NTU receives $4 million for teacher training from philanthropic couple

The funds will go towards new master's degree scholarships and grants at the National Institute of Education, and the scholarships will be named after the late philanthropic couple Mr Ong Tiong Tat and Madam Irene Tan Liang Kheng. PHOTO: THE ESTATE OF IRENE ONG TAN LIANG KHENG
SINGAPORE - The Nanyang Technological University (NTU) received a $4 million gift on Thursday (Nov 15) to support trainee teachers and innovations in teaching.

The donation from the estate of the late Irene Tan Liang Kheng is being matched by the Government.

The funds will go towards new master's degree scholarships and grants at the National Institute of Education (NIE). The scholarships will be named after Mr Ong Tiong Tat and Madam Irene Tan Liang Kheng, in honour of the late philanthropic couple.

This is the second gift from the Estate to NTU, with the first being an $11 million donation to the university's Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine in August.

At a ceremony at NIE on Thursday, Mr Tan Hsuan Heng, the nephew of Madam Tan and the trustee of her estate, shared how his late aunt and uncle had been influenced to give towards different causes such as education and healthcare.

Mr Ong, who was an investment trader, had been close friends with the philanthropist Koh Choon Joo, a lawyer better known as CJ Koh, who had also donated to the National University of Singapore and NTU.

Mr Tan said that Mr Koh and Mr Ong shared a common heart for social reform through giving towards education. After Mr Koh's death, Mr Ong became his estate executor and continued his friend's legacy.

"They both gave generously during their lifetime and when their time came to an end, Irene Tan, continued their legacy by extending their giving towards law, healthcare, charity, and sciences," he said.

Mr Ong died in 2013 when he was 74, and his wife, who had done some accounting work, continued giving until she died in 2016 at the age of 73. Like Mr Koh, the Ongs had no children.
"A great teacher can change a student's life," added Mr Tan. "Teachers need to keep learning and growing. It is my hope that through this gift to NIE, we can nurture inspiring role models who in turn will develop students with the means to create positive change in their lives as well as make meaningful contributions to society."

"It is also my hope that the gift will inspire others to step forward to contribute to this worthy cause of nurturing great teachers."

The scholarships will support students in five master's programmes: the Master of Arts (Applied Psychology), Master of Arts (Counselling and Guidance), Master of Arts in Humanities Education, Master of Arts (Leadership and Educational Change) and Master of Education (Early Childhood) programmes.

Up to eight scholarships will be given out annually, each worth $10,000 to $20,000. In addition, several grants worth a total of $290,000 over two years will go towards supporting teachers in training, and areas like service learning projects, conference participation and innovations in teaching and learning.

The Estate is also contributing $85,000 for a new showcase of books in the CJ Koh Collection at the NIE Library and Information Services Centre. The showcase will have an interactive panel for visitors to use.

Professor Christine Goh, NIE director, was heartened by the couple's support.

"Their friendship has further strengthened NIE's mission through the launching of two new scholarships, four grants and a student aid fund," she said.

According to Madam Tan's will, the couple's two-storey King Albert Park bungalow, which they inherited from Mr Koh, was sold last year.

Mr Tan told The Straits Times that so far, about 70 per cent of the $41 million from the proceeds has been handed out to different institutions and organisations.

These include the NUS, the Singapore University of Social Sciences, NTU and Nanyang Polytechnic. The funds will also go towards bursaries to help needy students at Raffles Institution, Hwa Chong Institution and CHIJ Toa Payoh (Secondary).

About $300,000 and $400,000 have also been given to the primary and secondary sections of Geylang Methodist School, which Madam Tan attended in the 1960s.
The funds have also been distributed to healthcare and social causes - Tan Tock Seng Hospital's Institute of Infectious Diseases and Epidemiology, Community Chest, Wicare Support Group for widows, Muscular Dystrophy Association Singapore and the Singapore Scout Association.

"Some of these organisations are specified in my auntie's will. I also chose organisations whose causes I find meaningful and really need help," said Mr Tan, who now spends his time liaising with different organisations.

With the help of students, the 66-year-old plans to come up with a book and an exhibition on the Ong couple and CJ Koh, and how their generosity have helped others.

He also hopes to bring together people who have benefited through the scholarships and grants to form an association in the future.

"This could give them a sense of belonging and help them understand their benefactors, and inspire them to pay back to society," he said.

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