

A responsive and mindful voice from the academe: A conversation with Dr. Sun Sun Lim

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As social science researchers, our mission to conduct and publicly share our ethically-sourced, evidence-based studies is even more critical as the world grapples with misinformation and disinformation. In my September 2022 conversation with Dr. Sun Sun Lim, an influential contemporary scholar of communication, technology, and society, she shared how she was able to keep up to date with research that is responsive to current and emerging issues, especially on matters concerning the social impact of technology.

Dr. Lim is a Professor of Communication and Technology and the inaugural Vice President of Partnerships and Engagement at the Singapore Management University. She was the former Head of Cluster of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences of the Singapore University of Technology and Design (2017-2022); an Assistant Dean for Research at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of the National University of Singapore (NUS, 2014-2016); an Assistant then Associate Professor of National University of Singapore's Department of Communications and New Media (2003-2016); and a Nominated Member of Parliament in the 13th Parliament of Singapore (2018-2020). In 2020, she was included in the inaugural list of Singapore's 100 Women in Tech, given her important contributions to the technology sector. She is also a 2022 inducted Fellow of the International Communication Association.

To date, she has authored a book on parenting and raising children in the digital age; edited a book on mobile communication and the family; co-

edited a handbook on mobile communication and society and a book on Asian perspectives on digital culture; contributed over 80 journal articles and book chapters on technology domestication by young people and families, on digital networks and its social impact, and on digital literacy, upskilling, and social inclusion; and has actively shared her expert opinion in print, broadcast, and online media, as well as in academic, policy, and public fora.

On a personal note, Dr. Lim has been my mentor for over a decade now, a bond that started when I was a graduate student in the Communications and New Media programme of the National University of Singapore.

Evolution of research agenda

Dr. Lim commenced her professional academic journey as an Assistant Professor at the Department of Communications and New Media at the National University of Singapore almost two decades ago. Since then, she has actively contributed to the discourse on the social implications of technology. Our conversation started with Dr. Lim sharing how her research agenda evolved as a communication scholar:

Dr. Lim: Just to reflect on my research agenda and how it evolved, I think when I first returned from the UK for my PhD studies, Singapore was taking off in terms of broadband adoption and some mobile penetration. And I was struck by the fact that when I went I would see in food courts and in restaurants, on the train, people were immersed in their devices and seemed not to be engaging with each other as much. And I thought to myself, “*Wow, this is a phenomenon that somebody needs to be studying,*” and “*Why not me?*” Because I had been looking at online behavior, people’s interactions with online platforms, online shopping interfaces during the dot com boom that coincided with my grad studies. So generally, the whole issue of people’s interactions with the online space has always been a great fascination for me.

So, I started looking at families because that’s always been my interest, to look at the domestic space. And I started studying families in Singapore, and then I moved on to families in China and Korea. And Korea was fascinating because, at the time, it was the leader in Asia if not, in the world, in terms of broadband penetration, so it provided a fantastic peek into the looking glass, if you will, as to what countries that are highly technologized could look like. So then, research into Korea was really eye opening.

And then, of course, as time evolved, there was more concern, moral panics around what kinds of effects these technologies would have, not

just on families but, generally, young people and society in general. So that's where I got drawn into some government advisory committees, to offer insights on the social phenomena, and as a result of the kinds of policy needs that I could identify. These helped me to sharpen my research so that I could help to address some of these policy needs because, to me, having research be valuable to the broader societal context is just as important as having it contribute to the academic landscape. So one thing led to another, I started to look at other issues and vulnerable communities, whether it was migrant workers or youths at risk in Singapore, as well as the kinds of adverse effects that they might have experienced from their technology use. That was the sort of the core of my research at the start.

After I moved on to take leadership roles within the academic community, as well as within my university community, I realized that I also had to speak to a broader remit around the role of communication as a social science discipline, and around the role of social science as an academic pillar. So how could I then champion both my specific discipline, as well as the social sciences and its contribution to society at large? I think that's why, over time, I've also taken on bigger questions, like "*What are the issues around perceptions of digital disruptions in the workplace?*"; "*What are the perceptions around smart city technologies and people's sense of digital literacy?*"; whether they feel that sense of inadequacy when they are living in a society that's digitalizing. So those are the big broad questions I try to address in my research agenda if I could just summarize it that way.

