

SMU Academic Year Opening Ceremony

School of Law Building, Friday 18 August 2017

Guest of Honour Mr *Kuok Khoon Ean*, Chairman of Kuok (Singapore) Limited;

Mr ***Lim Chee Onn***, Pro-Chancellor of SMU;

Members of the Board of Trustees;

Members of the faculty and staff of SMU;

Students of SMU;

Good afternoon and welcome to the inaugural Academic Year Opening Ceremony and Convocation Ceremony for SMU. For the past seventeen Convocation ceremonies we've followed the same format with, at its peak, almost 5,000 students, parents, faculty and other SMU stakeholders gathered in a single massive hall such as Suntec or Raffles City. And of course, we had 17 years of unique and memorable student performances which showcased the best of our students' talents – and SMU's ability to merge both the left and right sides of our students' brains, to create holistic, integrated and creative individuals.

This year, consistent with the SMU penchant for change, we're re-inventing the format. Because we now have our own large, multi-purpose hall in the SMU Law School which is part of the SMU campus itself, and we have a completely renovated and extremely user-friendly Campus Green, we want to concentrate all activities on campus.

And so the Freshmen Teambuilding Camps have been organised on campus, and in the spirit of inclusivity, the opening of the Academic Year is also an occasion

for later year students to feel a sense of festive coming back to the University. With a broad range of activities, ranging from Vivace, the name for our boisterous marketplace where all clubs and campus groups try to recruit members and supporters, to the policy-oriented President's address – this inaugural Opening will set the tone for future such events.

As in past Convocations, parents are welcome to participate, but in the spirit of even deeper engagement, we will organise special “parents' evenings” for them to tour the campus and catch a glimpse of student life.

All this of course, is because we have finally matured in size and infrastructure, to do what many universities have been doing – not just for decades, but even centuries, on their own campus.

For those of us like me, who feel as if we've been associated with SMU for longer than we can remember, it's easy to forget that in the overall scheme of global tertiary education, SMU is but a newby. And that means, like with today's new format, the opportunity to make changes and to create traditions from scratch.

The embracing and indeed, the initiating of change, is a fundamental value of SMU, perhaps even inborn in our DNA. Together with another value – the importance of choice – you will find the combination of change and choice to be quite disconcerting. And yet the two are intertwined; one implies and even requires the other.

Compared with life as JC or Poly student, the range of choices may be bewildering. Academic and extra-curricular choices, overseas and community service choices, internship choices, girlfriend or boyfriend choices ...

And with each choice you will perhaps imperceptibly but certainly irrevocably, change as a person. You may perhaps become more empathetic and compassionate, or more cynical and disillusioned. You may become more infused by passion and idealism, or more hardnosed and pragmatic.

But whatever you become, it will be your choice. It is a burden which only you are responsible for and a freedom which only you are accountable to.

You have all heard a lot about disruptive change, and how you may be facing jobs which still do not yet exist. That is only on the positive side. More threatening is the likelihood that hundreds of junior professional and even academic jobs, will be rendered obsolete by artificial intelligence. The world is facing unprecedented change and challenges – in global climate, geo-politics, socio-economic disparities, technological disruption ... you name it.

Like a glass half full or half empty, the future is both exciting and dire, and it all depends on your point of view. SMU will not give you any particular point of view with which to see the world or the glass; but we can sharpen your vision, develop your sense of balance, and give you a strong foundation, from which your own point of view can be developed with confidence and stability.

In recent months many public speakers, particularly politicians, have been flamed for plagiarising from other speakers or writers. In order to avoid this plight I will end by plagiarising from myself. I ended my stint two years ago as the inaugural IPS-SR Nathan Fellowship with a lecture where I quoted from the 13th century Persian poet Rumi. That quote also became the title of my book.

Rumi wrote, ***"You are not a drop in the ocean. You are the entire ocean, in a drop."***

In other words, you and I are not cogs in a machine, or grains of sand, or drops in the ocean. In each of us is the whole of SMU. Each of us represents the collective identities and histories which make up our ocean and on which we shall continue our journey together.

From this day onwards and past your graduation into the rest of your life, you will embody SMU – the whole ocean which is SMU, will be contained in the drop which is you.

I know these aspects of an SMU education are highly valued by our Guest of Honour, Mr Kuok Khoo Ean. Mr Kuok is currently the Chairman of Kuok (Singapore) Limited, and a Director of Kerry Group Limited and Kerry Holdings Limited, Hong Kong. The "Kuok Group" is one of Asia's most diversified and dynamic multi-national conglomerate with investments in commodities,

hospitality, logistics, real estate and shipping & shipping related businesses, amongst others.

Behind its success is a commitment to serving its customers and a determination to evolve with the times. The Kuok Group believes that success is measured not only by profits, but also by the contributions made to people's lives and to society as a whole. As it grows, the Kuok Group's attitudes and actions continue to be guided by the core values of loyalty, integrity and unity.

Mr Kuok was a member of SMU's first Board of Trustees and is a long-term friend and supporter of the SMU Community. I would like to express our gratitude to Mr Kuok for his donation of S\$5M for SMU Pathfinders Programme and SMU International Scholarships. The objective of the Scholarships is to motivate outstanding undergraduates from the emerging economies of South and Southeast Asia at SMU to achieve academic excellence and to accord appropriate recognition to the recipients of the Scholarships for their accomplishments. Mr Kuok himself has explained the SMU Pathfinders Programme "provides a framework and foundation for future leaders to uncover their own values, chart their own paths and discover their own purpose." Emphasising that learning is a lifelong journey, Mr Kuok urges SMU students to "pursue each opportunity with vigour, embrace every experience graciously, give wholeheartedly and live a life fulfilled."

Mr Kuok has a vision of developing the next generation of youth leaders who not only have the resilience and tenacity to lead, but who are also mindful of the values that shape those decisions and actions.

This aligns with SMU's own Vision 2025 as we seek to provide a transformative education that will encourage our students to go beyond discovering their own values, paths and purpose and go on to guide, transform and inspire others to discover theirs.

On behalf of all of us here, I would like to sincerely thank Mr Kuok for this gift that provides such a positive hope for the future as we look ahead at our inaugural Academic Year Opening Ceremony.

Thank you.