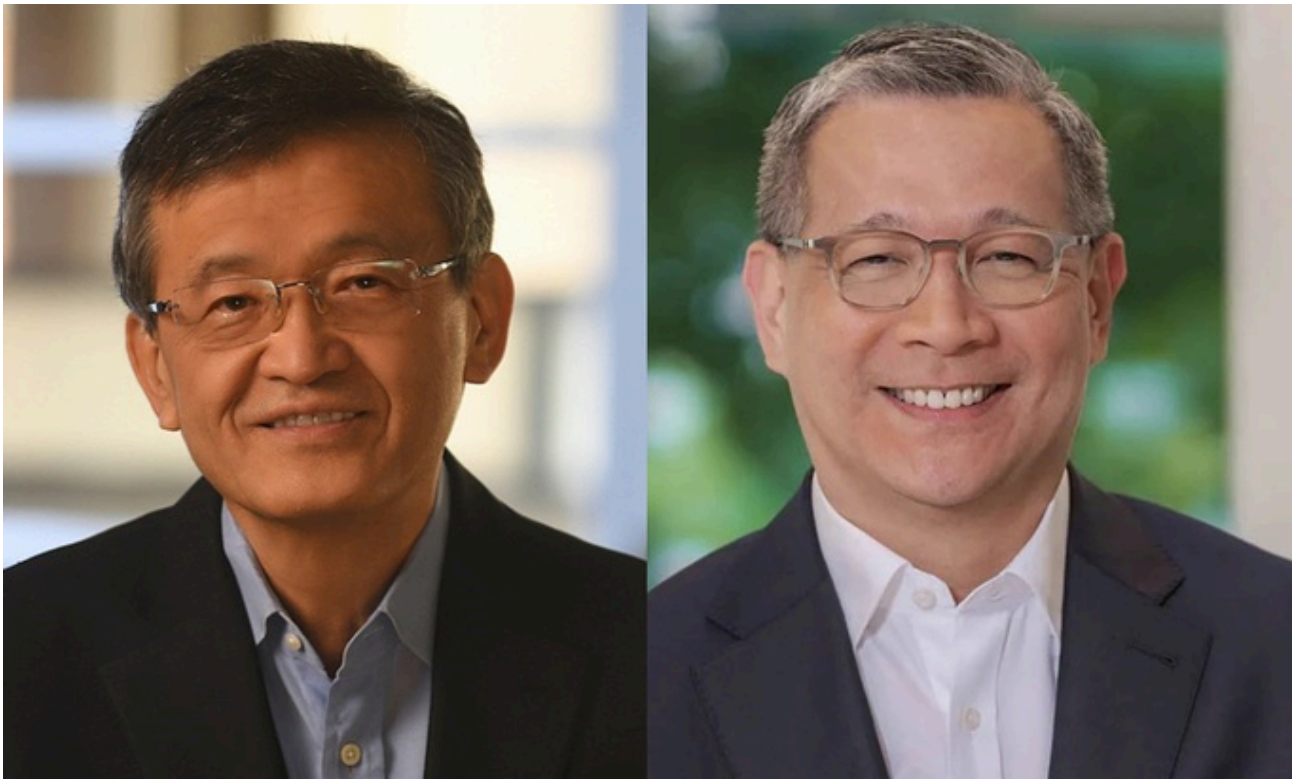
How two graduates of Asia's third-ranked university became CEOs of Intel and Western Digital

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Lip-Bu Tan and Irving Tan, both alumni of Singapore's Nanyang Technological University, followed different career paths before becoming CEOs of U.S. technology giants Intel and Western Digital, respectively.