Theorizing about our mediated lives

Dr. Lim has ardently pursued her passion to examine the social impact of technology, and she spoke about some key realizations that propelled her theorizing about our mediated lives:

Dr. Lim: So one of the key realizations that hit me was the amount of stress people were experiencing as a result of these new technologies. Obviously, there was a lot that was liberating about it. You had instant connectivity. You had many new platforms by which to communicate with people. You could choose the platforms so that you could communicate strategically and subtly, depending on the situation. You could broaden your networks, you can reach out to people whom you previously would never have been able to meet. So all the possibilities were very clear to me, but also through my fieldwork, through my interviews, with social workers, with youths at risk, with families, with

policy makers, I realized that there were also a lot of concerns around the kinds of stress that were being brought about, whether it was simply being too connected so that you always felt that sense of burden as to having to be responsive, having to be contactable as a parent, or as a teacher, or even as a teenager with your peers. So that pressure was there, and at the same time, there was the anxiety around, “*What will happen to me if I don’t understand the technology?*”, “*What if I get left behind?*”

So these realizations around the tensions and the anxieties, I think, motivated me to really look at how to articulate these concerns so that they would get heard, and so that these concerns can be addressed and supported, whether it’s through public education, policy, outreach, and so on.

Dr. Lim also talked about how the pandemic enriched the direction of her theorizing:

Dr. Lim: There was a fantastic sort of period of reflection because, I mean, when people talk about Singapore, there’s the assumption that we are a smart city and therefore, the connectivity is taken for granted. But in the peak of the pandemic, when we went into the lockdown, we witnessed actually, a small but not insignificant group of families, households, who were clearly digitally disconnected or digitally challenged in various ways. So on the furthest extreme, you would have those who didn’t have devices or had devices but they were outdated or broken.

And then you have those families with the devices but the parents didn’t have the competencies to guide the children and so, we realized that society, and at that time, I was in Parliament, together with another Nominated Member of Parliament, we raised a motion around the digital divides that were existing. Because of the lockdown, there were also a lot of people working from home. And the Ministry of Social and Family Development asked me to do some Facebook Live events where I could share my advice on how they could manage work-life balance during lockdown and being digitally connected. And I remember explaining to some of these people who called into the live session that you’re not alone in feeling as if your work day isn’t ending, you’re not alone in feeling as if you are neither being a fully-committed employee or being a fully-committed parent, you’re just so scattered and so divided.

So I think such experiences actually helped me and my PhD students think about an interesting opportunity with regard to studying women who were juggling both home and work-from-home. And then to look at that evidence to see how we can think about reinventing work post-

pandemic, so that work-from-home arrangements can continue but in a way that supports these women, both professionally and personally. In fact, tomorrow, I'm going to be speaking at a Diversity and Inclusion forum at Dell Technologies Forum, exactly addressing this point. How can we support women in the tech sector? By being more supportive employers, by understanding that if we reinvent work and working arrangements, we can actually make it easier for women to fulfil both their family, personal, and professional obligations. And therefore, it will help to stem the attrition of women from the tech sector and for that matter, any other industry.

In 2020, Dr. Lim published her book, "Transcendent Parenting: Raising Children in the Digital Age" (Oxford University Press). She described the building blocks of her conceptualization of transcendent parenting:

Dr. Lim: It hops back to the earlier point about the tensions and the pressures, and in a way, it was also to do with the timing of my two children's births. My first child, my daughter, was born in 2003 and then my son, in 2006. After the two births, guess what was born in 2007? The iPhone was born in 2007! And when my two children were progressively growing up, going through preschool and so on, it was very clear to me that the pace of digital transformation was changing the shape of parenting because I could compare and contrast very clearly between my two children, how the parenting obligations between the schools' communication to the parents, how the parenting obligations among parents of kids of whichever life stage, was changing with technological advancements. With my daughter growing up, more of her childhood was actually pre-smartphone, there was that sense that it wasn't so involved or so involving, the whole process of parenting. But as my son entered preschool, kindergarten, and so on, the parents' WhatsApp chats and the online platforms that parents could communicate on, suddenly exploded. There was a lot of parent-to-parent communication, there was a lot of parent-to-teacher communication, and it was really clear to me how the parenting burden had been intensified by the introduction of these kinds of technologies. Of course that brought its own blessings. I mean, clearly, with my son growing up at the time that my career pressures were also building up, I could see how I could be waiting to meet his teacher for a parent-teacher conference while doing my work. But at the same time, I also realized that the constant communication between his teachers and me, between the parents in his school group and me, were imposing quite a lot of pressure on me.

