

SMU - a risk that paid off, says Heng

Minister reveals initial concerns over attracting high-calibre students

By DEBBIE LEE

AS THE Singapore Management University (SMU) celebrated its 10th and largest batch of graduates yesterday, Education Minister Heng Swee Keat admitted that its founding was a risk that paid off.

"We had serious concerns," said Mr Heng about Singapore's third publicly-funded university, which was set up in 2000.

"Would the new university,

with no track record, be able to attract high-calibre candidates? I am glad the dare paid off."

Ten years after its first batch graduated, the university is still grooming students who are highly sought after.

He cited statistics such as a 91.7 per cent employment rate for last year's batch of graduates.

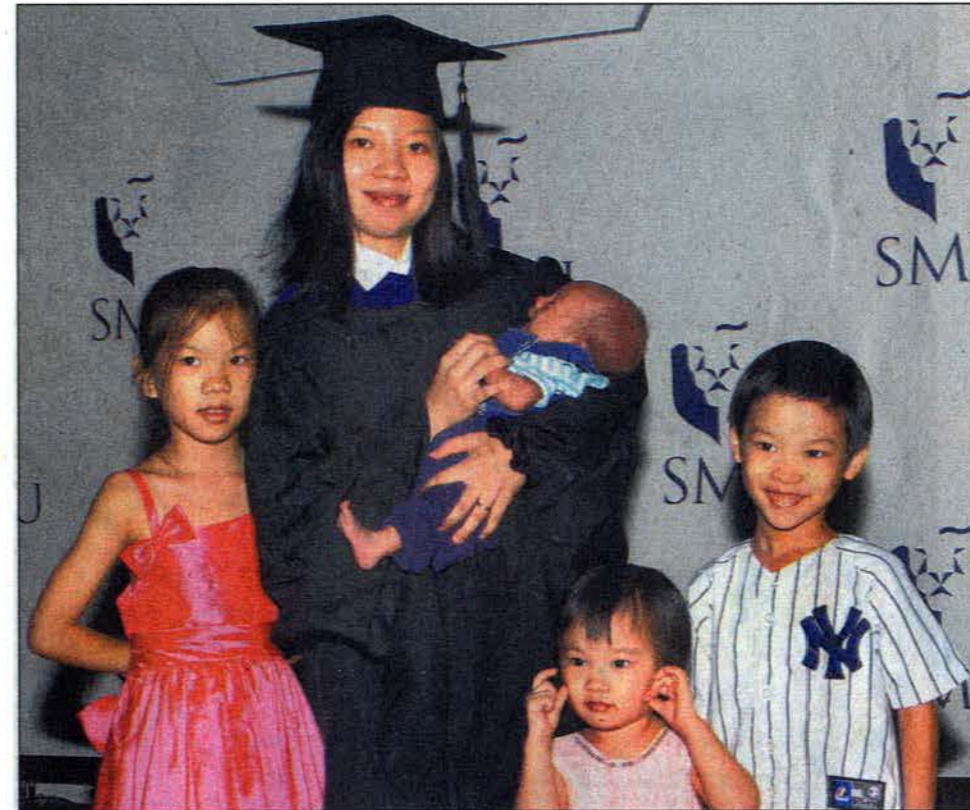
"SMU exceeded expectations and has turned out successive classes of well-qualified graduates," he said.

Mr Heng was speaking at Resorts World Sentosa to more than 2,000 graduates.

Among them were the pioneer batches of four new postgraduate programmes, namely a PhD in Business, and Masters programmes in Laws, Science in Communication Management, and Science in Innovation.

One of them, Madam Luo Ling Ling, graduated with a Masters' in Law while caring for her three young children and working as a litigation lawyer.

"There were trying times, but it was worthwhile as I am very passionate about public service," said the 28-year-old.



Madam Luo graduated with a Masters' in Law from SMU while caring for her then-three children and working as a lawyer. With her are (from left): Rachael, seven; newborn son Caleb; Audrey, two; and Michael, five. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

SMU also conferred two honorary degrees, a Doctor of Laws on former chief justice Chan Sek Keong and a Doctor of Information Systems on former Xerox Corporation chief John Seely Brown.

Mr Heng reminded the fresh graduates about their important role in society, adding that the required 80 hours of community service for every SMU student was a good first step.

"Such contributions say more about you than your academic transcripts," he said.

The minister also shared an anecdote about a student he met at a recruitment event who wanted to "learn as much as possible" so he could "have the corner office in 10 years' time".

"It was a polite way of saying he wanted my job," said Mr Heng. He reminded graduates that while it is good to be ambitious, "you now progress by making a difference to the people around you."

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