



**For the Media**

**28 August 2009**

**LAUNCH OF NUS CENTRE FOR SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND  
PHILANTHROPY**

**"Philanthropy in the Singapore Context"**

**Delivered by Ms Chew Gek Khim,  
Deputy Chairman of Tan Chin Tuan Foundation**

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President of NUS, Professor Tan Chorh Chuan;  
Dean of NUS Business School, Professor Bernard Yeung;  
Director of the Centre for Social Entrepreneurship &  
Philanthropy, Associate Professor Albert Teo;  
Distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen,  
Good afternoon.

I have been asked to talk about philanthropy in the Singapore context but there are many professionals here who are better qualified to do so.

For this reason, I will talk about the evolution of the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation as an illustration of philanthropy in the context of Singapore.

Many foundations are started by individuals based on their personal philosophy and life experience. In this instance the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation was founded by my late grandfather Tan Sri (Dr) Tan Chin Tuan.

He was born in 1908 and passed away in 2005. Over the period of 97 years, he witnessed two World Wars, the Great Depression, the decline of the British empire, Singapore's birth and growth, the use of bullock carts to man's trip to the moon and many other amazing changes.

Personally, he saw his family's fall from grace when his father passed away during the Great Depression. He had to give up schooling and a fairly privileged childhood to start work. He also saw his own rise as a junior bank clerk to an elevated position in politics as Singapore's first Asian and only Deputy President of the Legislative Council - second only to the Governor of Singapore.



In business, he became enormously influential as Chairman of at least 10 blue-chip companies in the 1960s and 70s, ranging from OCBC Bank, Raffles Hotel, Robinsons, Straits Trading, Fraser and Neave, and many more.

It is this sense of history, of the vagaries of life and the fickleness of fortune that determined his philosophy of life, of money and of philanthropy that has set the value system for the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation.

Hence, when the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation was formed in 1976, we focused on meeting basic needs: helping the poor, creating educational opportunities for orphans and the underprivileged, housing the homeless, the abandoned, the elderly and supporting charities for the poor and needy.

Today, Singapore has changed tremendously. Our contribution to philanthropy has to evolve to meet Singapore's changing social needs.

Before I launch into how the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation has evolved perhaps I can give a backdrop of the philanthropic scene in Singapore today:

**Singapore is positioning herself as an emerging centre for philanthropy**

As a consequence of her position as a financial hub in the Asia-Pacific, Singapore is emerging as one of the leading centres for philanthropy. Hence, we see donors and philanthropic groups from Singapore and overseas coming together to share ideas. 2008 marked the first time the Global UBS Philanthropy Forum was held in Asia instead of Europe. And Singapore was selected as the venue for the Forum.

The number of international non-profit organizations setting up offices in Singapore has also increased, for example, the World Vision International & World Wildlife Fund.

As a result of the confluence of a more international community in philanthropy, there has been a visible change in mindset, with greater emphasis on getting the larger community to contribute and volunteer their time. In other words, philanthropy is now no longer the exclusive purview of the rich.

Volunteerism has risen from 15.5% in 2006 to 16.9% in 2008. In this same period, donations from individuals tripled, from



S\$341 million to S\$958 million, according to NVPC's 2008 Individual Giving survey.

We also see increasing numbers of students, professionals, and migrant workers who are "Givers" of time, or money, their talent or strengths, such as their ability to organise community activities, raise funds, activate their networks to deliver aid. The more Tech-savvy among us are harnessing new social media tools such as Facebook to raise funds for pet causes.

With so many more people and groups meeting Singapore's diverse social needs, as well as a good state welfare system, we have had, as a foundation, to evolve to remain relevant in this fast-changing backdrop.

At the same time, we remain mindful to retain the key values upon which we were formed.

Thus, rather than just meeting the financial needs of our key beneficiaries, we have also tried, to be thought leaders and to change mindsets through the way we give.