And I could witness in all the parents' chats that I was in, the kinds of dynamics that were occurring with regard to parents feeling stressed by other parents' showing off or showcasing what they were doing for their children, and some parents then confiding personally to me or in smaller group chats that they felt that they weren't equal. And of course, broadly, beyond my own experience, beyond Singapore, I was also seeing these kinds of issues being raised, around the fact that people felt stressed by the hyperconnectivity. So yes, the intersection of personal experience as well as broader observations.

In her book and op-ed pieces, Dr. Lim extensively wrote about the emergence of a highly digitally-connected network of parents that engenders pressure among its members to keep up, as they seemingly have this fear that their children might be missing out on the best possible opportunities out there. Her dialogues with parents revealed how they have attempted to manage this kind of pressure:

Dr. Lim: So I will say that, a lot of parents wish they could step out, they want to leave these chats but they choose not to because they are very concerned that they will lose out on communication with other parents that could somehow help their children or that, if they do not participate, that they will disadvantage their children. Either way, they feel that there is this sense of responsibility that they should remain in these chats. Some of them have taken to being quite strategic about how they participate in the chats. They will, for example, silence the notifications because they don't want the stress of the constant updates but they will strategically go in and review the chats to see if there's anything important. Some of them will actually, if they are able to have the luxury as in, they are so secure about their parenting, they are so secure about their kids, that they will actually leave the chats. I have encountered parents like this, and they are few and far between. For the most part, most parents feel that they must maintain some form of presence but they will, for example, choose not to be drawn into any kinds of very intense discussions. Sometimes, the discussions will go into, for example, critiquing a particular teacher and wanting to take action against a particular school policy. Some parents find that level of participation, that level of agitation, is not something they see as important to them. And yet, there will be some other parents who are involved to that degree, that they want to be part of these kinds of efforts. It's really a matter of personal choice and personal preference, not to mention, personal bandwidth. If you've got a very intense job, you simply don't have the bandwidth to surveil these kinds of chats as

much as you would. So I would say that it really differs from parent to parent, but across the full spectrum, from the minimally-involved to the highly-involved.

While the intensity of parenting may vary, Dr. Lim noted in her book that at the core of transcendent parenting, parents will always be bound to their children and the magnitude of their parenting is influenced by their sociocultural socialization, a perceived need for parental nurturing and oversight, and their valuation of their children's academic excellence, which is especially true in Asian society. While she wrote in her book that transcendent parenting is platform and device agnostic, she also elaborated that access to more sophisticated technology tends to bring about higher levels of parental omnipresence, surveillance, and dependency:

Dr. Lim: In a way, this is very much a socioeconomic status linked issue. There are parents who have the resources, not just the digital competencies, but also the time to go and understand how to use some of these platforms. For example, there are certain parental oversight apps where you can actually monitor your child's online use. Then, some of these parents who are quite on the ball, they will actually know how to use these kinds of parental supervision, parental oversight apps. And then, at the same time, there are those parents who are highly invested in their children's educational performance, so they will also be very actively monitoring the educational apps where the schools are updating the parents on how their kids are performing online. They're giving them online updates, all the charts about their kids' grades, feedback on their performance, feedback on their test scores, and all that. And then, at the same time, there's just the day-to-day communication apps, between parents and children, that are used. Whether it's Whatsapp, whether it's Messenger, whether it's Telegram, and so on.

If you were a very tech-savvy parent, you can actually use a whole range of these platforms to be a very active parent. If you were a parent who's not that technologically adept, you are maybe less educated, you would find some of these platforms very difficult to navigate. You don't actually know how to get into the educational platform to see how well your child is doing, to provide guidance, support, or intervention. Then, obviously, your use of these platforms to manage your child's schooling, or to provide guidance, is much more limited. It's really a competency issue, as well as also a resource issue.

