

SMU PRESIDENT'S REMARKS AT THAILAND QUALITY EDUCATION FORUM 2019

29th January 2019, 9am – 10.30am

Pullman King Power Hotel

Mahidol University President Professor Banchong Mahaisavariya,

Members of the Thai Higher Education Commission,

Fellow educators from Thailand and abroad,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning and *sawadee ka*.

1 Thank you President Mahaisavariya for your kind invitation to me to share and engage in dialogue with you and your colleagues at this important higher education forum.

2 This is my first overseas engagement since taking up my appointment as President of SMU, and I am delighted to be in Thailand to participate in this event organised by a long-time partner.

3 The SMU-Mahidol University partnership spans more than a decade, enabling our students, faculty and staff to come together to learn from and alongside one another. In particular, our relationship has strengthened over the past two years:

4 We hosted study visits by Mahidol's Division of Student Affairs in May and the Department of Academic Services in September 2018, while leaders from both universities had the opportunity to meet in Singapore on two occasions, at the APAIE Conference in March and at the ASEF Rectors' Conference in October 2017; both events were co-organised by SMU.

5 Mahidol has also indicated keen interest to participate in the Technology-Enhanced Personalised Learning initiative that SMU's Centre for Teaching Excellence is working with the ASEAN University Network Secretariat to develop into a new AUN Thematic Network.

6 But I am particularly heartened that Mahidol University partnered us last year in our first SMU-X Overseas initiative in Asia. SMU-X is our signature programme that represents SMU's pedagogical DNA, and bringing SMU-X to ASEAN and beyond is the next phase of its development. Vice President Nopraenue was a very active enabler of this collaboration and I thank her for her keen support and enthusiasm. I look forward to the second run of SMU-XO with Mahidol later this year.

7 Outwardly, our two universities seem different in character. SMU is a specialised university focused on management, social sciences and technology and their intersections, while Mahidol University is a leading comprehensive university.

8 But there are clearly many common interests and similar priorities that create opportunities for us to learn from and collaborate with each other. I am committed to work with President Mahaisavariya and your team to deepen relations between our two universities.

9 Turning to this morning's topic of discussion,

10 I thank the organisers for accommodating my request to adjust the focus of my remarks. It was originally suggested that I speak on *Academic Leadership in a Disruptive World*.

13 It was clear to me as a speaker at the APAIE and ARC6 forums that there is interest to understand and formulate effective responses to the impact of the 4th Industrial Revolution on the education sector. At these conferences, many had questions about the future of universities – and more provocatively, some had wondered if universities were even necessary in this disruptive world.

14 As such, I would like to share some perspectives on the changes and challenges to universities, followed by what SMU has done to **ride the waves of disruption** to fulfil our mission and commitment to ensuring that we nurture global-ready and socially responsible citizens – that our students are in time for the future.

15 The message I hope to leave with you is that universities can thrive amidst changes and disruptions by adapting, creating value and remaining relevant to industry and society – at home and beyond.

16 So what might some of these changes and challenges to universities be?

17 The first is the impact of technology on the nature of jobs.

18 I recall a book by Bill Gates back in 1999 entitled *Business @ The Speed of Thought*. It was, to many, a novel idea some twenty years ago and way ahead of its time, despite the birth of the World Wide Web in 1989.

19 Today, this **speed and pace of change and disruptions** is very much a reality as can be seen from the rapid ebb and flow of jobs and business models.

20 There are as many people today shopping online as there are in the malls, and one has to be adept in using the internet to *grab* a taxi, or even a *Tuk Tuk*, when you need one.

21 And the impact of technology is not just on the brick and mortar.

22 Many traditional jobs that need routine physical and cognitive skills are being automated and displaced. From robots doing certain types of surgery to leveraging artificial intelligence to interpret X-rays. And even composing music.

23 The question to us as educators is: Will the jobs which we are preparing our students for still be there when they graduate?

24 At the same time, students and their parents may wonder if they should still invest three to four years in a university education. With rapid technological advancement, they know there is an earlier expiry date on the skills and knowledge acquired in schools and higher education.

