receiving the award that day, Superintendent Tseng Wen-Pin returned to Hualien Hospital to see patients as usual. When colleagues, patients, and family members congratulated him, he simply said, "Sorry, I haven't done much." In fact, his achievements have not only benefited Taiwan, but have also impacted the world.

A Half-century-long Medical Practice, a Legacy Carried On by Students

Of Honorary Superintendent Tseng Wen-Pin's four children, only his son, Tseng Han-Min, is in Taiwan, and his three siblings live in the United States. In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, those returning to Taiwan from abroad must comply with Ministry of Health and Welfare regulations and undergo a 14-day home quarantine. Therefore, a memorial service is scheduled for Dec. 20, 2020. Dr. Tseng Han-Min has expressed his wish to send his father on the final journey with the sisters. After discussing with his family, it has also been decided that the grandchildren, who are still abroad, will pay tribute to their grandfather through video

conferencing.

Dr. Tseng Han-Min said that when Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital first opened, there were not many doctors, and his father had a good relationship with all of them. His mother would invite the doctors home for a reunion dinner on Chinese New Year's Eve. This was not only because the doctors were his father's students, but also out of gratitude for their willingness to come east to take care of the health of people in the region.

Honorary Superintendent Chen Ing-Ho was one of the students at that time. He said that he was taught by Superintendent Tseng when he was a student at National Taiwan University. When he was a first-year resident, he admired Professor Tseng's tireless efforts in conducting epidemiological research. Later, when he entered clinical practice, the hypertension section was taught by Prof. Tseng Wen-Pin. He will always remember how he was inspired by the professor.

Superintendent Chen Ing-Ho noted that Superintendent Tseng was the "forerunner" of domestic hypertension research in Taiwan, and through his efforts, Taiwan began to have its own hypertension data. In addition to raising public awareness of this national disease and its prevention, Superintendent Tseng was also a role model in teaching,



In January, 2020, Superintendent Lin Shinn-Zong (first from left) leads the team to celebrate the birthday of Superintendent Tseng Wen-Pin. Dr. Tseng Han-Min (first from right) expresses gratitude on behalf of his father.

research, and service. What is most important is Superintendent Tseng's contribution to the country, society, and people. "He was a great medical scholar in my heart," said Superintendent Chen Ing-Ho. Although Superintendent Tseng took his work very seriously in the workplace, he was very kind and friendly in private. Once at the Mid-Autumn Festival Party at the annual convention of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association, he mingled with medical volunteers from all over the world,

dancing and having fun, without any stance, as it is said, "A gentleman looks solemn from afar, but gentle up close".

In the evening of November 22nd, 2020, Dr. Tseng Wen-Pin passed away in his sleep at the age of 98. In the morning of the 23rd, Jing Si Abode dharma masters, hospital colleagues, and Tzu Chi volunteers came to the morgue to pay their respects and to remember the contribution of Superintendent Tseng to the Taiwan medical professionals and the Tzu Chi Medical Foundation.