

Xinhuanet Interview with Professor Arnoud De Meyer - President of Singapore Management University

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(Source: sg.xinhuanet)

Cultivating Leaders Through Holistic Education

Journalist: Thank you very much, Mr. De Meyer, for receiving our interview today. My first question is that, since SMU stands for Singapore Management University, most people would think that SMU's focus is more on management-oriented education. Could you explain to us if this is true?

Arnoud De Meyer: Singapore Management University is a young public university. We were created about 13 years ago, by the Singapore Government, to be an agent of change, to help change the educational system in Singapore by bringing in a little bit of competition. We started as a business school, and maybe that's the reason why the name still reflects a little bit on management and business administration. But, very soon, we started to create schools in economics, accountancy, information systems, social sciences, psychology, sociology and political science, law etc. So, today, we are actually more like a social sciences university, and when people ask me today, "what does the word 'management' title still mean, or do you have the wrong name?", I say that we are about managing not only business, but also managing yourself, which is psychology. Or there is managing conflict, which is law, or managing groups, which is maybe sociology, so we interpret the word 'management' in a very broad way today.

Journalist: As a majority of our audience is Chinese people in China, including Chinese parents, students, and high-level executives, could you share with them what kind of education programmes are open for them now?

Arnoud De Meyer: We, like most universities, have both undergraduate and graduate programmes, and then we also do continuing education, or short programmes that lead to a certificate or a diploma. In the undergraduate programme, we are mainly focused on the Singaporean young people, because that is why the Government created us. But because we actually want to create an environment in which the Singaporeans can interact with foreign students, we also take about 12% foreign students. Currently, out of the 2,000 students that we take in every year, about 250 students are from abroad, so there are some opportunities in the undergraduate programme, for Chinese students to come and study here in Singapore. At the same time, we believe very strongly in exchange of students, and last year we had more than 830 students from abroad coming to our university, and about the same number of Singaporean students that went to study abroad. Then again, we have very good exchange programmes with Chinese Universities, both in Beijing and Shanghai, but also in Wuhan, Guangzhou, and Chengdu. So we have, and are looking for more, exchange partners in China.

At the level of the postgraduate programmes, such as the Masters programmes, we actually work very closely with some Chinese universities. First of all, we have quite a few Chinese students coming to study here in Singapore, in our Masters of Innovation, Masters of Finance, Masters of Information Technology and Business programmes, but more recently we have worked very closely together with Chinese universities. First of all, we have, actually since 2007, a collaboration with Xiamen University, where they send us up to 50 students from Xiamen to come and study applied finance every year, and more recently we launched a Masters of Science in Financial Economics, which we again do with Xiamen, but also with the Huazhong University of Science and Technology in Wuhan, and Shanghai University of Finance and Economics. We are looking constantly for partnerships with China's universities, so that we can give double degrees, or allow Chinese students to come and study here.

Finally, we do continuing education. We have short programmes in Wealth Management, Service Management, in many different areas that we are strong in, and we hope that we will attract more Chinese companies to come and sample what we have to offer here in Singapore. I almost forgot that from January onwards, we will also have a Master of Science, a dual degree with Beijing University, in the field of Information Technology and Business. I think we have about 26 students that will come in January to study here, to have their double degree with the School of Software Engineering in Beijing University. So, there are quite a few activities, and we hope that we will be able to enhance and increase the number of Chinese students studying here for their Masters Degrees.

Journalist: Could you explain to us more on why Chinese students should choose SMU to pursue their studies, compared to other local public and foreign universities in Singapore?

Arnoud De Meyer: It is always difficult to compare, so I would advise potential students to really look at the university, and then ask "which one fits best my career profile, my aspirations?" so I'm not going to say the others are not as good, we just offer equally good products, maybe a better product in some cases. But why come to SMU? Because we

have a very special way of education. We believe in holistic education. I always say that perhaps only 20-30% of what the student learns, he or she will learn in the classroom. Maybe 70% they will learn outside the classroom, by discussing with each other, by doing project work, by doing social community service, by being exposed to foreign students, by perhaps participating in the many, many clubs that we have, and displaying leadership. We see it as a holistic education. Everything you do in SMU contributes to make you a better leader, and that is what we want to create.