With regard to the parents who are very involved through all these platforms, I think one of the risks clearly is overinvolvement where you

deny your child of agency. In my interviews, there were parents who would actually use the teacher-parent platform to ask the teacher for certain things that the child should have been given the opportunity to request on their own, so that they start to develop their independence, their agency, their autonomy. That's where I think, the overinvolvement has its risks.

With the parents on the other end of the spectrum, under-involvement is a problem because if you don't know how to use these resources to assess your child's school performance, then you don't know that you need to provide more support, that your child maybe needs assistance in certain things, and so on. In that regard, it will really require the support from the school, for example. To understand that there are some parents who will need their helping hand, with regard to some of these platforms and that the teachers maybe need to reach out personally to the parents to say, "You know, your child may need a bit of support in this particular subject," or in some disciplinary issues, and so on.

I think we need to cater to that full spectrum. The parents who are overinvolved, we need to encourage them to hold back a little. The parents who are under-involved, we need to provide that support so they can level-up. Because fundamentally, so much of education is being digitalized. And if parents are losing out on that part of the equation, then their children will lose out as well.

When asked if there is such a thing as too much transcendent parenting, Dr. Lim had this to say:

Dr. Lim: Yes, absolutely! I think in my fieldwork, it was quite clear that there were some parents who felt that they had overdone things, that at the point when we conducted the interviews, that they had already come to their realizations.

So for example, there was this mother who shared with us that she had become so obsessed with the notifications from the school platform, with the notifications from the teacher. The moment her son came back from school, she would confront him and say, "*Oh, how come you didn't go to this and that?*", and "*How come you didn't do better?*", and so on. She realized that it really created a lot of unnecessary tension between her and her son. And that, it made the relationship kind of transactional where she was always demanding this performance from him, instead of actually being the safe space for him to come home to. She then realized how she had distorted their relationship to some extent, and she decided to hold back. She's conscious enough to hold back, and I

think that was a very useful learning point not just for her, but also for me and, hopefully, my readers.

Similarly, there was another incident in the book where I recounted where this kid had a fight in school, in the school field, and the father then wrote this long incident report about what happened. Actually, the child had basically been injured in the school while jostling over some sports match, but the father sort of escalated it through this email.

Again, through this kind of overinvolvement, you rob the child of the agency, you rob the child of the ability to speak up for themselves, and to resolve disputes on their own. To be sure, there will be kids who are unfairly picked upon, who suffer from bullying and abuse, and where parental intervention is definitely ideal and necessary. But, I would say that for the most part, some of the fieldwork that I've uncovered, there were situations where, basically, adult intervention was not necessary and indeed, would have been undesirable. But because of the sheer ease of connectivity, the parents got involved and they denied the children of that personal space for growth and there's no development.

Given the temptation to engage in too much transcendent parenting, Dr. Lim shared how parents could set up healthy boundaries and be more mindful of their parenting:

Dr. Lim: I think that this always goes back to the relationship between parents and children. Sometimes, I think that a lot of the parents who could benefit from a lot of the talks I give, they're not the ones attending. Very often, I feel that if you are motivated enough to come to a talk on parenting your child, digital parenting, you already know that it is important, right? And, unfortunately, we just have to work a bit harder to reach out to those parents who are not there. But, fundamentally, I think whether it's got something to do with technology or whether it's got to do with relationships, the parent-child relationship really hinges strongly on communication, as well as trust. If parents and children are not communicating in a healthy, naturally respectful way, there will be very little opportunity to build that trust and, then, should the parents of the children encounter some kind of crisis, maybe the child is picked upon and wants to seek the support of the parent, but the parent just sees it as, "*You know, you're just so difficult. I can never advise you without you feeling like I'm judging you.*" Usually, those kinds of situations, it's kind of like a little bit too late.

So I think, fundamentally, parents and children need to put in the hard work to maintain that healthy interaction. I mean, it's easier said

than done because funnily enough, even kids today, their schedules are very busy. But if in your daily lives, you need to carve out time to talk to each other, you need to carve out time to learn one another's interests. And particularly, when you think about technology, there's a lot of shared media use that can help you bond and connect, like parents doing cute TikTok videos with their kids or even if you just manage little shared Instagram accounts where you post pictures of your family holidays, that you share with other relatives and so on. These are all really nice ways for you to bond, for you to connect with each other, so that you build that trust, you build that relationship. And it makes your relationship more resilient should you encounter any bigger issues along the way, which there clearly will be in life, there always is.