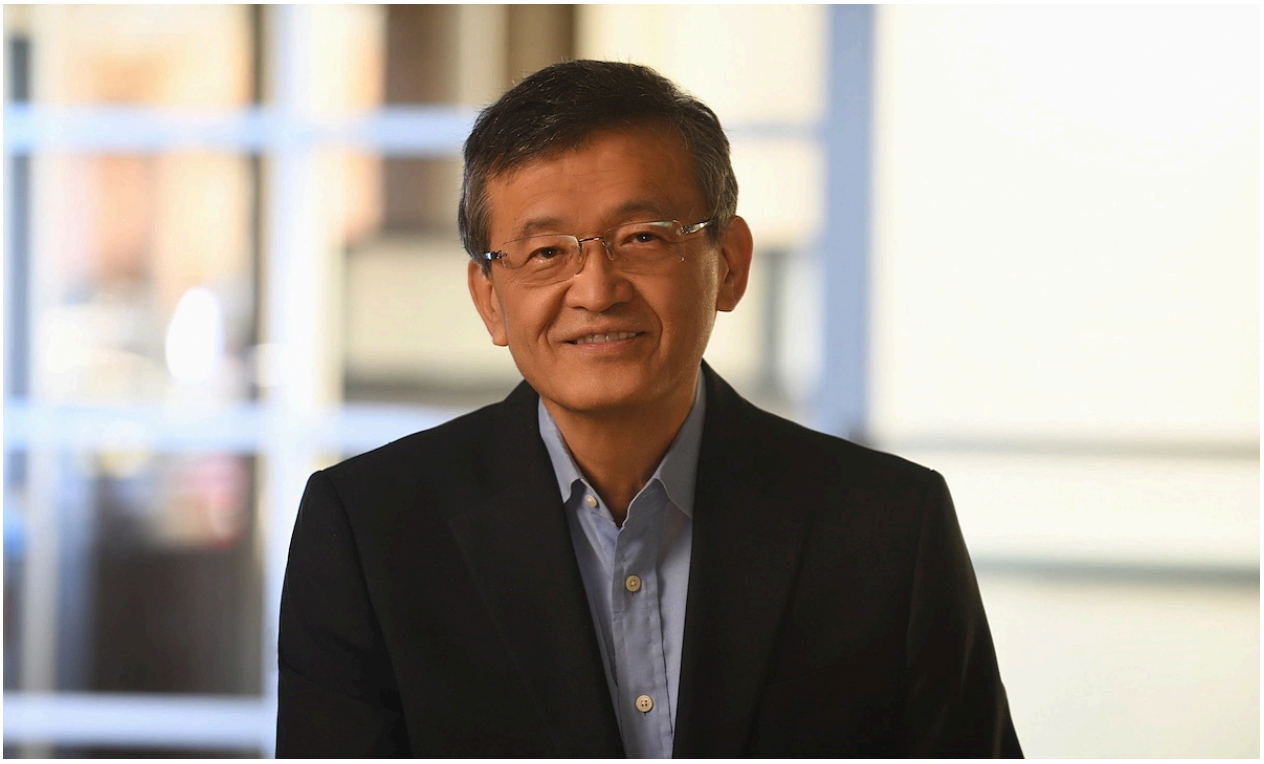
The two executives attended NTU's first U.S. Tech Summit and Alumni Conference, held at the Computer History Museum in Mountain View, California, on Oct. 23. The event brought together technology executives, researchers, entrepreneurs and investors to discuss artificial intelligence, emerging technologies and industry collaboration, according to the university.

NTU shares third place in Asia with the National University of Singapore in the QS Asia University Rankings 2026, behind the University of Hong Kong and Peking University.

At the conference, Lip-Bu Tan joined NTU President Ho Teck Hua for a discussion on leadership, career development and staying connected to one's roots, while the Western Digital's chief delivered a keynote on the growing demand for data storage to support the AI economy.

Although both studied at NTU, their journeys to the top of America's technology industry unfolded very differently.

Lip-Bu Tan: From physics graduate to billionaire chip executive



Lip-Bu Tan, CEO of Intel Corp. Photo courtesy of the company

Born in Muar, Malaysia, in 1959 and raised in Singapore, Lip-Bu Tan graduated from Nanyang University, a predecessor of today's NTU, with a bachelor's degree in physics in 1978, aged just 19.

His academic journey began with an early setback. In an interview with *The Straits Times* in 2025, he recalled spending three months on a waiting list before securing admission, causing him to miss part of the academic term. Despite the late start, he ranked among the top two students in his first university examinations. "With the results, at least I knew where I stood in the school and I gained confidence; so that was my first success," he recalled.

