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- Mr Lim Jiun Hong, now at the London School of Economics

Opening doors to higher education

SIM GE graduates are more than able to fulfil their aspirations, with many going on to pursue a Master's or even a PhD

WHAT a difference a little over a decade has made for Tommy Khoo. About 12 years ago, he fared so poorly in his A-Level examinations that, in his own words, he had "no hope" of ever making it to a university based on those grades.

How things have changed for the better since then. The 30-year-old recently earned a scholarship to pursue a PhD in Mathematics – his pet subject – at Dartmouth College, one of the Ivy League universities in the United States.

Mr Khoo credits much of this turnaround in life down to the strong foundation and experiences that he gained from enrolling in Singapore Institute of Management Global Education (SIM GE) for his undergraduate studies.

After emerging with first-class honours from the University of London's (UOL) Bachelor of Science in Mathematics and Economics programme back in 2009, he went on to do his Master's in Mathematics and Computer Science at Oxford University in the UK.

He also qualified for a scholarship to continue with a PhD in the UK but eventually plumped for Dartmouth because of its reputation and the chance to experience life in a different country.

"At SIM GE, I got to meet many lecturers with PhDs in Mathematics themselves. They were the ones who told me about academia, research and being a career mathematician," he shares.

Prestigious scholarships

Others who have secured a top scholarship to pursue further education include the likes of Ursula Wiradinata. In her case, however, it is her wish to want to contribute back to society that first spurred her on to study for her Master's and now, her PhD.

After graduating with distinction for her diploma in Economics at SIM GE, she stayed on for her degree in Economics and Finance and did well to graduate with first-class honours.

Ms Wiradinata then earned a London School of Economics (LSE) scholarship for international students to do her Master's in Finance and Economics, and she recently flew to the US to start a PhD in Finance at the renowned Booth School of Business at the University of Chicago.

"We should do our best to realise our potential by working hard so that we can contribute and give back to society. One day, I want to dedicate my life to doing good, especially in the field of education," says the 24-year-old.

When asked why she chose to pursue the Finance track, she adds: "In my opinion, there are many aspects in Finance that can be improved so that society will be better off. It is my goal to produce research pieces that will leave a positive impact." While it's still a good five years until she's done with her studies, Ms Wiradinata is already thinking about her possible career path after she completes her Doctorate.

"I may work in good universities as lecturer or researcher, in the public sector, or at a non-government organisation. At this stage, I want to keep my options open and will choose the path in the future that is most suitable for me," she says.

Both Mr Khoo and Ms Wiradinata are among many of SIM GE's 105,000-strong alumni who have used their undergraduate education as a springboard to doing their post-



graduate studies, either locally or abroad, in a wide variety of disciplines.

For Lim Jiun Hong, he made up his mind to go for his Master's when he was still only in the second year of his Bachelor of Science in Computing and Information Systems degree programme at UOL.

The 25-year-old, who graduated from SIM GE last year, is now at LSE – one of three universities where he had received conditional offers – doing a Master of Science in Management, Information Systems and Innovation.

Like Mr Khoo before, Mr Lim credits his alma mater in Singapore for steering him in the right direction in terms of inspiring him to upgrade his education qualifications.

"Every year, SIM GE conducts a talk where they share stories of students who go abroad to pursue their Master's. I attended one such talk in 2011 and it got me interested in the idea of doing my Master's right after graduation," he says.

"What spurred me further was the Achievers event that SIM GE holds yearly to celebrate those who received commendations for getting the highest scores in their papers, those who receive awards from UOL or those who have earned first-class honours. That event probably gave me the confidence boost to work harder in my final year and to apply for Master's programmes," Mr Lim adds.

Career springboard

Among those who have embraced lifelong learning include the likes of Ramesh Narayanan, who has completed not one, but two Master's programmes ever since he graduated from SIM GE.

