Tony Tan appointed honorary patron of SMU

Former president was instrumental in the creation of the uni and its educational focus

When the Government mooted the idea of a third university in Singapore in 1997, Dr Tan was convinced it should be different from the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University, which were largely based on the British model. He felt the new university should be an American-style one that focused on management, business and economics.

Nur Asyiqin Mohamad Salleh

Former president Tony Tan Keng Yam has been appointed honorary patron and distinguished senior fellow at the Singapore Management University (SMU), an institution he helped envision when he was deputy prime minister.

Dr Tan has so far kept his post-presidency plans under wraps, but The Straits Times has seen an internal e-mail to members of the SMU community last month which said he had "kindly accepted the appointment" at the university.

SMU president Arnoud De Meyer said the offer was made to Dr Tan after he stepped down as president on Aug 31, and he accepted the following month.

"Dr Tan was instrumental in the creation of SMU," Professor De Meyer said. "During his term as president of Singapore, he was our patron and, hence, it was fitting that our board of trustees offered him the honorary patron title for his many contributions to SMU."

The distinguished senior fellow title, he said, is similar to what was offered to the late Mr S R Nathan.

Mr Nathan – SMU's patron when he was Singapore's sixth head of state – was appointed distinguished senior fellow at the SMU School of Social Sciences after stepping down as president in 2011.

Prof De Meyer said the school is very honoured to have Dr Tan in its midst.

"We hope that our faculty and staff will be able to benefit from his insights, based on his outstanding career in academia, business and government," he said.

Dr Tan began overseeing university education in the 1990s and was the driving force behind SMU, which in 2000 was set up as the country's first publicly-funded autonomous university.

When the Government mooted the idea of a third university in Singapore in 1997, Dr Tan was convinced it should be different from the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University, which were largely based on the British model.

He felt the new university should be an American-style one that focused on management, business and economics, and he visited universities in the United States when he travelled there to learn more about them and explore potential partnerships.

Dr Tan also helped get the new school off the ground, approaching veteran businessman and current SMU board of trustees chairman Ho Kwon Ping to help set it up.

asyiqins@sph.com.sg