25 Innovation guru Clayton Christensen predicted in 2005 that within a decade, half of universities in the United States will be forced out of business as student demand drops. Fortunately, this has not yet happened. But it is not a stretch of imagination to argue that the signs today point in that direction.

26 My second point is still about technology, but now, about the ways in which technology changes the delivery of education. Here, I am talking about the surge of technology-enabled **Massive Open On-Line Courses**, or MOOCs.

27 They exemplify how the internet, with its ability to provide more immediate and extensive ways of accessing content, challenges the role and need for traditional universities.

28 Besides scale and improvements in design and course presentation, MOOCs are attractive because students can learn at different speeds and can mix and match courses from several different MOOCs.

29 They can create their own education portfolios, which employers have begun to accept as valid credentials. This is also particularly appealing to freelancers in the burgeoning gig economy.

30 Price wise, MOOCs are also available at a fraction of the cost of traditional university courses. In fact, hundreds of courses are free.

31 In a good scenario, MOOCs become a good complement to traditional university education, enabling students to “attend lessons” online the week before and come to the classroom not to listen to lectures, but to discuss and solve problems.

32 Allow me now to put a third observation out there for consideration. This is the sustained, if not growing, currency of what is loosely termed **corporate universities**.

33 Since General Electric’s Crotonville in the mid-50s, many major corporations have established their own universities to train, develop and equip the workforce they desire.

34 Disney and Motorola Universities debuted in the ‘70s, and the Apple University was established in 2008. And this is not just a Western phenomenon.

35 There is also the Sony University, while Samsung has strategic alliances with Korean Universities. More recently, Jack Ma established the Hupan University in Hangzhou dedicated to the “education of entrepreneurship”.

36 Corporations are increasingly taking education, and not just technical training but a range of leadership and business education, into their own hands.

37 They are now designing their own courses, capitalising on MOOCs and teaming up with MOOC providers like edX – the collaborative venture by Harvard and MIT providing online courses.

38 One might also wonder if corporate universities are growing because traditional universities are not producing the workforce that these corporations need, or not doing it fast enough.

39 As we ponder the implications of rapid technological advancements, and changes in needs and demands of industry and society, some parallels emerge.

40 First, **interdisciplinary teaching, research and innovation** is the way forward.

41 Our students need to be able to continuously learn, adapt and apply themselves to rapidly changing environments, shifting norms and business models.

42 We must educate at the intersections of the humanities, science and technology and through our research, embrace technology to create meaningful impact on economy, society and polity.

43 Next, we must effect **closer collaboration with industry and society**, to co-create learning programmes and curricula. This would bring our lessons out of the classroom and into the real world, to give our students the opportunity to learn through experience and practice. This ensures relevance.

44 Third, we need to embrace **lifelong learning**. We know the education of today will no longer guarantee our students the jobs of tomorrow, so we must ensure pathways for them to re-educate and upskill themselves, to remain constantly relevant for the future.

45 Lastly, our students need even more **cross-cultural learning to be global-ready** in a hyper-connected world.

46 With today's technology and connectivity, developments take place at the *speed of thought*, and their implications go global within minutes. Our students must be adept in engaging with other cultures, other ways of working, and other ideologies. They need to succeed across borders, and in multiple markets.

47 I have spoken about **what** it takes to educate for the future. Let me now share some examples of **how** we might, as educators, better prepare our students for a future world that is disruptively complex and uncertain.

48 At SMU, we seek to nurture graduates who have independence of mind and are dependable in deed. Our graduates should think deeply and broadly, and at the same time, act to create value and deliver meaningful impact at home and abroad.

49 We thus prioritise **interdisciplinary programmes** that emphasise integrative learning, critical thinking and creative problem-solving. Our pedagogy is as **experiential** as it is **collaborative**, particularly through our SMU-X programme which I will elaborate on later.

50 And we place emphasis on **personalised learning**, which will enable faculty to be more responsive to individual needs and progression of students.

51 All these are enabled and enhanced by the use of technology, and we have developed a strategy for **technology-enhanced learning**, for greater impact on teaching and learning outcomes.