Despite not excelling in his Primary School Leaving Examination and GCE N-Levels, he grew up in a household where he was taught, from a young age by his mother, that a good education was important to get ahead in life. Now 42, he graduated from his Bachelor of Science (Management) course at UOL back in 1997 and spent the next nine years working at a local telecommunications firm in various roles such as customer service.

It was during this period when he studied part-time for a Specialist Diploma in Infocomm Technology at Nanyang Polytechnic, which gave him the necessary skills and qualifications to move up the career ladder.

"I needed to equip myself with the technical understanding to better perform and contribute to my employer and my own development," he says. "Eventually, the course paid dividends as I was promoted to become man-



Reaching for the skies: SIM GE alumnus Muhammad Ilyas Bin Abdul Kadir (above, left) graduated six years ago with a Bachelor of Business (Management) from Australia's RMIT University and is now in his first semester of his Master in Mass Communication course at NTU. Lim Jiun Hong (left) is now at the London School of Economics doing a Master of Science in Management, Information Systems and Innovation. As for Ursula Wiradinata (above), she recently flew to the US to start a PhD in Finance at the renowned Booth School of Business at the University of Chicago.

ager of a technical support team, overseeing about 30 staff."

The desire to go back to school again led him to apply for a Master of Science at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in 2006. It was one of the courses that he took in International Political Economy that sparked his interest in past global economic crises enough to pursue a second Master's, this time a Master of Science in Economic History at LSE.

His wife, incidentally, is also a SIM GE alumnus. The pair – your classic case of "university sweethearts" – met during their UOL course and eventually went on to tie the knot. She hopes to go on to do her Master's one day, although she is now busy juggling being a mother and having a full-time job as executive director of the Singapore Association of Exhibition & Convention Organisers.

A global community

There are also many SIM GE graduates who have opted to continue their education journey at Singapore's publicly-funded universities.

Daniel Ho Sheng, a fresh Bachelor of Arts (Communication) graduate from the University at Buffalo, The State University of New York, recently enrolled in the Master of Science (International Relations) programme at NTU's S Rajaratnam School of International Studies.

"Through various overseas study and exchange programmes, I experienced first-hand the complexities of human relationships and the realities of the global community," says the 24-year-old. "These encounters compelled me to re-think my observations of the world through multiple lenses, and to better appreciate and make sense of these diverse perspectives. In particular, they challenged me to question the very nature of global conflict and cooperation."

Mr Ho hopes his Master's will give him a

firm foundation to engage and collaborate with others in current affairs and to "think critically" about the future.

"Professionally, it will equip me with the necessary skills and knowledge to conduct credible policy research and analyses, as well as formulate effective solutions to meet the needs of local and global communities. These are especially useful given my desire to pursue a career in the public service," he adds.

Another SIM GE alumni who has chosen to go "local" is Muhammad Ilyas Bin Abdul Kadir. The 30-year-old graduated six years ago with a Bachelor of Business (Management) from Australia's RMIT University and is now in his first semester of his Master in Mass Communication course at NTU.

"From a young age, I had already decided that I would study beyond just my Bachelor's. I decided to work first before going for my Master's. It's more for my personal development and interest, and I enjoy the challenge of doing research and working on projects now that I'm back in school," he says.

"Balancing work and studies is never easy, but I believe that so long as a person puts his or her heart and soul and effort into it, things will turn out well in the end," he adds.

Each of these SIM GE alumni may have gone on to walk very different paths in their lives ever since leaving their alma mater, but what's clear is that the trans-national education route has proven successful in helping to open up many new opportunities for them to fulfil their dreams of upgrading themselves and pursuing their interests.

And just as how SIM GE has been opening different doors for its graduates to continue their lifelong learning journey, the private education institution – which celebrates its landmark 50th anniversary next year – will hope to continue doing so for many more decades to come.

If you are an SIM GE alumni and keen to take part in the 50th anniversary celebrations, email alumni@sim.edu.sg for more information.

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- Daniel Ho Sheng, a Master of Science student at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies at NTU