

**SPEECH BY MR HO KWON PING, SMU CHAIRMAN  
AT SMU COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY 2019  
TUESDAY, 30 JULY 2019, AT SMU HALL**

Guest of Honour, Mr Tan Min-Liang, co-founder and CEO of Razer;  
Mr JY Pillay, Chancellor of SMU;  
Mr Lim Chee Onn and Mr Eddie Teo, Pro-Chancellors of SMU;  
Members of the Board of Trustees;  
Faculty and staff of SMU;  
The Class of 2019;  
Parents and guests;  
Good afternoon.

Welcome to the opening ceremony of SMU Commencement 2019.

Let me begin by sharing with you that SMU Chancellor Mr JY Pillay will be stepping down from his role, and this will be the last Commencement he will be officiate as SMU Chancellor. SMU has been most privileged to have Mr Pillay as our Pro-Chancellor for 7 years and Chancellor for the last 3 years.

An already illustrious, highly decorated and extremely busy public persona when he joined us, Mr Pillay nevertheless generously gave us invaluable time and advice, and graced the University's Commencement and Academic Year Opening Ceremonies. He has inspired not only our students, but also our faculty and staff with his gentle sense of humour that belies a very inquisitive and sharp mind.

We have been truly honoured to Mr Pillay as our Pro Chancellor and Chancellor. Please join me to show our appreciation.

As SMU approaches the end of its teenage years, I am taken aback by how quickly and how much it has grown since our first cohort of 309 students graduated in 2004. I am sometimes greeted on the streets or in a shopping mall by old alumni, with spouse and even children in tow ... and I never cease to be shocked.

Today, just fifteen years later, over 2,800 students will graduate from six schools with a diverse range of 27 undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, including 6 doctoral programmes. And next year SMU will celebrate its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. How time truly does fly.

SMU's founding concept included being more than a typical management university. We sought to be, as our pun put it, A Different U – a different pedagogical approach to shape a

different kind of person. Diversity among our students and the breadth of our academic programmes are at the foundation of the broad-based, holistic and transformative education that is the hallmark of SMU.

Other essential factors are inculcating a sense of social responsibility through an obligation to complete 80 hours of community service before graduating; and encouraging global exposure through overseas opportunities such as business study missions, student exchange, internships and community service. I don't know how many times I've chanted this same mantra but for each cohort of students, it has been a core part of your SMU experience.

Over the last few years, under the leadership of past-President Professor Arnoud de Mayer, we enhanced the SMU experiential learning through initiatives such as SMU-X, which brings together the academic experts, students and relevant industry partner to collaborate and develop viable solutions in tackling real-world challenges.

Under the new leadership of President Lily Kong, other exciting new initiatives will be unveiled in due course, because SMU has not gained a reputation for innovation without good reason.

Upon graduation, an entirely new chapter of your life will start – welcome to the working world.

Because of Singapore's robust and resilient economy, no one under 40 years old will have ever experienced the emotional toll and economic ravages of a high unemployment rate. While in some countries more than half of university graduates are unemployed for several years, or have to accept menial service jobs or manual factory work, our own universities only have to worry whether in a bad year it may take 6 months for a graduate to find employment compared to say, 3 months in a good year.

Singapore with its entirely open economy is highly susceptible to slowdowns in global trade, and our economy is already feeling the impact. Nevertheless, we will continue to enjoy full employment, and much of this credit goes to the close co-ordination between manpower planning and educational output, so that the mismatch between jobs and school-leavers is minimized.

And yet there are rumblings in the air and uncertainty amongst policy planners and CEO's. The most obvious signals of global problems dominate the daily headlines; the US-China New Cold War – now more than a trade dispute – is just the most glaring. The global economy is experiencing serious challenges where economic and political currents align to create a storm of unprecedented proportions. Decades of globalisation have reversed course dramatically, with serious impact on global trade and economic growth. Fortunately, the direct impact on you will be minimal.

The bigger problem is less immediate and less predictable. And that is due to what you probably already know as the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution, when the advent of robotics and in

particular artificial intelligence, will completely disrupt labour markets. Hundreds of job types will be made redundant even as dozens more are created; yet even more jobs, occupations, professions – whatever fills up your working hours – will be merged and reconfigured.

This is not necessarily depressing but clearly disruptive. And since you cannot predict which jobs will be lost and which new ones created, you can only do two things: first, focus not on a specific job or occupation but in an area of particular interest, expertise, or competency, so that you can flexibly redefine your own work focus as the world of work changes rapidly. Secondly, experiment with different occupations, to the extent of even entering the gig economy, in order to experience a variety of roles, rather than to specialise in one for a long time, and then find that obsolete.

Do not job-hop simply for a higher salary or promotion; if you must, try out different jobs to find which area of work gives you the most satisfaction and enduring curiosity, because curiosity requires flexibility which is critical in a disruptive world.

You should also consider working outside of Singapore as a normal and perhaps even desirable phase of your life, just as the rites of passage for many New Zealanders in their isolated part of the world, involve working and travelling overseas when they are young. The whole of ASEAN is our backyard and its 600 million population contains some of the fastest growing middle classes in the world.

As the Latin injunction *Carpe Diem* – or *Seize the Day* – exhorts, take the initiative to create your own future, and not stumble into it accidentally, starting from your first job which you might take without too much thinking.

I am delighted to introduce our Guest of Honour Mr Tan Min-Liang – a Singaporean with a truly global outlook who has made a meaningful impact on an international scale with his creativity and entrepreneurial spirit.

Min-Liang is the co-founder, Chairman and CEO of Razer Inc, the global gaming hardware manufacturing company established in 2005. He is also Chairman and CEO of movie technology company THX Ltd. His leadership has resulted in the growth of Razer from a two-man startup to a multinational market leader that was honoured on Fortune Magazine's "Unicorn List" in 2015 for private companies valued at US\$1 billion or more. Razer went public on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange in 2017.

According to Wikipedia, he has a cult-like following worldwide and his fans have created fan sites of him as well as even tattooed Min-Liang's name on themselves. One of his fans has gone as far as tattooing Min-Liang's face on himself. ( is that for real ? )

He was named one of "The 25 Most Creative People in Tech" by Business Insider in 2015. Juniper Research distinguished him as one of the "Top 10 Most Influential Leaders in Tech"

while Tech in Asia has ranked him No.1 of the 30 top Southeast Asia tech founders. In 2016, he was named one of the "Straits Times Asians of the Year".

Min-Liang in his bold innovativeness and entrepreneurship shares many of the values and characteristics that we have striven to imbue in you during your time here. He is the quintessential SMU graduate.

I look forward to hearing his message for you, SMU Class of 2019 as you commence on the next phase of your life, striving with purpose for yourself and for an impact on those around you.

Thank you and enjoy the afternoon and the years ahead.

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