We want to create leaders for the global cities of tomorrow, and that is where I think it is very interesting for Chinese students to come here, because it is a relatively familiar environment. It is not like going to the suburbs of London or whatever; it is a safe, familiar environment. You find good Chinese food and Chinese culture, yet it is different, and you can meet many, many people from difference cultures, different backgrounds, and different countries, because there are so many international people living here in Singapore. So I think you get almost the best of both worlds. So that is the second reason, which is the ability to live in almost an international life, prepare yourself to become a leader for global cities, and lots of big cities in China, that have global aspirations.

The third point that I want to make is that we do a lot of research on Asia. I know there are some foreign institutions in earlier days, but that is the world coming to Singapore, or to Asia. We bring Asia to the world. We do research on Asia, not only on what is going on in China, but also here in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia etc. Myanmar is now an interesting country to look at, we do interesting research on psychological problems or sociological issues, management and business, law, and we look at it from this Asian perspective, and what we learn in our research, we try to share with the rest of the world. Again, I think it is interesting for a Chinese student to come here. I'll take an example. If you come and study in our JD (Juris Doctor Programme), you study law, but you study the Common Law, as it was developed in the United Kingdom, and then used elsewhere, but you study how it has been implemented in Asia, so you get a very interesting combination. If you were to study law in England, you get English law. But you see it only in that area. When you come here, you see how we have adapted it to an Asian environment, how it applies in Asia, and I think that is actually very interesting for students to see how the two are then merged with each other. So we do research on this part of the world, and we try to make sure that that is top-class research, world-class research, that we can improve our programmes with that research. So I think that is the third point.

The holistic experience, the international experience, the third point is the strength of research that we have to offer. We are a truly Asian school, and that I think is important for many students.

Journalist: You've shared with us why they should choose SMU. Then what kind of Chinese students are you looking for? What are your expectations after they graduate from SMU?

Arnoud De Meyer: We want them to become leaders. We want to make sure that our students and our alumni are successful in business, in government, in society and non-profit organizations. We are quite neutral about it. They do not have to go into business, notwithstanding our name, but we want them to become leaders, to be outspoken, thoughtful, and to be able to give leadership, and who feel a responsibility for society, not only for making money for themselves, but actually who would say "we do this because we

want to improve society”. You probably know that all of our students have to do 80 hours of community service while studying in SMU. Many of them do a lot more. That is important for us, because we want to ensure that they understand that as university graduates, they are privileged, and they have to give back to society. They’ve got a lot from the Government, and from society, because they are allowed to study. They get a good degree, they probably will make good money, with good salary, but they should realize that they have to give back to society. So that is the second thing I expect from them, that is that they are leaders, and secondly, that they are leaders with a heart, and are willing to give back to society. Thirdly, of course I hope they will be very professional, that they will apply what they learn here at the university. I actually had the privilege of going to Shanghai and Beijing to see our alumni there, and I was very impressed by them, because I think we are succeeding. They were all talking about their job, and the hard work they had to do, the long hours they had to work. That’s OK! I’ve worked hard and long hours when I was young, so that’s fine. But they were all talking about something else, something that they were trying to do to give back to society. I think I’m very proud of my alumni.



(Source: sg.xinhuanet)

Furthering SMU’s Internationalization with the Setting Up of China Initiatives

Journalist: Now, let’s talk about China Initiatives. What were the main reasons for setting up China Initiatives in late 2012?

Around De Meyer: When I came here as President of the university in September 2010 (which means I’ve been here almost 3 years), the Chairman of the Board actually asked me only one thing. He basically said, “You have to make sure that we can internationalize SMU”. He trusted that I would do the other things well, and that I knew how to lead the University. He said that one of the reasons why they recruited me was because I am a very international person. I’m Belgian originally, but I’ve lived in France, the United Kingdom, Japan, here in Singapore, in the United States, six countries in all. And I’ve been working

internationally for a very long time. Actually, my first time in China was in 1984, when I was working in Shanghai for a few weeks. I have an interest in international management, and an international vision, so my Chairman asked me to internationalize the university. We thought long and hard about it, we learned a lot from the United States, and we still have very good relationships with the Wharton Business School of the University of Pennsylvania, with Carnegie Mellon University, and we also have very good relationships in the UK, with Cass Business School, in Switzerland with the University of St. Gallen...with the traditional industrialized countries of this world, we have very good relationships, so we thought about it and said to ourselves that we need to be more present in China, and also a little bit in India. These are two fast-growing economies.

