

SPEECH BY MS TOH LE YI ON BEHALF OF 2024 POSTGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

A very good evening to our Guest of Honour Mr. Murali Pillai; Chairman of the Tan Kah Kee Foundation Mr Lawrence Tan; Chairman of the Postgraduate Scholarships Committee Professor Eugene Tan; distinguished members of the Postgraduate Scholarships Committee; esteemed donors; fellow scholars and guests.

My name is Le Yi, and I am about to embark on a Master's in Social Data Analytics at Brown University. It is a profound honour to speak on behalf of my fellow postgraduate scholars, a remarkably diverse group of lawyers, social workers, researchers, musicians and designers, who are united by a passion for the community.

Today marks a significant milestone for me as I wrapped up my last day at work, and it turned out really emotional. In fact, I just returned my laptop and staff pass this afternoon. I'm sure my fellow scholars would agree that taking the plunge into graduate studies required immense courage. For many of us, it meant leaving behind stable salaried lives for a year or more, without truly knowing what lies ahead. Yet, we all reached a pivotal moment where we decided to take a leap of faith, in hopes of finding ways to better serve our communities.

For me, my turning point was not a sudden revelation, but a gradual and growing desire to contribute more beyond my current self. When I first started volunteering, I saw community service as a window to engage with people from various backgrounds and understand their fears, concerns and aspirations. I came to appreciate community service as an art – the art of active listening, where empathy and understanding guide our interactions; the art of connecting with individuals on a personal level; and the art of fostering meaningful relationships and building trust. Each of my encounters with the community deepened my understanding of the human experience and strengthened my resolve to empower those I serve.

Over the years, I have evolved from an eager volunteer into a dedicated community organiser determined to amplify social impact. As I engaged with research and data-driven insights, I began to see the need for outcome measurements and started asking critical questions: How can we best measure the impact of our initiatives? Which efforts should we scale, and which should we streamline to optimise resources? Especially given Singapore's increasingly vibrant ground-up landscape, how do we consolidate and benchmark community efforts?

My work experiences – two years of hands-on community engagement at the forefront of action, and two years evaluating social programmes and administering community grants – have only fuelled my commitment to data-driven social good.

Today, I approach community service as a blend of science and art. By immersing myself in rigorous analysis and systematically collecting and analysing social data, I aim to drive evidence-based interventions that are as grounded in *data* as they are in *empathy* – initiatives that are *strategically informed* and *compassionately implemented*.

Reflecting on my journey, I am acutely aware of how fortunate I am to be able to thoughtfully engage with these issues, a privilege made possible by educational pioneers like Mr. Tan Kah Kee. On behalf of my fellow postgraduate scholars, I would like to thank the Tan Kah Kee Foundation, the scholarship committee, and our donors Mr. Tan Keng Leck, Vice-Chairman of the Tan Ean Kian Foundation; Mr. Osbert Lyman, director of the Li Siong Tay Foundation; and my donor Mdm. Doreen Liu – thank you for embodying Mr. Tan Kah Kee’s spirit and supporting our ambitions. This scholarship not only provides financial support but also opens doors to invaluable connections.

I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the extraordinary individuals whose steadfast support has been instrumental. To my parents who have always championed Mr. Tan Kah Kee’s vision of education as a powerful equaliser, and continually remind me of its transformative power – thank you for grounding me every step of the way. My deepest thanks also go to my life and career mentors, as well as friends who have supported me through every high and low.

To my fellow scholars, thank you for sharing a glimpse of your lives with me. Your stories leave no doubt that the spirit of Mr. Tan Kah Kee continues to live on in our generation. I am inspired by your endeavours – from designers innovating for social good, to musicians sparking meaningful dialogues, researchers and advocates shedding light on pressing societal issues, and lawyers providing pro bono services that uplift communities. This is just a snapshot of your incredible impact. I am confident that together, we can transform our shared goals into tangible solutions for our communities.

As we forge ahead, let us always be guided by the principles of 诚毅 (to be sincere), 勤俭 (to be hardworking and frugal), 忠公 (to be loyal and fair) and 创新 (to continuously innovate), as we strive to build a more inclusive, caring and resilient world. Thank you!