



Welcome Remarks by Prof Lily Kong, SMU President
SMU Patron's Day 2020
SMU Hall
Friday 17 January 2020

Excellency, President of Singapore and Patron of SMU, Madam Halimah Yacob;
SMU Honorary Patron Dr Tony Tan;
SMU Chancellor Mr Lim Chee Onn and Pro-Chancellor Mr Eddie Teo;
Mr Ho Kwon Ping, Chairman, and Members of the SMU Board of Trustees;
Distinguished guests;
SMU faculty, staff, alumni and students;

Good evening everyone.

I am delighted that today's Patron's Day marks the start of our many events to celebrate SMU's 20th birthday. On this special day, we have amongst us some very special guests. These include SMU pioneers – some of whom I have not had the opportunity to meet before. Here, I echo our Chairman's sentiments and thank the pioneer faculty and staff for all they have contributed to SMU – in conceptualising the University, in their early unstinting efforts to turn blueprint into reality, and for their continuing support and contributions since then. I am delighted that our pioneer classes are also represented here – the daring of the first cohorts was absolutely crucial in ensuring the growth of the University. Collectively, their stories and values form part of the University's heritage.

Heritage is not history. History connotes that which is past, relevant perhaps only in the lessons to be learnt. Heritage is living – it is cultural continuity, a past that enriches the present such that our roots feed our growth today. The past is not a foreign country if the spirit, values and culture live on today, as is the case at SMU.

SMU's 20-year history may be short in a global context and even compared to that of the two older universities in Singapore. But there is no shortage of heritage at SMU,

nor lack of appreciation for that heritage. There are certainly strong efforts to keep aspects of what we value of that heritage alive and well. Let me cite just three examples.

First, at a time when the prevailing pedagogy was anchored in the large, faceless lecture group, where happiness in the first week on campus is someone to go to lunch with, as the well-known late social worker Ann Wee used to say, SMU broke with tradition and introduced the small interactive seminar as the principal pedagogical approach. It allowed students the opportunity to interact, to speak up, to question, to present, and soon enough, the marketplace recognised SMU graduates to be more articulate, more confident, more able to think on their feet, more forthcoming with their views. We have held on to that heritage, and therefore continue to enjoy that advantage. Even as technology has somewhat transformed education, famously with the advent of MOOCs (or Massive Open Online Courses), SMU has insisted that the use of technology in the classroom must be to enhance, not diminish the quality of interaction. In that sense, our heritage lives on today.

Second, when universities generally paid little attention to engagement with the community, SMU made this a part of its signature, setting community service as a graduation requirement. Today, it is a part of our DNA. Not only do our students undertake nearly twice the number of community service hours that we require of them, the University as a whole has embraced the ethos of making meaningful impact on the community, and extended that to our other activities. In research therefore, we are determined to make the important scholarly impact that academics should make, ***and*** at the same time, to ensure that we address issues in ways that also make significant impact on economy, society and polity. Further, in recent years, we have vigorously built programmes in professional and continuing education to contribute to lifelong learning, so that we have gone beyond the impact on our undergraduate community, and now seek to transform lives through our postgraduate degrees, our Executive Development programmes and those of the SMU Academy. In all these different ways, the University has expanded significantly

its range of activities, while still holding fast to and living out its original values and heritage – of contributing to the community.

Let me now cite a third example of how heritage matters and lives on here at SMU. Some of you visiting today may have taken the opportunity to look around the newly completed SMU Connexion, which *connects* this building with the rest of the campus for the first time. It is the first building in Singapore's City Centre to receive the BCA Green Mark Platinum award and the On-site Net Zero Energy Building certification. It is also Singapore's first WELL Precertified building, which means that the building has paid attention to features that impact human health and wellbeing. Our colleagues have just started to move in last week. There are many firsts here, for which we are very proud.

But in the midst of constructing a building of and for the future, we have not forgotten the past. Some of you will know that we are privileged to continue a tradition of learning at this site, in being located where the former National Library stood. What remained of the National Library when we inherited the site was a pair of red-brick gateposts and 12 cast iron fences. Even though they are not gazetted for conservation, we have returned the posts to their original location, and the fences will enjoy a prominent location in the public thoroughfare that links the Bras Basah section of our campus to Stamford Green and Fort Canning Park. In so doing, we are prompted by a recognition of the importance of this heritage to Singaporeans.

We take advantage of this year of reflection and celebration to theme this year's City Dialogues under the banner of 'cultural heritage'. SMU's City Dialogues brings together business, government and academia in dialogue about themes that matter to the city. After the first successful City Dialogue on climate change and sustainability issues on the back of the IPCC meeting in Singapore last year, our second City Dialogues event in March this year will be held in association with the Victoria & Albert Museum of London, and timed to complement the 20th International Conference of National Trusts in Singapore. A distinguished speaker from the V&A



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will also present the first SMU President's Distinguished Lecture of 2020 on a related theme.

Our 20th anniversary is thus a time to celebrate our collective heritage and, importantly, the values that underpin – of innovation, of breaking new bounds, of engagement with the community, and of making meaningful impact on the community. It is not about fossilizing the past, but about drawing from the spirit and values, thus always remaining pioneers of the next chapter. We shall see shortly how this pioneer heritage has shaped our many successful entrepreneurs who have contributed so much in so many different fields.

As we celebrate the University's special anniversary today and show appreciation to our pioneers, let us also pay tribute to our three Patrons, the late Mr SR Nathan, Dr Tony Tan and Madam Halimah Yacob. They have inspired and guided us, and graced every Patron's Day in turn. Like them, let us continue to strive to create a better future – just as our foregoing leaders, faculty, staff and students did.

Happy Birthday SMU.

Thank you all and have a good evening and great year ahead.