We want to be there for four reasons. First of all, we want to build our reputation, because we want to attract better and more students from China. Secondly, we also want to do research together with universities over there. We want to better understand what is going on. I want my faculty to work with professors in Chinese universities. I want to invite Chinese professors to come and spend some time here, so we get a very good research environment, and learn a lot about what is going on in the Chinese economy, and the Chinese environment in general. The third reason why we want to do that is because we believe that there are enormous opportunities in Masters programmes. The advantage that we have is that our Masters programmes are one year, and in many cases, the Masters programmes in Chinese universities are 2 or 3 years. So, for Chinese students, it is quite easy to come to us for a year, and actually get two degrees, one in their own university at home, and a good Masters degree here. We want to collaborate on these Masters programmes. That is the third element. The fourth element is that I want to make sure that our undergraduate students have more exposure to what is going on in China, and study with their Chinese friends, maybe do an internship in Chinese companies. Same for Chinese students coming here, to learn about what is going on here, work with a diverse set of nationalities here, and perhaps in some cases do an internship in Singaporean companies.

The main goal of setting up China Initiatives was to build our reputation, and the three sub-goals are attracting better students, creating Masters programmes, carrying out research and making sure that we find good exchange programmes. So I made my first trip to China as President of SMU about a year and a half ago. Since then, I have been going on lengthy visits every 6 months, to work with my counterparts in Fudan, Shanghai Jiaotong, Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, Beijing University and Tsinghua University, and also in Wuhan, Chengdu, and Guangzhou. We are trying to see which universities we feel would be a good match. We have also welcomed quite a few Presidents of universities to come and visit us. We had a very good visit by Professor Zhang, President of Shanghai Jiaotong University, and also from Sun Yat Sen University in Guangzhou. We have these exchanges, and we're gradually building up our relationships, so I think the closer we come to each other, the more we can do together. It is also our intention to work with Chinese companies. That will probably take a little more time, as they have to get to know who we are, and we need to build up the trust. But that is the purpose of China Initiatives.

Journalist: Could you share more about existing collaboration programmes with universities in China? Also, what is your long-term development strategy in China?

Arnoud De Meyer: We already had a few small exchange programmes for our undergraduate students, and the undergraduate students from the Chinese counterpart, before I arrived here. But in April, I went to China for a week, and we signed 13 or 14 agreements with universities. In some cases, they were pure exchange agreements, between our schools and the schools in China. But we have some interesting work. For example, we are going to do research with Fudan. One of our faculty members is actually a graduate from Fudan who is here in Singapore as a professor. He is now on sabbatical at Fudan, to start up some form of research in the area of social development and ageing of society, a topic that is important for both China and Singapore. We are also setting up some research projects around the perception of China outside China, which we can probably contribute to. We did, for example, a summer camp on finance with Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, where we had more than 100 participants, PHD students and researchers sharing their research with each other. Those are examples from when we try to set up research projects and collaborations. The second example is the Masters programme. I mentioned earlier our collaboration with Xiamen University, which is in finance. We have two Masters programmes, Applied Finance and Financial Economics, with them, and those are now joined by Huazhong University of Science and Technology in Wuhan, and Shanghai University of Finance and Economics. They will send us a batch of about 30 people. We actually started the Masters of Science in Financial Economics programme a few days ago, and we will have 26 students coming from Beijing University to study IT in Business with us here.

We set up these Masters programmes, and in terms of long-term strategy, I can only say that I would like to increase the number of research projects, and the number of students and dual degree programmes that we can do together with universities. One of the hopes that I have is that we will be able to work together with universities like Tsinghua and Southwestern University of Finance and Economics in Chengdu, to perhaps set up executive programmes, short programmes, because I think, for the people here in Singapore, we can learn a lot from the Chinese universities, and vice versa. As universities, we can probably bring a lot of knowledge to their clients, so if we do a good partnership, I think we can actually learn a lot from each other, and provide a better, short executive programme for people in business by doing it together. One of my hopes is also that at some moment in time, I can link up with a Chinese university, and an Indian university, and create a three-way programme with people from Southeast Asia, since Singapore alone may be too small, and managers from China and India, bringing them together to see what they can learn from each other. Maybe they could do business together. So my long-term strategy is to build the reputation of SMU in China, and at the same time in Southeast Asia and India, and maybe at some moment in time, we can get three or four way collaborations.

Journalist: You mentioned that the first time you visited China was in 1984, and you've been regularly visiting China ever since. Could you share with us, in your eyes, how Chinese universities have changed over the years?

