出席新大“赞助人日”
陈庆炎总统旧地重游

陈秋华 报道

上个世纪90年代中期，政府决定增设一所全新的大学以满足市场需求，当时担任副总理兼国防部长的陈庆炎总统接下这个重任。在他的推动下，新加坡管理大学在2000年1月12日正式成立。

12年后的今天，新大已经发展为亚洲顶尖大学之一，拥有六所院校和19个研究中心，学生人数从最初的300名增至现在超过7000名。

昨天，陈总统首次以赞助人的身份回到这所他一手催生创立的大学，这也是他第一次以总统的身份出席新大“赞助人日”（Patron’s Day）。

在回忆当年创建新大的种种挑战时，陈总统说，打从一开始，创立新加坡的目标就是为学生提供有别于新加坡国立大学和南洋理工大学的学习体验，让新大的大专教育环境多样化。

因此，无论是在管理、课程、教育与行政制度、校舍地点和建筑标准等方面，新大都与两所既有的大学截然不同。新大实行的是学校学院的教育与行政制度，地点在繁华的市中心而不是较偏僻的西郊。

“硬性”在当时可谓颇具革命性，催化了本地大专领域的改变。

新大校长德梅耶教授昨天致词时说，最能听闻陈总统对第三所大学的概念时，也觉得他的想法太大胆。

他说：“不过我没庆幸是我错了，15年后的今天，我仍能以新大校长的身份夸自己。”

除了感慨万千，陈总统在为新大杰出导师的杰出论文等颁奖仪式后，也提及他将参与新大新校舍的奠基仪式，因为新大的新校舍将比旧校更为现代化。

新大校董会执行主席何光平（左一）和新大校长德梅耶教授（右一）为新大“赞助人日”盛装出席。
Translation:

In mid-1990s of the last century, the Singapore Government decided to establish a new university to meet market demand. At that time, President Tony Tan Keng Yam, who was then Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister, took on this heavy responsibility. Under his charge, the Singapore Management University was set up officially on 12 January, 2000.

Today, after 12 years, SMU has emerged as one of Asia’s top universities, with six schools and 19 research centres and institutes. The student population has also increased from some 300 to more than 7000 today.

Last night, President Tony Tan returned to this university that he single-handedly conceptualised and for the first time, in his new role as SMU Patron. It was also his first appearance at SMU’s annual Patron’s Day as the President of Singapore.

When recollecting the challenges faced in building SMU back then, President Tony Tan said, from its conception, SMU was designed to provide students with a different learning experience. The new university should be different from the other two established institutions – NUS and NTU, to provide more variety for our higher education landscape.

Therefore, from management, curriculum, education, administrative system, campus location and admission criteria, SMU was different in every aspect, when compared to the other two established institutions. SMU adopts an American-styled pedagogy and administrative system, its location is in the buzzing city centre and not the relatively quiet west side of the country and results are not the sole criteria in making admission decisions. All these breakthroughs were very forward-looking at that time, catalysing changes in the local higher education landscape.

In a speech yesterday, SMU President Arnoud De Meyer said, when he first heard of President Tan’s vision for the third university, he thought President Tony Tan’s ideas for the new university were “different” and “bold – in fact, he thought them possibly over ambitious.

He said, “How glad I am that I was wrong. I am pleased, 15 years later, to be the SMU President to welcome him as the University’s new Patron.”

Other than his bold and unconventional ideas, President Tony Tan also took a different approach when selecting leaders for the new university – he chose Ho Kwon Ping, Executive Chairman of Banyan Tree, who had no academic background to head the University as Executive Chairman.

Ho said at the event last night, “I still remember it was a day in 1996, the then Deputy Prime Minister called me into his office and asked me to help kick-start a new university that was different from NUS and NTU. Up to now, I have never dared to ask, why me?”

He also revealed that all these years, President Tony Tan had politely demurred every honour the University tried to bestow on him. It is only now through his election as the President of Singapore that he has become a member of the SMU family as the university’s official Patron. SMU’s previous Patron was President S.R. Nathan.

Two years ago, to commemorate the University’s 10th anniversary, Ho Kwon Ping had called for efforts to be made to gather documents and photographs from SMU’s early years. Part of the initiative was to collate oral history records, entitled “Conceptualising SMU: The People and Ideas behind the SMU Story”, which records 21 interviews and video accounts by President Tony Tan, past Presidents of SMU, and the pioneer batch of students. President Tony Tan also personally launched the oral history records last night.

The oral history records can be found at oralhistory.smu.edu.sg and the public can download an abridged version for free. Those who wish to view the full version can contact SMU Li Ka Shing Library.

Some 100 guests and 1,400 SMU students, alumni and faculty members attended last night’s celebrations.

Photo caption:
Ho Kwon Ping, Chairman of SMU Board of Trustees (left) and SMU President Professor De Meyer (right) presenting to President Tony Tan his SMU matriculation card and officially welcoming him as a member of the SMU family.