

Yip gets honorary degree from SMU

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Seven-time Paralympic gold medallist Yip Pin Xiu returned to her alma mater on July 28 to receive an honorary Doctor of Laws from Singapore Management University for her sporting achievements and contributions to society.

The 34-year-old national para swimmer is the youngest recipient of an honorary degree from the university.

Yip had graduated from SMU in 2017 with a Bachelor of Social Science, majoring in political science.

“The wonderful thing about graduation is you leave with a degree after years of hard work. You also leave with the opportunity to decide what kind of person you want to become,” she said to the 2026 graduating cohort of over 3,800 students.

In her speech at the commencement ceremony held at the Yong Pung How School of Law, Yip spoke about the support she received from her family that helped her rise above naysayers.

“I had to learn how to separate the limits that existed in the world from the limits that existed only in the minds of others,” she said.

At two years old, Yip was diagnosed with Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease, which causes muscles to progressively weaken. It eventually made her lose function in her hands and legs.

That did not stop her from becoming one of Singapore’s most decorated athletes.

On Sept 15, 2008, she made sports history by becoming the first Singaporean to win a gold medal at the Paralympic Games, in Beijing, China.

Today, Yip is a seven-gold Paralympic champion and she has won eight world titles. She also holds multiple world records in S2 backstroke swimming events.

Her sporting feats inspired the Yip Pin Xiu Scholarship, a bond-free award that SMU established in 2016, which supports elite student-athletes with outstanding international achievements.

Beyond her accomplishments in the pool, Yip actively championed greater inclusion, accessibility and



Seven-time Paralympic gold medallist Yip Pin Xiu and members of the Singapore Management University leadership team singing the National Anthem during SMU’s commencement ceremony on July 28. Yip received an honorary Doctor of Laws for her sporting achievements and contributions to society. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

equity. She worked with governmental and community organisations to advance opportunities and support for persons with disabilities.

During her tenure as a Nominated MP from 2018 to 2020, Yip advocated issues such as sports and

the well-being of vulnerable groups. Her call for parity in the cash incentives for gold medallists at the Paralympics led to the sum being doubled to \$400,000.

She brought attention to challenges that people with disabilities may face in accessing information,

food and other essentials during the Covid-19 pandemic, and spoke out against campus sexual violence and workplace harassment.

In a citation, SMU president Lily Kong said that Yip “has brought honour and distinction to Singapore, elevating the nation’s stand-

ing in elite sport while redefining what is possible in the face of adversity”.

She added that Yip has surmounted significant physical challenges with quiet determination, discipline and resilience.

“Her achievements are not only measured in medals and records, but also in the inspiration she offers to people from all walks of life – demonstrating that limitations can (be transcended) through courage, perseverance and hard work.”

Towards the end of her speech, Yip said: “As graduates, you have spent years learning about markets, incentives, the many forces that shape the world around us. But there is one concept I wish we could all study a little more deeply and that is the concept of bias.

“We make quick judgments based on someone’s appearance, their background, their nationality, their religion, their gender, their disability, their education – anything that is essentially different from ourselves.”

She cautioned against building a world where everyone thinks the same way.

“That is not unity. That is simply being comfortable,” Yip said. “Unity means that despite our differences, we still choose to see each other as human beings first. And I believe that is something the world desperately needs right now.”

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