Arnoud De Meyer: I must say that the first time I was there, I went to Changsha to work with Volkswagen, to teach quality management to their suppliers and subcontractors. It was a training programme. Since then, I have been going back every year, several times per year in the last 3 years. I've been going to China as a teacher, a researcher, and also as a tourist, so I have travelled around quite a lot. In the 80s and early 90s, frankly speaking, the universities were not very good. Maybe some of them were good teaching institutions, but

there was very little research ongoing. That has dramatically changed. When I go to China now, I can see that that the Government has invested a lot in the top universities. I know that there are 3,000 or more universities, and when I look at the ones that I visit, which are in the top 50, I can see that there has been a very conscious and big investment in these educational institutions, not only in the buildings and the grounds, which look beautiful, but also in the quality of the research, and I think that since about 10 years ago, the major change for me is that the top universities have moved from being teaching institutions to real universities, combining teaching with research. It can also be seen that quite a few members of the Chinese diaspora in the United States and the United Kingdom have decided to come back and work in Chinese universities, and I can also see that they get very good packages, so it is probably very attractive for them to go back to China, but that creates a very strong research capability, and I'm sure that within the next few years we will see a lot of very good research ideas coming out of Chinese universities. That is the reason why we want to collaborate, because we think that by working together, we can do even better research, bringing our capabilities and insights, matching and merging them with the very strong capabilities in the Chinese universities, and make the best out of 2 worlds.

Journalist: Could you share with us the biggest difference between universities in Singapore and China?

Arnoud De Meyer: Singapore universities are very open to foreign talent. Our universities, in general, have slightly more than 50% foreign faculty members, and this is not specific to SMU; this is for all the universities. I think this open-ness to foreign talent that come to work here for a number of years, train some of the PHD, graduate and undergraduate students, and do research here, is one of the strengths of our universities in general. It has generally improved the quality of the output, both for teaching and research. It is easy for a small country like Singapore to attract a lot of foreigners. It is also easy for a foreigner to live here, because the environment is relatively very welcoming. It is not that easy to replicate this elsewhere, but I think that is the first characteristic that is different. The second one is, of course, that all the teaching is in English, which makes it easy for foreigners to come work and study here. I am not saying that all universities should teach in English, but we need to have some kind of common language. The third characteristic is that the Government is very supportive of the universities here. I know this is the same now in China, but the amount of resources that are made available by the Government has really made a big difference in upgrading the universities. The fourth point is that the Government was actually very forward-looking when they created SMU, and later on the Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD), creating a bit of competition between the universities. The two comprehensive incumbent universities, NUS and NTU, were both based on the British system of education, and when Dr. Tony Tan, who is now the President of Singapore, pushed the idea of creating SMU, he wanted it to be based on the American system, to create a bit of competition, to be an agent of change for the educational system, and I think it has worked quite well. We have learnt from each other. Maybe SMU is not fully American anymore, as we have learned some of the good ideas of the British universities, and NUS and NTU have adapted themselves, and have perhaps taken some characteristics from the American system, and we are developing our own Singapore system, sort of by taking the best of 3 or 4 different worlds. We also have learned a lot from Continental Europe, and have learned something from Japan. I think what we try to do, not just in SMU, but in the higher education system in Singapore, is to learn from the best in the world, and bring that here. We're not being arrogant about it, we

just try to learn from many people, and sometimes try to improve on what they already do. So, the four characteristics are: being open to foreign talent, teaching in English, very strong commitment by the Government, and openness for competition.

Journalist: I've also heard that you have a management board, and its members are from different industries. This is very different from Chinese universities...

Arnoud De Meyer: We are very much managed like a company. I have a quite large board. 20 members, all very, very committed people. We also have 2 representatives from the Government and 2 academics on the Board. The 16 other people are all business people, and they manage this place like a company, so I have objectives, key performance indicators, and I have to manage this place like a company. Of course we are not a company, we are a university, but we've taken the best of what they have. They have actually taught us a lot about how to manage the place. You know that academics may not always be the best managers, so they teach us a lot. This makes us very different from Chinese universities.



(Source: sg.xinhuanet)

SMU President's Message to Students: Be "A Different U"

Journalist: Firstly, let's talk a little bit about you. What is your greatest mission as President of SMU?

