

**Speech by Ms Yong Ying-I
at SMU School of Law Official Renaming Ceremony
held at SMU on 8 April 2021**

Ministers

Chief Justice & members of the Judiciary

SMU Honorary Patron, SMU Chancellor and SMU Chairman

Distinguished guests, friends

Good evening.

1. On behalf of my mother, I wish to thank Singapore Management University and the Government for honouring my family by renaming the SMU School of Law after my late father, Dr Yong Pung How. We are also touched that SMU chose to change the name of the school to time it with what would have been my father's birthday on 11 April.

2. My family was Malaysian. My father led Shook Lin & Bok, a thriving law practice in Kuala Lumpur started by his father Yong Shook Lin. My parents decided to move down to Singapore for a number of reasons, a primary one of which was my education. The schools in Malaysia were switching to teach in Bahasa Melayu when I was due to enter Primary One, which my parents did not want for me. As the size of the Singapore Shook Lin & Bok branch was still small, my father decided to change careers and go into merchant banking at Singapore International Merchant Banking Ltd. SIMBL was bought over by OCBC and he became OCBC's Dy Chairman. He was tapped by Mr Lee Kuan Yew to set up the Government of Singapore Investment Corporation, and he then led Monetary Authority of Singapore as well. We were happy to take up Singaporean citizenship which came with the GIC role. After putting both GIC and MAS on a good footing, he returned to OCBC as Chairman. Unexpectedly, Mr Lee tapped him again, this time to enter the Singapore Judiciary, with a view to becoming Chief Justice. A difficult challenge; my father consulted us, and took the challenge. The majority of you here know the rest of that chapter of the story.

3. In his final years as Chief Justice, my father strongly supported the Government's plan to set up a second law school in Singapore, at SMU. After his retirement, my father was

delighted to chair the law school's Advisory Board. He met founding Dean Michael Furmston and the next Dean Prof Yeo Tiong Min often, attended seminars, and helped to select some faculty. He was happy to make gifts to establish the Yong Pung How Chair Professorship which Prof Yeo holds, gifts for two research centres in Law, and the Yong Pung How Bursaries to benefit students with financial needs, both in the School of Law and the broader SMU. He was greatly honoured to be appointed Chancellor of SMU, where he enjoyed the many discussions with SMU Chairman Ho Kwon Ping and President Prof Arnoud De Meyer, as well as participating in the life of the University. Therefore when the family was asked if we would agree to name a law school after my father, it was very clear to my mother and me what my father would have liked.

4. I'd like to offer a few insights from my father's career and beliefs, which I hope are relevant to the law school. First, my father believed in education and talent development. It wasn't just my education; he pushed for more undergraduate, post-graduate and in-service masters and diplomas for the Legal Service. And it wasn't just to the established bastions of learning in the west; he sent at least one of you here for a Master's degree in China. He arranged lectures on Saturday mornings – that is when we still worked half days on Saturdays -- for judges to learn about emerging areas such as e-commerce and biomedical sciences, in order to remain relevant. He raised pay for the Judiciary and the Legal Service, to be fair to the top talent they wanted to retain.

5. Of all the initiatives on talent, my father was proudest of his Justices' Law Clerks scheme, where he hoped to attract and nurture the best and brightest, thereby strengthening some of Singapore's core institutions and making Singapore's legal system world-class. He mentored his JLCs and took a personal interest in their careers and their lives. This has paid off in spades, with his alumni now filling leadership positions in the Judiciary, Legal Service, as Senior Counsels and senior partners in private sector law firms, CEOs of our Statutory Boards, academia including in the SMU law school, and political leadership. These include 9 members of today's Supreme Court Bench today, a Deputy Attorney-General and a Cabinet Minister. You know yourselves that my father is immensely proud of all of you. You in turn have been wonderful to him when he was Chief Justice and after his retirement, and wonderful to my mother and me as well.