52 We have also recently put into place a new **Exploratory Course policy** that would encourage students to experiment with classes outside of their major or usual sphere of academic interest, without being unduly concerned about the impact on their grades.

53 By allowing students to exclude up to two grades from their total GPA, we create the opportunity for them to learn outside their 'comfort zone' and to grow breadth in their studies.

54 We have created a multidisciplinary and broad-based curriculum that we keep constantly updated. This allows us to equip students with relevant hard knowledge and soft skills, to prepare them to take on an increasingly globalised and digital economy.

55 In 2016, we introduced a new major in Politics, Law and Economics – the PLE for short. It is the first of its kind in Singapore, and aims to develop students in global political and economic transformations, within legal frameworks.

56 We followed up in 2017 with another interdisciplinary major, the Smart-City Management and Technology programme, to equip students with skills to integrate technology, social sciences and management, for innovating smart-city solutions.

57 And in 2018, we introduced two programme specialisations for our undergraduates that were also the first of their kind – a Health Economics and Management second major as well as a Real Estate track for Finance and Economics students. These specialisations equip our students with the knowledge and cross-disciplinary skills to thrive in important sectors that are growing in scale and relevance.

58 Such initiatives also prepare students for increasingly diverse work in their future careers – from the public service and consulting, to foreign affairs and urban management.

59 Universities and education for the future must allow students to engage with real-world problems, to give them opportunities to chart their own paths to solutions. The key to this is for universities to work with members of industry to create experiential learning programmes, with meaningful outcomes.

60 An example of this is SMU-X, which I mentioned earlier.

61 SMU-X is a learning framework where undergraduates tackle real-world issues by taking on projects from companies and community organisations. Through this, we are able to bring students into close contact with industry partners to work together as cross-disciplinary teams. This accelerates learning beyond the classroom, as students are challenged to solve problems with interdisciplinary approaches, and to apply skills and knowledge in practical ways.

62 In addition to applying their domain knowledge through SMU-X courses, students also develop functional skills and market expertise. Most important of all, they develop soft skills and the ability to adapt to whatever is required for the jobs of the future economy.

63 Moving forward, SMU will continue to hold fast to our distinctive interactive pedagogy, while further developing experiential learning through expanded SMU-X offerings, including SMU-XO, or Overseas, courses.

64 Besides Mahidol, we are partnering other universities in the region and beyond to immerse our students in experiences that will help them be global-ready.

65 For aspiring entrepreneurs, we have our Global Innovation Immersion Programme, or GII.

66 It brings students out of their comfort zone – literally out of Singapore – and into the heart of a dynamic experience overseas.

67 Over three months, students study entrepreneurship with partners like the Copenhagen Business School while interning at startups, incubators and other industry partners to gain practical knowledge and experience from working in challenging environments – all while living overseas.

68 The GII and SMU-X are ways that SMU prepares and *innoculates* students from the vagaries of change. By encouraging them to embrace the unfamiliar, students grow resilient and more adaptable to uncertainty and disruption.

69 We acknowledged that some jobs today will disappear, while others will be transformed and new jobs will be created. Because of this, today's professionals must be open to change and committed to re-educating themselves.

70 And universities must provide for this need, to ensure that students are constantly equipped with the right skills at the right time.

71 We believe that lifelong education is well-achieved through executive education and skills training, which we offer through SMU Executive Development and SMU Academy respectively.

72 We focus on educating adult learners with functional skills across professions, as well as competencies specific to industries such as financial services, human capital, management and leadership, and technology and intelligent systems.

