Speech by Assoc Prof Ang Peng Hwa, Chair of NTU’s Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, at the launch of the Shinnyo-en Singapore Wee Kim Wee SCI Scholarships on 27 April 2007

Welcome
Mr Kawabata Shogo, director of Shinnyo-en,
Mr Kwee Liong Keng,
Ms Wee Eng Hwa
to the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information.

It is a pleasure to have you all visit the School.

We meet here today to honour a person who shares some common traits among all of us—a Buddhist foundation and a communication school – the common trait is that we all believe that we can change the world and change the world to a better place.

I have had the honour and privilege to be lunching with the late Dr Wee with our Founding Dean Eddie Kuo and a visiting professor. Over the lunch conversation, it was very clear that Dr Wee loved journalism. Some of you have heard the story, and I’ve told this many times: that when Dr Wee was asked which of his occupations he would choose if he had to choose it all over again—journalist, a diplomat and a President—he said he would be choose to be a journalist. And the first reason he gave was that he could meet many people.

When I asked my daughter who is 12 that same question, she chose President—because presidents fly first class.

By meeting people, he did not mean just saying hi or shaking their hands because many jobs allow us to do that. By meeting people, he meant that he could touch people’s lives. And hopefully influence them for the better.

So it is with journalism and so it is with religion.

From my conversation with Rev Kiyoshi Takaichi, the Manager of the International Affairs Section of the Shinnyo-en Foundation, senses that spirit in the late Dr Wee. For a religious group, which is sensitive to matters of the heart and spirit, to be impressed by Dr Wee says a lot about the man himself.

And so we in the School hope that those who pass through the School to work and to study will share some of that idealism of the late Dr Wee to change the world for the better.

Many of the students in SCI are idealistic. So it is fitting that a scholarship be created from the endowment.

It is also fitting that the Shinnyo-en Foundation wants to give to the GO-FAR programme—Going Overseas for Advance Reporting. Credit should be given to Cherian George. This is the programme where we expose students to overseas reporting. Two years ago, the students went to Banda Aceh and Sri Lanka to cover the tsunami recovery. Last year, they went to Nepal, the birthplace of Buddhism, to cover the political changes. This coming academic year, they will be going to Laos.
GO-FAR tests the resourcefulness and resilience of the students as future journalists. The programme has been very well received and turns away more than half of the applications.

Those who go return with a deeper appreciation of the less fortunate. Many of them expressed a desire to return to those countries to report, to use the media to inform the world of what is going on in that part of the globe, and so perhaps to effect change for the better.

I believe GO-FAR is a programme that the late Dr Wee would approve.

So on behalf of the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, thank you for the gift that speaks to our idealism and the spirit of the late Dr Wee.