

Local author and husband donate \$500,000 to NTU

Donation, along with govt boost, aimed at nurturing future students of Chinese studies



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Well-known Chinese language author Tham Yew Chin and her husband James Lim have made a gift of \$500,000 to Nanyang Technological University (NTU) to nurture future generations of students in Chinese studies.

Better known by her pen name You Jin, Madam Tham will also donate 206 of her books to the NTU Chinese Library.

With government matching, the total sum raised is \$1.25 million.

The You Jin Education Endowment Fund will fund two awards, a scholarship and two awards under a bursary every academic year. It will also support the creation of a creative writing publication run by NTU faculty and students.

The gift signing and book donation ceremony last Friday was witnessed by Ms Low Yen Ling, Minister of State for Culture, Community and Youth, and Trade and Industry.

Madam Tham, 71, said it was natural for her to give back to the Chinese department of NTU, which nurtured her in the past.

She was recognised with the Nanyang Alumni Achievement Award in 2016 for her achievements as a writer and her contributions to the Chinese literary scene. She is known for her travelogues, as well as essays, short story collections and novels.

She graduated from Nanyang University in 1973 as the top student in her cohort, with first-class honours in Chinese language and literature. She said she hopes that the donation can play a "small role" in drawing young people to the department in pursuit of Chinese studies.

She said: "Many Singaporean students feel that Chinese is boring and difficult to learn. It is purely a misunderstanding arising from lack of in-depth contact with the language. Chinese is a beautiful and profound language, and its importance will increase day by day."

Mr Lim, 76, a retired engineer who is donating the money to start the fund in his wife's name, said: "I hope that future generations will remember my wife's achievements and follow her example. It is also our wish that more will come forward to contribute to education, which can alleviate poverty."

The couple have three children - bank executive Danny Lim, 45, corporate development director Ivan Lim, 40, and online travel agency chief executive Jacinta Lim, 38 - and five granddaughters.

Ms Lien Siaou-Sze, vice-president for university advancement at NTU, said their contributions will help to inspire future generations of students to pursue academic excellence, as well as spur an interest in Chinese studies and other humanities subjects.

Madam Tham's first published work was at the age of 11 when she submitted a piece titled I Wish To Be A Fairy-tale Writer to the now-defunct Singapore Chinese newspaper Nanyang Siang Pau. She went on to join the paper as a features reporter and eventually published her first book, A Glimpse Of Society, in 1978.

She took up teaching in the early 1980s and remained a teacher for nearly three decades.

Her works started to gain popularity internationally in the late 1980s.

She broke into the China market in 1989 when a publisher in Zhejiang released five of her travelogues. Her books sold out quickly, from Guangzhou to Shanghai.

A decade later, Chongqing University set up the You Jin Research Centre for students to study her works and those of other South-east Asian writers.

She has also won many accolades, including the Cultural Medallion in 2009. In 2019, she was inducted into the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame.

Madam Tham is working on a book to share her experience as an educator of 29 years. It will be published next year.

COMMON MISCONCEPTION

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CHINESE LANGUAGE AUTHOR THAM YEW CHIN,
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