6. So no one was surprised when my father paid similar attention to the SMU School of Law as Advisory Board Chair and University Chancellor. He cared about the quality of the Faculty, whether they had the right leadership and University support & resources. He founded some bursaries because he didn't want affordability to prevent able and talented students from studying at SMU. My mother and I were pleased to top up the gift last year, hoping that we could help some students whose family finances were impacted by Covid.

7. The second insight that I'd like to offer is my father's belief in inter-disciplinary learning, in practical problem solving, and innovating. With his banking and management experience – he had been variously Chairman of Malaysia Singapore Airlines (precursor to SIA), Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (MediaCorp) as examples of more interesting roles -- he did not define legal excellence in classic academic terms. He believed that the law must be applied to tackle clients' concerns, solve important problems and to enable society to progress peacefully. He believed that the legal system could only be strong if the institutions of the law were well managed, its administration efficient and its officers cared for. Many of you here will remember his push, as Chief Justice, to computerize the courts and the judicial process. Change is not easy so your memories of going digital may be chequered but I'd like to think that the smooth way that our entire legal system pivoted online during Covid, was due in some small way to the investments in digitalization that he started.

8. My father liked SMU's approach to education which includes interactive pedagogy, opportunities for global exposure and multi-disciplinary study, emphasis on soft skills, and compulsory internships and community service. The law school benefitted from this. Prof Arnoud De Meyer told me that from the earliest days, the SMU's law school was not established as a school run separately on its own, but Law students would attend lectures on leadership from the Business School in an integrated programme. I understand the School of Law now uses state of the art technology in the Kwa Geok Choo Law Library and David Marshall Moot Court, and launched a Centre for AI & Data Governance. I was at NRF when you received a small grant from us for a research programme on AI and data use, and I understand a Centre for Computational Law has also been set up. I know that my father

would be pleased with these developments because it shows that SMU and the law school is innovating and setting the pace in moving Singapore forward.

9. Insight No 3 is my father's belief in service to others. Wealth is valuable – it gives you creature comforts, options, provides a safety net. But you can't take it with you. Your achievements can give the world new services and give you social recognition and standing. But your legacy, after you have gone, is what you have done for others, how you have done your part to make the world a better place. Whether bursaries, research centres, stronger institutions or the next generation of leaders, these are what continues to have an impact after you go. There is a lovely story from the Oral history archives which the SMU team found, where my father explained why he accepted Mr Lee's request to lead the judiciary. Mr Lee makes this point in his usual sharp way, that this role would enable him to leave a legacy. My family was appreciative of becoming Singaporean. My father wanted to give back where he could, to the country that had accepted us and gave us opportunities to contribute to something bigger than ourselves.

10. I believe my father would similarly like to see faculty, students and graduates of the SMU School of Law also live in service to others. Singapore is way too small to afford us all, especially the most successful in society, to just live for ourselves. My family hopes to continue to do our small part in philanthropy, but service can be in a multitude of ways big and small, and it need not be grand gestures that are noticed by others. If each of us can help one person at a time, we will collectively have helped a lot of people. I believe SMU gets it right by guiding students early towards community service, solving practical problems and real needs.

11. SMU told me that naming the School of Law after my father will be a reminder of his contributions to Singapore, to the legal system in particular, as well as to SMU. To know about the past does help us understand the present better. But I am also quite sure that my father would not want a heavy focus on himself or the past; rather, he would want the SMU School of Law to look forward to the future.

12. So to the Dean, Professor Goh Yihan, I urge you to look forward. Aim to excel. For Singapore, this means two things: world-class standards, and excellence that is forward looking and embraces change. In a rapidly changing world, we must innovate to remain relevant.

13. And to all, I hope you will be anchored in being of service to others and, wherever you are – be you in the law school in the legal system, or elsewhere -- please think about developing the next generation of talent to be better than you are. That would be the best way to honour my father.

14. Thank you all so much for being here today. I know a large number of the people in this audience. My mother and I are very touched that so many friends have joined us to celebrate this happy occasion.

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