Arnoud De Meyer: My biggest mission as President of SMU is making sure that this university, which is now a very successful young university, becomes a leading university in Asia. There will be other leading universities. The world is big enough for a few leading universities, but traditionally all the leading universities are in the United States, a few in the

UK, a few in Continental Europe, and one or two in Japan, but the rest of the world did not have that many good universities 20-30 years ago. Currently, we are developing in Asia, probably also in Latin America, some new universities that can really become leading universities of the world, where the best of the students from the world will want to go and study. Today, SMU is a young university. We have achieved enormous success in 13 years, by now having more than 8,000 students, and all of them get good, nice-paying jobs when they graduate. We are ranked very well in some research rankings in economics, accountancy, business, information systems, etc., so we've achieved a lot. Now we have this wonderful platform to make sure we become a leading university that is well known beyond Singapore or its surrounding countries. That requires hard work in terms of research, and the quality of students, to make sure we get there. That is my overall, overarching mission. But in the process of doing that, I think we need to reinvent what a university is all about.

The traditional universities are based on a European model, which is almost 200 years old. The model of university based on disciplines where you only teach people between 18-26 years old is a bit disconnected from the real world. I think that is an obsolete model, and we have the opportunity to not only become a leading university, but to develop a new model of what a university is. There is much more inter-disciplinary interaction, where people work together to reveal problems in society, and reach out to society and have impact, making a difference in society. We are perhaps in a world where knowledge is changing so fast that we have to educate people throughout their whole lives. I always think that we should become eternal students. Not full-time, because we also have to work, but we have to learn all the time, and universities should help in that learning. I see all these discussions about these MOOCs, or Massive Online Open Courses. I think there is more hype than reality, but it is interesting to see how people are thinking about teaching people of all ages, not only young people, but also middle-aged or older people. We can still learn a lot, and I think these MOOCs enable us to do so. So that may well be a big change that universities have to go through. But we need to reinvent the university. We need to come up with new, innovative, different universities. You may have seen when you came into the building, that our slogan is "A Different U". We want to create a new, different university, and that is my second mission.

Thirdly, I must make sure that our students have the best education possible, so we must make sure that we are very well-organised and efficient. We are a management university, so we should be able to manage ourselves well.

Journalist: After moving into management, do you still conduct any research?

Arnoud De Meyer: I love research. I do not have enough time for it, because I need to run the place, but in my late hours at night, or during weekends, I still find the time to write. I still work with some of my colleagues at the University of Cambridge on topics like Management of Innovation, so I still publish a few papers a year. It is partially because I think I should do what my faculty does. I should teach a little bit, and I should do a bit of research, so that they cannot tell me that I no longer know what I am talking about, because I still do it. I love to do research. If I would not like to be an academic, I probably would have gone to work in industry, but it is because I like academia that I stayed here.

Journalist: One of your academic fields is innovation. Why do you think innovation in Asia is growing in importance, and how do you think Singapore could develop in terms of innovation?

Arnoud De Meyer: First of all, let me talk about Asia, because Singapore is very small. I think there are huge opportunities for innovation, because we have a very rapidly increasing group of middle class people, those who earn \$50,000 or more per year, are above the poverty level, and thus can spend money on consumer goods such as cellphones, smartphones, luxury bags, etc. This group of middle class people and families is probably now in the hundreds of millions in Asia. It used to be in the tens of millions. This group is rapidly growing, and some predict that in 2030, about 1.5 billion will be middle class. But it is typically the middle class that is a source of new ideas for innovation, because they express their wishes for luxury goods, household equipment, smartphones, etc. They express what they want. Before, it was the American middle class, then later on the European middle class, that were expressing their desires, and companies were making products for them. Today, it is here that we express our needs, and large organizations will start to cater more and more to the needs of people here, and they will want to have research and development carried out close to where the markets are, so that is one of the major reasons, I believe, that we will see more and more innovation coming out of Asia, because companies see here what the needs are, will bring their research and development, we have good universities that can educate the technicians, and the marketing specialists to do the hard work of developing and launching these new products and processes or services. So I think the sky is the limit for the moment for innovation.