He later moved to the U.S., earning a master's degree in nuclear engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and an MBA from the University of San Francisco. Rather than pursuing nuclear engineering, he entered the investment industry and founded venture capital firm Walden International in 1987. He became a prominent technology investor, backing semiconductor and software companies, including Singapore-based Creative Technology, a manufacturer of computer and digital entertainment products.

He later moved into corporate leadership, serving as CEO of Cadence Design Systems, an American developer of software used to design semiconductor chips, from 2009 to 2021.

During his tenure, the company's revenue doubled and its share price rose more than 3,200%, according to NTU.

His success in technology investments and corporate leadership also made him a billionaire. *Bloomberg* estimated his fortune at at least US$1.1 billion in August 2025, with most of his wealth coming from Cadence Design Systems.

He joined Intel's board of directors in September 2022 before becoming CEO in March 2025, taking charge of the American chipmaker as it struggled to regain its competitive position. His rise also drew praise from U.S. President Donald Trump, who described his career as "an amazing story" after meeting him at the White House in August 2025, days after publicly calling for his resignation as Intel CEO.

Despite his international success, Tan has maintained close ties with his former university. He served as an NTU trustee from 2006 to 2011 and contributed $3 million in 2024 to establish the university's first professorship in artificial intelligence. His venture capital firm also partnered with NTU to establish the Nanyang Frontier Fund, which supports technology startups emerging from the university.

During a discussion with NTU President Hua, he emphasized humility, surrounding oneself with talented people and fostering a workplace culture that encourages honest communication. He also advised aspiring leaders to seek good mentors and pursue work they genuinely enjoy, comparing life to a marathon rather than a sprint.

He said playing basketball during his university years taught him the importance of trusting teammates, a lesson he has applied to his efforts to build a winning culture at Intel. "One of the most enduring lessons I learned during my university days came as an athlete, not a student," he wrote in a memo to Intel employees. "I learned to believe in and trust my teammates, because I knew that was the surest path to victory — and there's nothing I dislike more than losing."

Irving Tan: From energy industry trainee to Western Digital CEO



Irving Tan, CEO of Western Digital. Photo courtesy of the company

Unlike Lip-Bu Tan, who began his career in venture capital, Singaporean executive Irving Tan, 56, started in the energy industry before moving into consulting and technology leadership. He graduated from NTU with a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering in 1995.

His first job was as a graduate management trainee at ExxonMobil, where he gained experience in finance, sales, marketing and operations. Early in his career, he grew frustrated with bureaucratic practices, including preparing reports that nobody read. When he complained to his manager, he received advice that stayed with him. "Someday you'll be in a position to change that," his manager told him, according to *The Business Times.*

Tan subsequently earned an MBA from NTU and joined management consulting firm Kearney, working with businesses across Australia and Southeast Asia. He later entered the technology industry, holding positions at HP and Cisco. During his 13 years at Cisco, he rose to become chief of operations and chairman for Asia Pacific, Japan and China.

Tan later joined Western Digital, an American company specializing in data storage technology, as executive vice president of global operations. He became CEO in February 2025, following the company's separation of its flash memory business. He also served as chairman of Singapore-based aviation catering company SATS and received the Outstanding Overseas Executive of the Year award at the Singapore Business Awards in 2025.

Reflecting on his career in a September 2026 interview with NTU, Tan said his progression through engineering, finance, sales and operations had not followed a predetermined plan.

"Careers are rarely linear," he said. "The common thread throughout my career has been a willingness to learn, adapt, and take on challenges that broadened my perspective, even when I did not have all the answers on day one."

His experience in senior management also taught him that effective leadership was not about always having the answers or being certain of the right decisions. He advised young professionals to develop business, communication and leadership skills alongside technical expertise.

Reflecting on his own journey, he said he would tell his younger self not to worry about having a perfectly defined career plan. "Stay open to opportunities and be willing to take on challenges that feel uncomfortable. That is often where the most meaningful growth happens."