- 73 Last year, our programmes benefitted some 12,000 individuals who participated in a total of 226,000 hours of training.
- 74 But it is not only what we offer, but also how we offer our courses to cater to an adult learner's lifestyle and preferences.
- 75 Students at the **SMU Academy**, our lifelong learning institute, are able to read courses that can be incrementally 'stacked up', at a student's own convenience and pace, to contribute towards graduate certificates, diplomas and even master's degrees.
- 76 We believe the promise of incrementally working towards an academic qualification gives students the incentive to continue learning, regardless of age.
- 77 Like today's jobs, academic programmes are also vulnerable to disruption.
- 78 With the pervasiveness of new and unprecedented technology in the economy today, we saw the need to refresh some of our existing **Master's programmes**, and to launch new ones that respond directly to new tech-driven needs.
- 79 Disruptive technologies like block chain, cryptocurrency, smart contracts and Big Data are disrupting our banking and financial services sectors. In response, we enhanced our **Master of IT in Business (MITB)** programme by blending curriculum on traditional banking with courses on these new financial technologies.
- 80 By doing this, we successfully "up-skilled" our 10-year-old programme to keep it relevant – and I am heartened to say that it worked. Our MITB programme was recently ranked by QS as the first in Asia and 11th worldwide.
- 81 Similarly, we found that there was increased reliance on data analysis to inform business decisions in the field of accountancy, but not enough skilled professionals to meet this need. Accountants had little training in such data tech, and data analysts did not have enough knowledge in accountancy to apply their skills.
- 82 To bridge this gap, we launched our new **Master of Science in Accounting (Data & Analytics)** programme last year. It is the first programme in Asia to have students specialise in both accounting and data analytics, to equip them with new skills to meet a rising trend.
- 83 The growing complexities of globalisation and technological disruptions are but two reasons of why law – whether as a discipline or profession – is in a state of flux. As such, it is imperative that those working in the field of law continue to keep ahead of developments and hone new skills.

84 This is why the SMU School of Law will launch its new **Master of Law in Judicial Studies** in August this year. It will be yet another first of its kind in the region, and a collaboration between SMU and the Singapore Judicial College and the Singapore Supreme Court.

85 Through the programme, serving judges and judicial aspirants from Singapore and beyond will immerse themselves in the workings of the Singapore judiciary, while advancing their adjudication, extra-legal skills and judge-craft.

86 These are some of the initiatives that SMU has put forth to re-skill and upgrade the workforce of today so that they may remain relevant for tomorrow.

87 It is clear that we need innovative programmes and strategies to nurture students who will be adept at navigating, operating and succeeding in a future world that will be increasingly connected and complex.

88 But achieving this requires first-hand experience in understanding other peoples, other cultures and other systems.

89 At the same time, these experiences should be tempered by a sense of **social responsibility** – the fundamental appreciation that we are all part of a larger community for which we are responsible.

90 Only then will we be able to leverage technology and connectivity for a higher purpose – to nurture a generation of global-ready and socially-responsible citizens.

91 Currently, 87 percent of SMU students have gone overseas for exchanges, short-term study programmes, internships, study visits, and overseas community projects.

92 As we take steps towards our ambitious target of 100 percent global exposure for all our students, we stay true to our mission of ensuring that every student benefits meaningfully from each overseas experience.

93 This, by working closely with our international partners to co-create meaningful experiences for all.

94 All our undergraduates need to clock 80 hours of community service to graduate, and I am heartened that the majority of our students go over and beyond this minimum.

95 Since 2000, SMU students have rendered more than 2.5 million hours of community service. This adds up to 285 years of 24-7 volunteerism, and I will remind you that SMU is just 19 years old.

96 Many of our students contribute to community service in China, Nepal, Cambodia and even Africa. They have helped locals start micro-enterprises and medical dispensary services, and conducted lessons on basic business and accounting skills for underprivileged youths.

97 These are all novel experiences to enrich our students and broaden their horizons – to allow them to open their eyes to the world, however uncertain or complex it may be.

98 As technology continues its unrelenting surge into the future, we educators must be equally committed to finding new ways to help our students succeed amidst this industrial revolution, and the next.

99 Beyond education, our research is translational – to create meaningful impact on business, government and society.

100 We seek to address societal issues and challenges of global relevance through five key thrusts, namely

Interpreting economies and financial markets,
Strengthening social fabric and improve quality of life,
Navigating boundaries and borders,
Managing for sustainability,
Advancing innovation and technology.

101 With technological disruption comes increasingly intelligent Artificial Intelligence, and university research and thought leadership must stay ahead of this curve.

