

SINGAPORE

Granddad realises dream to earn Chinese literature degree

72-year-old did the course as part of lifelong interest in the language

Ng Wei Kai

Mr Teo Jwee Chiang, 72, left school more than 50 years ago to work to help support his family.

But he nurtured a love for writing and the Chinese language, contributing columns to Chinese-language dailies Lianhe Zaobao, Lianhe Wanbao and Shin Min Daily News between 2015 and 2018.

Yesterday, he fulfilled a long-held dream, earning a bachelor's degree in Chinese language and literature from the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS).

Mr Teo is one of about 2,600 people to graduate from SUSS at convocation ceremonies held at the university from Tuesday to Oct 12.

This batch includes the first graduands from three programmes: Bachelor of Laws, Enterprise Leadership for Transformation and Master of Management.

The first ceremony on Tuesday saw Second Minister for Law Edwin Tong giving a speech as guest of honour.

President Halimah Yacob, the university's patron, was also in attendance.

Mr Tong, who is also Minister for Culture, Community and Youth, spoke on continuing to learn after



Mr Teo Jwee Chiang, with his wife Lee Sai Mui, 72, and Winston, 40, the younger of his two sons, is one of about 2,600 people to graduate from SUSS at convocation ceremonies held from Tuesday to Oct 12. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

graduation, growing resilience and doing good.

He said to the graduands: "This may be controversial but I hope you fail at something.

"I think it is important to suffer the gut-wrenching disappointment of failure some time early in your lives or your career," he said,

adding that failure is part of future success.

He asked the graduands to pay it forward by helping those who have less.

Mr Teo, who is the oldest graduate in this batch, earned the Habit award from the university, given for showing passion to lifelong

learning.

He will receive \$3,000 and a plaque. He intends to use the money to set up a Chinese tuition website to help the less privileged.

The grandfather of four is working on two memoirs in Chinese titled *An Ordinary Life: Memoir Of Teo Jwee Chiang*, and *Essays By Jwee Chiang*.

The second book details his views on family, country, the environment and other issues.

He told *The Straits Times*: "When I started working on this degree, I was worried about whether or not I would be able to finish it because of health or energy, but I told myself, why not just try?"

"It's okay if you drop out; to complete it is a bonus," said Mr Teo, who worked in the housing and development sector after he left his Chinese-language medium school when he was a teenager in 1968.

He added that he pursued the degree not for the certificate but as part of his lifelong interest in the language.

While working, he went back to school to earn a graduate diploma from the Singapore Institute of Engineering Technologists and a master's from The International University, both in engineering-related fields.

Yet, despite his achievements, he is still hungry for more.

He said: "Even now, I still feel like my knowledge is not up to scratch."

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