Apart from her observations on transcendent parenting as an urban, middle-class phenomenon in Singapore, Dr. Lim also shed some light on a segment of the migrant community in Singapore and their technologically-mediated family experience:

Dr. Lim: A more recent study by my PhD student, *Wang Yang*, about mothers from China who are now living with their kids in Singapore captures the emergence of all these new platforms. It was really fascinating because the mothers who have come from China were negotiating two worlds. They had to negotiate their Chinese community back home, as well as their Chinese community locally in Singapore, as well as the broader Singapore community. They were having to see the online space to understand how to carve out a life for themselves in Singapore, and to understand how to seek out opportunities for themselves and their kids while also maintaining the relationship with family back home. It was quite interesting because a lot of the social norms around the online Chinese community, as well as the online Singaporean community, didn't always align. Because there are different lingua franca, different norms around what you say, what you can't say, what kinds of resources you can seek, and so on. It was altogether quite fascinating to understand how these women had to negotiate different kinds of communities with different kinds of norms. At the same time, because their children were actually studying in Singapore, they were adapting faster to Singapore and able to provide their mothers support through a kind of role reversal.

All in all, again, I actually look towards the possibilities, that if you were a migrant from 50 years ago, coming to a new country, having to figure everything out without the Internet, it would have been so much more challenging. It would have been very isolating, whereas today, for

you as a migrant to another country, you can immediately, even before you leave your shores, reach out to people of your community out there in the host country. And the moment you arrive, you know you've got a welcome party. I think we need to think about having, again, more online support groups for these kinds of new entrants to communities so that they can seek and receive the support that they need as they are adapting to a new society, with new norms, and different kinds of expectations, and so on.

Contributing to an Asian-centered or an Asian-driven internationalization of communication and media studies

In 2016, Dr. Lim co-edited a book, "Asian Perspectives on Digital Culture: Emerging Phenomena, Enduring Concepts" (Routledge), wherein they offered an encouraging call to Asian scholars and scholars focusing on Asian communication and media studies to contribute to an Asian-centered or an Asian-driven internationalization of the field.

Women have figured in a lot of Dr. Lim's works, from parenting to cyber safety, to reinforcing women's place in technology development, and in the social construction of technology. When asked to point out some gaps that studies on women could still fill when it comes to contributing to a more Asian perspective on digital culture, Dr. Lim remarked:

Dr. Lim: I love this question because I think it can benefit from the input of Asian women on so many levels. Again, talking about the whole issue of work-life balance, now that work-from-home has become more accepted, more supported, more legitimized. I think Asian women actually do bear a significant brunt because of the kinds of cultural norms around the obligations of women within the home. So the presumption that the daughter-in-law must care for the elderly parents on both sides, the presumption that women are always going to be the primary caregivers, I think that is actually much more salient in Asia than in other parts of the world, in the global north for example. We're able to highlight these kinds of cultural norms that hold Asian women back. I think that would really help to draw attention to the issue, and it would actually help for policy makers as well, to be made more aware of how they can educate the broader public, as well as educate employers around how they can help to change the narrative around women's obligations. That's one area which is how the norms around women's roles are stacked up in certain ways in Asian countries.

Secondly, is the other issue of the social divide which is that in certain Asian countries, you will still find that girls are discriminated

against in educational opportunities. And that, if there were particular funds for educating children, the funds tend to be diverted towards the males rather than the females. This kind of discrimination can only hold women back longer, and when we think about, for example, even the online space and the safety of the online space. When we have women who don't have the technological competencies and we find that women, when they enter the online space, they feel that they're harassed, they feel that they're intimidated. They may then withdraw from that online space and that's to their detriment because, clearly, the Internet is so empowering in terms of providing resources, in terms of providing opportunities, education, and so on. The education and training opportunities for women, for education, for technology and so on, I think the picture in Asia is still quite uneven. Women still bear a lot of discrimination and disadvantage. Again, that's where research on women would be very helpful.

