

**SMU Commencement for Class of 2025,
Opening Ceremony
SMU Hall, Tuesday 29 July 2025, 1pm
Speech by SMU President Prof Lily Kong**

Guest-of-Honour, Mr Ron Sim;

Chancellor Mr Lim Chee Onn;

Pro-Chancellors Mr Eddie Teo and Mr Kuok Khoon Ean;

Chairman Mr Piyush Gupta and Members of the Board of Trustees;

Faculty, staff, and the Class of 2025;

Parents and guests.

Commencement is always a moment of joy and celebration. This year, it carries special significance. As Piyush mentioned, 2025 marks important milestones in both SMU's and Singapore's history, reminding us of what vision, courage and determination can achieve for a nation and a university. And as we look to the future, we do so with confidence—because we know that the next chapter will be written by our next generation, and you, our graduates, count as leaders and changemakers among them. You will write the next chapter with the spirit of purpose and possibility that we need for the future.

Last week, we also had the privilege of conferring an honorary Degree of Letters on Mr Kuok Khoon Hong, in recognition of his outstanding contributions to business and philanthropy in Singapore and beyond. As Chairman and CEO of Wilmar International, and a generous benefactor of SMU, Mr Kuok exemplifies values we hold dear: integrity, humility, resilience, and service to others. His journey is an

inspiration - and I hope his example will encourage each of you to pursue excellence not only for personal success, but to uplift communities and contribute meaningfully to the world around you.

[Graduates' Growth, Resilience & Character]

To all our graduates today: this moment belongs to you.

You've earned your place here through hard work, adaptability, and determination.

Along the way, you've learnt and shown leadership, creativity, and compassion.

What you've achieved goes beyond what can be represented by your transcripts, CV or LinkedIn profile. It is reflected in the relationships you've built, the values you've upheld, and the growth you've embraced — academically, personally, and socially.

I hope you take a moment to honour that journey — and the many people who supported you along the way. To all our graduates, I invite you to please stand and face your loved ones and supporters and give them a rousing round of applause to express your gratitude.

[Reflections on Higher Education – Diversity, Dialogue & Purpose]

At SMU, we are grateful to our many benefactors and friends who believe in us and have given us immense support throughout our journey thus far. We have a government that has long been supportive of education – over all of our 60 years as a republic (and I'm a beneficiary of that). We have industry partners that have worked alongside with us – in shaping curriculum and offering experiential learning opportunities. We have university partners who believe in student mobility and

enable cross-cultural learning. We have benefactors who see our students with financial need and believe in our vision and brand of education, and ensure needs are met.

None of this is to be taken for granted. In the last half year, we have seen student mobility threatened, diversity jeopardized and inclusion compromised on campuses and elsewhere. At SMU, we are clear about where we stand.

We believe that diverse communities enrich learning and strengthen excellence. When students from different backgrounds, cultures and worldviews come together, they sharpen one another's thinking — and deepen mutual understanding.

As so many leaders – CEOs, university presidents and others have recognised, diversity is not a distraction from excellence — it is essential to it. We echo that belief.

At SMU, we are proud of the diversity of our students and faculty. We are proud to be a university where differences are respected, and where people are valued not in spite of their uniqueness, but because of it.

This is how we build a community that is future-ready, but more importantly, that is fundamentally human.

[On the Class Gift – A Culture of Generosity]

In this spirit of community and contribution, I want to acknowledge something truly heartening.

Each year, graduating classes have chosen to give back to SMU through the Graduating Class Gift — and this year is no exception.

By choosing to establish a class gift, you've done more than mark your graduation — you've extended a hand to those who will come after you. You've shown that you value not just what you have received, but what you can enable for others.

For a young university, SMU has cultivated a rare and admirable culture of giving — and your generation continues to shape that tradition. Thank you for exemplifying the kind of leadership that is grounded in generosity and vision.

[Closing – Looking Forward with Purpose]

To the Class of 2025: the world you are stepping into is full of complexity — but also immense opportunity.

You won't have all the answers. No one does. But you have what matters most: the ability to keep learning, to think critically, to act with integrity, and to care deeply.

Wherever your path takes you — in business, the arts, civil society, law, technology, or public service — I hope you will carry with you the essence of what it means to be part of the SMU community:

- a spirit of inquiry and innovation,
- a commitment to purpose and people,
- and a belief in making a difference beyond yourself.

Congratulations once again. It has been our privilege to write this chapter with you — and we look forward to seeing the impact you will make in the chapters to come.

Thank you.

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