Education, the aged, children and youth, health and the disabled continue to be key causes we support. However, rather than just supporting them by giving a cheque without explanation, we have tried to inculcate in our beneficiaries the underlying philosophy and direction of our founder which is, "To appreciate the resources that we have and use them wisely".

Let me elaborate on this philosophy.

In both business and philanthropy, the key issue is how we utilise our resources.

In business and giving the key resource is money, which we should steward well and wisely. Money should be made honestly and applied faithfully to achieve good. It should not be squandered or left to languish.

However another resource we have at our disposal are our skills and abilities, for that too should not be wasted but should be honed and continually improved. It is only when we utilize our resources well - whether it be money, intellect, skills or a combination of all - that we can truly achieve a greater good and make the world a better place.



This is all easily said, but how does one execute? Set out below are a few guidelines we have adopted to enable us to remain true to our philosophy.

**1) Our contribution must generate a social return**

A donation is a social investment. In a financial investment, each dollar invested must generate a financial return. Similarly, in a donation, each dollar donated should generate a social return, which ideally should be viewed in the same light as a financial investment.

Thus if a donation does not give a fair social return, we as custodians of my grandfather's legacy would not have done our job well. Had that same donation gone to another charity that could have used the money better and the donation would have gone further in helping to improve society.

**2) There must be clear and measurable outcome to benefit many**

Again, whilst this looks like a business plan, it does mean a disciplined approach to spending money. Each non-profit group or recipient that we help must have a clear idea what he or it will do with the funds.

When there is clarity of purpose, we can work together to make a difference to society and achieve the social good that we want.

Ideally, each gift should help the largest number of people, or make as much long-term social impact as possible. The yield in good should be high.

Based on this philosophy we have changed the way we give over the years. In the 1970s, we gave mainly to the downtrodden. Then, stronger charities would have been passed over and funds channeled to the weakest.

Today, given the large safety net that the government provides as well as the proliferation of many volunteer groups, stronger charities get a larger piece of our donation. In the hands of these "strong" partners with well-oiled processes and extensive reach, we have found that our donation can be superlatively multiplied to benefit many in deeper ways.



By changing the way we give a resource like money, we are trying to change the practices of the recipient organisations.

### **3) The Heart of the Matter**

Our founder emphasized that whilst structure and accountability is good, it is the "heart" of the foundation that drives its philosophy.

Without personal involvement and the endorsement and support of individual family members for specific projects, our gift would lack that personal touch. We wish to be more than a cash cow to our beneficiaries; our experience has proven that nothing beats that precious face-to-face connection.

For this reason, Council members are encouraged to attend events so that they remember the "human side" of giving.

Many of you here today will know that we have committed our former family home on Cairnhill, called the Tan Chin Tuan Mansion - now a conserved development - to be used as a platform for business and philanthropic activities. This is one of the venues where we can have that "face-to-face" connection.

### **4) Create a system to continue the philosophy**

In our case, we set out deliberately to institutionalise our family history, values and processes to ensure their longevity.

For this reason, we were the first family foundation in Singapore to have a non-family member as chief executive officer in 2006. Backing the CEO is a professional team to assess appeals guided by disciplined funding principles, develop programmes here and in ASEAN, for the causes we have identified that we wish to continue supporting.

Even as we redefine ourselves as a foundation and fine-tune our focus to remain relevant to society, the philanthropic scene continues to evolve and improve.

Today is one such example as we come here to celebrate the launch of the NUS Centre for Social Entrepreneurship and Philanthropy. This centre is illustrative of Singapore's



desire to continuously review how it can innovate and improve the philanthropic scene.

Certainly this centre fills one of the gaps in the sector by offering grants to NUS undergraduates and graduate students to develop innovative ideas that address specific social problems.

For that may I congratulate NUS on the setting up and launch of this Centre. And may I also thank Keith Chua on behalf of all of us here for his donation.

Thank you.

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