In the same co-edited volume, Dr. Lim co-authored a chapter about the significant impediments that stand in the way of Asian-centered or an Asian-driven internationalization. They identified three issues that needed to be resolved, or at least acknowledged, to be able to shift away from the current predominance of Anglo-American perspective in communication and media studies: (1) making curricula, syllabi, and pedagogies more inclusive and international; (2) developing and sustaining a culture of knowledge and information sharing across Asian nations; and (3) addressing linguistic differences (Lim & Soriano, 2016).

However, apart from the three hurdles that they raised in this chapter, a reality on the ground is that a good number of academics in universities and higher education institutions, especially in developing countries, are overloaded with administrative commitments and teaching units, which consequently constrict their research energies. Dr. Lim offered some advice to these academics who are juggling multiple academic roles and responsibilities, who are time and probably resource-constrained, in contributing to a more Asian-centered or Asian-driven internationalization of the field:

Dr. Lim: I'm so glad you pointed this out! I think it is indeed a serious impediment to all these very promising scholars having the bandwidth, the time, and the resources, to do more in terms of scholarship. I think, with the scholars in certain countries where universities might not be as well-resourced, there will always be that problem that the more able will get more tasks. And you know, that's actually so unfortunate. I think on the one hand, you can think about more collective articulation of

these kinds of issues. So, for example, maybe someone like you in UP could reach out to colleagues in other universities in the Philippines, where you've identified this issue around mid-career professors. You could set up some kind of forum, where you discuss and raise the issue to increase the awareness among university leadership in your country. I think that solidarity could actually help to highlight the importance of the issue and to maybe pave the way towards some kind of intervention at a higher level. I think that's one possibility. For example, if I were to be visiting the Philippines and I had the opportunity to meet with university leaders, I would also help to echo that sentiment if I feel that it will be of help to my younger colleagues. Once you identify the phenomenon, and you highlight it and call it out, and create more platforms to raise awareness, I think the chances of some action being taken would be higher.

Separately, I think on a practical level, is also maybe thinking about working in teams. Forming teams of mid-career scholars who share out the load of different kinds of tasks. And then, maybe think about having the different kinds of tasks be spread out across the year so that each of you can take the leadership in a different period that alternates with your research activity, so that you can divide up your time. That part of the year, you're focused more on administration. The other part of the year, you're focused a bit more on research and so on. It's really about teamwork, I guess.

I don't think it's easy. Theoretically, it sounds like it has a lot of promise, so I think it's really a matter of sitting down and looking at your different schedules, and finding a way to make it work while you wait for higher-level solutions.

Sharing her evidence-driven insights

Dr. Lim has widely disseminated her research-driven understanding of technology, mediated behaviors, and society in her op-ed pieces, media appearances, public engagements, and during her term as a member of the 13th Parliament of Singapore. She spoke about how she chooses which topics to focus on when she shares her evidence-based insights:

Dr. Lim: I think, partly, when I spoke earlier about the broader role around having to promote the importance of the social sciences within the academic landscape, that was a broader remit that I felt I had to answer. In that regard, I may sometimes talk about social issues that go beyond the technological so, I've written about issues over the extreme pressure in the education system. I've written about the marginalization of ethnic

minorities, and so on. So those I wrote because I felt that an academic voice was needed, particularly when issues were brewing and there was concern around why it was that people couldn't meet each other halfway, why it was that people seem so diametrically opposed, why there was so much polarization. That's where I felt that an academic voice was useful.

Then of course, going to Parliament, I realized that Parliament focuses on everything! I realized that my own academic exposure to various insights across various disciplines was also useful again, for me to provide academic insights on various things. So that's where I would speak on issues where I felt academic insights would be valuable. But, for the most part, I would say that I generally identify those issues where there is public concern, where there is some sort of moral panic that is brewing, where there is confusion, or where there is also too much misrepresentation by certain vested interests. So then, I feel that I have to balance out the conversation by providing the academic counterpoint.