It's not always easy, because there is no tradition of being innovative here. There is the tradition of low-cost manufacturing for principals in the United States, or Japan and Europe, not necessarily high value-added manufacturing. There is no good market research, and people do not like to tell what they like, so sometimes it is more difficult to find out what the consumer wants than it is in the United States or the United Kingdom. There is no good concept of intellectual property rights, which is very essential for innovation. The innovators need to feel that they are protected, that they can make some money out of their innovations, and get the rent out of their investments. There is a lack of designers. There are lots of good engineers, but not necessarily good designers, people that can take a concept and make a beautiful, easy-to-use product out of it. We all know the success of Apple when they brought out the iPhone, or the iPod. The components of those products were all made elsewhere, most of them even in Asia, but it took some creative people to put it together, to design it in such a way that it suddenly becomes beautiful and easy to use. That is still what we need to develop here, but I am very confident we can do it. There is great opportunity. Singapore itself is a very small country, so it can be successful in innovation if it is very outward-looking, and I also think that it can be successful in services. It is a very sophisticated society today, one of the richest in the world, and we have some of the best services here, so we can probably become a specialist in service innovation, the same way that I think it can happen in Shanghai. Shanghai is a very sophisticated city today, too, with lots of sophisticated services, and demand for sophisticated services, so you can see that there will probably be a lot of service innovation there. But, coming back to Singapore, there is a real need to remain very open, because if we are too inward-looking, we will not be very innovative. The market is too small.



(Source: sg.xinhuanet)

From Europe to Asia: Continuous Learning with an Open Mind

Journalist: As a scholar living and working in Europe, what reasons brought you to Singapore?

Arnoud De Meyer: I graduated as a PHD student from my university in Belgium, but had also spent quite a lot of time in MIT in the United States, Cambridge, and in Boston. I graduated as a specialist in management of innovation and management of operations, and for some reasons I was very interested in what was going on here in Asia. At that moment, it was not very clear. I did not know too much about Asia. But as the school that I was then working for in 1983, 1984 and 1985 had the small unit that enabled the faculty to come to do research and teach in Asia. And when I joined the INSEAD, I immediately jumped into the occasion to say "Yes. I want to go there, I want to understand what is going on". So I had this interest and I went to Shanghai in 1984 to do some teaching for quality management. I went many times to Indonesia, I went many times to Japan to learn Japanese manufacturing techniques. I went to the Philippines and Thailand. So I got to know lots of companies here and I found it quite interesting, in contrast to what I was used to in Europe, and I learned from the differences.

So in 1995, when my school in France, INSEAD, was looking for a director for their little unit to work in Asia, I put up my hands and said I want to be the director. And they said "Ok. Do that." So I started coming here a lot, and built up a lot of friends here. So when INSEAD considered setting up a campus in Asia, I did a feasibility study and looked up for all the different possibilities. And we ended up choosing Singapore and setting up a campus here in Singapore. So I lived here from 1998 to 2003, and setting up and leading the campus of INSEAD here in Singapore. Then I got to know the region even better. I did quite a lot of research on innovation management in this part of the world. But then for personal reasons

I need to go back to Europe. I needed to be close to my parents, who were aging. I wanted to take care of them. And I decided also to go to the University of Cambridge.

But then in the end of 2009, I got a phone call from SMU, asking "Are you interested in coming back to Singapore?" I thought the University of Cambridge is a very good university and SMU is a very young university. Maybe...maybe... But then I came back and I saw what has been achieved and what was going on in this part of the world. I said "Yes." That's how I decided to come back. So this is now my home.

Journalist: Have you experienced any culture shock in Singapore?

Arnoud De Meyer: "Shock" is a big word. But I had to adjust a little bit. I come from a country which is relatively non-hierarchical. And Asian cultures have very strong respect for the elders, the seniors, power, etc. It is a rather hierarchical society. So in the beginning when I was here, I felt that it was very strange, because in my country we respect each other. It is not a question of non-respect, but we are much more equal. The leader is only the first among equals, in a sense. So that was one of the culture shocks. It was probably the most difficult one that I had to adjust myself to. But, again, "shock" is a big word.

The other aspect I found interesting is exploring the differences in food, culture, arts and history. But that's not a shock. It is just that I learned how different the backgrounds of people can be. And you can learn if you listened well, you can learn a lot from many people, and you can improve your opinions and behaviors. Actually it is quite fun to discover all these differences. Of course, you go through periods where you think everything is different at the beginning, and then you discover that maybe it is not that different. All parents love their children. So it is just commonality. And then you maybe discover the deeper differences, the ones you do not talk that much about. That was the part I found very interesting. It is not a shock. It is just that you need to be open for it, and accept that people could be different and I hope that people could accept that I am a bit different too. I cannot become an Asian. It does not work, physically (laughs). So I will always be a European, but I think a modest European that accepts that there are many interesting differences that I can learn from here. So that's my second observation.