102 As Singapore, like Thailand, develops its digital economy, a trusted ecosystem is key, one where industries can benefit from tech innovations like AI while preserving consumer confidence and understanding.

103 Thus, it is necessary to develop policies and guidelines to govern the use of AI in an accountable and responsible manner.

104 To contribute to the management of AI in industry, SMU established the Centre for AI and Data Governance in September last year.

105 Besides promoting cutting-edge thinking and practices in AI, data policies and regulations, it would also serve as a centre for knowledge exchange with experts worldwide.

106 As one of its first international projects, the Centre has embarked on a research collaboration with Canadian research lab and startup incubator, Element AI.

107 Both sides would work together to share information, tools and approaches from Singaporean and North American perspectives, to draft joint recommendations and policy papers. These would expand the deep-tech talent pool in Singapore and develop the fast-growing tech startup ecosystem in ASEAN.

108 By leveraging multidisciplinary research and international partnerships, universities can apply their R&D knowledge to contribute meaningfully to business, government and society.

109 For SMU, our map for the next steps forward lies in our partnerships with leading universities worldwide.

110 Firstly, we are exploring international collaborations in **interdisciplinary programmes with leading universities**, to bring together perspectives that are even more diverse – to co-create and problem-solve at a higher level.

111 Among our latest partners in this endeavour is University College London, with whom we have established an accelerated programme.

112 Within four years, the best students in our Bachelor of Science in Smart City Management and Technology would complete both SMU's degree programme and UCL's Master of Science in Smart Cities and Urban Analytics.

113 With Zhejiang University in China, we have finalised two collaborative DBA programmes, or Doctor of Business Administration, in Accountancy and Economics.

114 From this year onwards, Chinese postgraduate students have the opportunity to study at both Zhejiang University and SMU, and would graduate with an SMU DBA in four years.

115 And *Down Under*, we recently launched a sequential master's degree programme with the University of Melbourne involving our Master of IT in Business and Melbourne's Master of Information Systems.

116 In two years, students would graduate with a master's degree from each university, and relevant skills and knowledge across the disciplines of Business and Information Technology.

117 Secondly, we want to create more opportunities for our students to learn with industry. This, so that they may better apply what they have learnt in class to their on-job experiences, and vice versa.

118 Therefore, SMU is now piloting a **work-study option** that allows students to take longer internships of up to six months, without the need to apply for a leave of absence.

119 Every week, students on the work-study programme would alternate between working at their attached companies and studying at SMU for at least one day, and they would still earn academic credits under the mentorship of a faculty advisor.

120 We rolled out this work-study option last year with our new Health Economics and Management second major, in cooperation with SingHealth, Singapore's largest national healthcare provider.

121 In this way, we ensure that our students deepen their disciplinary knowledge through a work-study experience that is structured and guided.

122 Thirdly, we seek to **evolve our initiatives in innovation and entrepreneurship** by forging partnerships with leading innovation and enterprise-linked institutions around the world. Particularly, in the United States, Germany, China, France, Thailand and other parts of Southeast Asia.

123 By sharing resources, know-how and networks, we will build the Global Innovation Immersion programme into a comprehensive platform for nurturing entrepreneurs from SMU and around the world.

124 We would also work with like-minded partners to establish innovation hubs in key cities, to grow innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystems.

125 For example, we have partnered the University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City, or UEH, and the Government of Vietnam to draft recommendations that would inform policies to develop innovation and entrepreneurship across Vietnam.

126 We are also working with UEH and Vietnamese investment conglomerate Vina Capital to establish an innovation institute and incubator in Ho Chi Minh City.

127 **I conclude** by returning to our earlier question on the future of universities:

128 Are we still relevant with all that is disruptive, and will our students be in time for the future?

129 If we are able to nurture global-ready, resilient and innovative lifelong learners who have sound values – I know the answer is a resounding yes.

130 The key to this is our commitment to make it happen.

131 I have shortened my remarks to allow for more time for dialogue and for me to learn from you. I look forward to questions you may have – and answers too.

Khop Khun Ka