The third observation I had is the very fast development of Asia. It is not cultural, but because of this, materialism is quite strong here. The materialistic attitude...maybe that will quiet down over the years, but sometimes it is a bit shocking.

Journalist: Yes. Everybody here talks about houses and cars, etc. So what do you miss most? The arts?

Arnoud De Meyer: No. There is very good contemporary art here. Each time when I go to China, I will go to see the galleries there. It has very good contemporary art. The same is true in Manila, or in Jakarta in Indonesia, or Mumbai, when I go to India. There is very creative and good art everywhere. That is not a problem. I guess what I miss most is my family, my sisters and my siblings. But that has been improved with modern telecommunication technology, such as Skype, WhatsApp and all kinds of other same products and technologies. They come quite regularly to Singapore.

Journalist: Nowadays there are also many young Westerners coming to Asia to look for job opportunities. What are your suggestions for them?

Arnoud De Meyer: I get that question all the time from my friends. They now have children who are twenty-five, twenty-six and twenty-seven years old. And they ask "Should I come to Asia, should I ...?" And my answer is "Yes. Please." I mean not forever. Many of them will be able to set up their business in Europe, or work there, but I tell everybody to please come and experience what is going on here. Come here with open eyes and open ears. Listen a lot. Learn a lot. Don't think that you have all the wisdom. It is a very competitive environment with very good graduates here. And you have to compete with the best of the world. But actually you can compete and you come and learn here. So I tell the kids to come and do it. Sometimes it may be very tough for them because in Europe they may belong to well-off families and have good jobs. They come here and then they work in an environment that is very competitive where they may not necessarily speak the language, so they have to learn a new language. But I basically tell them that this is a great opportunity to learn a lot. And you will be a much better person if you spend three to five years here in Asia. And please do not always go to the easy places like Singapore. Go to the difficult places. Go to Urumqi, go to Kashgar. Go to Chengdu. Go to Jakarta in Indonesia. Go to Yangon in Myanmar. Go to the difficult places, because that's where you learn the most.

Journalist: I noticed that you have been working and living in Asia, in Japan a little bit, in India, and in Singapore. So, in your eyes, how has Asia changed over the years?

Arnoud De Meyer: Obviously the economic development everywhere has created a very different environment. You see it in your eyes every day. I look out of my window and I see the developments here in Singapore, the financial districts, the infrastructural works happening, and the new airport terminals. Every time I go to China it looks different to me. When I went to Shanghai years ago, there was nothing in Pudong. Now I look over The Bund at the other side of the area, I see this huge world city there. So I think the first thing that strikes me is the change in infrastructure that enabled us to do more economic development, and the speed at which the infrastructure development has happened. It happens faster in China than in India, but even in India you see the changes. If you went to Jakarta in Indonesia, you would see the same infrastructural developments. It is not unique to China. It is actually throughout Asia. The physical infrastructure has changed a lot.

The second big change is the education level of people. Most governments of countries in Asia have invested heavily in education. And companies have started to invest a lot in education a lot as well, so the education level of people here is much higher than in 1985. I would even to say that even in Singapore in 1985, there were still a lot of people that were illiterate. I think that is not the case anymore today. So the education level has changed a lot, and the sophistication of the economy has changed a lot.

The third is in culture. There is a far richer arts scene and landscape than before, not only of imported art, but also local production of art. When I came here a long time ago, I was often looking for music concerts because I love music. But there was nothing. I could not go anywhere, except for a few places. But today we have some of the best symphonic orchestras, whether it is classical, Western music or Chinese music. We have wonderful ballet groups, good painters and sculptors, so I think the arts landscape has changed a lot, and it has become more Asian and more confident in what you produce.



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President of Singapore Management University**

So basically these are the three main changes. The food is still equally good. I got used to the food a long time ago. But education, infrastructure and the entertainment and arts scene have changed a lot and improved a lot.

Journalist: What are your hobbies? What do you do in the weekends, or after work?

Arnoud De Meyer: I was going to ask whether I have time during the weekends (laughs). The President of SMU has to go to many places. But I love music, so I still go to concerts, and a lot of the activities carried out by my students. We have very creative students, so they invite me to all of their performances. I love to do that. I read a lot. I still read a book per week. 52 books per year is my goal.