Dr. Lim has indeed been a very active academic voice in the community, a modern-day exemplar when it comes to weaving scholarship and practice. When asked about what she considers her legacy highlights at this point, she quipped:

Dr. Lim: Wow, I haven't even thought that far. I think, mainly because our society is experiencing information overload and an attention economy. Then, it doesn't help that there are also increasing instances of disinformation and misinformation campaigns. So, to me, whenever I have the opportunity to provide some kind of academic input to a conversation that's unfolding, I try not to say 'no'. Because I think that when you've got this very noisy online information space, those who have the relevant insights should step forward to share them, so that you can help to educate the public. That's been very much my guiding principle, if you will. A lot of it arose from my own education in the London School of Economics, where there was always this push for "the public understanding of science". I found that the whole philosophy of "the public understanding of science" really resonates with me because as a reader, I try to be discerning. I try to identify views that I think are well-informed. That's something that I hope to pay forward by also then providing my own insights to credible platforms.

Even with the considerable volume of her publications, Dr. Lim disclosed some areas of interest that are still on her immediate research bucket list:

Dr. Lim: You know, recently, I got very intrigued by the whole issue of digitalization of a whole bunch of services, and in Singapore it's especially accelerated by the pandemic. We have digitalized so many things. Banking, for example. And when I think about elderly people, using digital banking interfaces on their mobile phones that they're struggling with. And then they have to turn to their family members for help. I wonder about those families, where the relationship of trust is not very strong, where some of these elderly people could be exploited and have their control over their finances wrested away from them because they don't know how to use these digital interfaces. That's something that I think is a little bit worrying, that I hope to do some research on. How do we protect the elderly? Especially their assets and all that, as our society becomes more digitalized.

Being mindful as academics and scholars

Before we ended our conversation, Dr. Lim shared her thoughts on how we can be more mindful as academics and scholars in terms of finding our niche in the discipline and in terms of creating a healthier multidimensional life balance:

Dr. Lim: I think that it's important to find something that you are inherently passionate about. Because if you simply choose a niche area because it is in vogue or because people tell you it's important, but you don't have that natural inclination towards it, you're not going to be able to sustain the work. You're not going to be able to have that creative spark to really carve out that niche in a way that will allow you to demonstrate your strengths. I think that's something to think about, how do you carve out a niche that really speaks to you and your interests. In other words, the niche should be something that you're inherently passionate about. So that's one.

With regard to the question about better work-life balance, I do feel bad. Inherently, academia can be a very lonely experience. You very often feel like the research is your own thoughts, your own struggles, and so on. And yet, I think it doesn't have to be. I believe that it's important to surround yourself with scholars whom you find supportive, who affirm you, and who will be able to provide you with good advice when needed. I think these are the same people who will be able to keep you honest if you become too egotistic. But they should also be the ones who will be able to pick you up when you've got a terrible journal article review, and you feel really demoralized. If you've got a very difficult situation at work that you've got to make a decision on, and you're just at a loss. So

if you're able to find colleagues, not just within your own university but within the broader community to lend you support, that's great. Now with Zoom, to reach out to even international colleagues is so easy. By all means, reach out to people whom you think would be good mentors, would be good sounding boards, and build that relationship.

Very recently, I went to an international conference and an international colleague took me aside. I thought she wanted to discuss research but she actually said, *"You know, I'm managing my department. I've just started the job, I really don't know what to do. You seem to have done this for quite a while, you seem to have gotten it figured out. Can you be my mentor?"* Obviously, I haven't gotten it all figured out, I have done it a bit more than she has, so there are some things I learned the hard way that I'm more than happy to share with her. So when she reached out to me, I realized that it was actually smart of her to do that, to know that she needed help, to know that she needed someone to talk to. Yes, I don't have the answers but I think that by her reaching out to me, she will be able to share some of that burden, then I will hopefully be able to help, point her to some advice, and give her some of the relevant experiences that could be illuminating for her.

Dr. Lim has certainly been an inspiring, generous, and compassionate modern-day guru, a safe space, and a pep squad for me and many of her colleagues. I am eternally grateful for her mentorship and support given that, at any point in our careers, we all need passionate and benevolent mentors and steady support base. May she keep on sharing her warmth and brilliance and may she never get tired of forging and lighting the path for fellow academics and scholars.

I hope that through this conversation, her timely reminder on the value of mindfulness resonate with more and more members of our community. I also hope that through this conversation, her mission to incessantly inquire and theorize may motivate many others to pursue researches that are responsive to current and emerging social issues and to join the communal quest to surface Asian perspectives in communication and media studies. And through this conversation, I hope that her academic voice would stir other academic voices to collectively reverberate, offline and online, in order to drown out the relentless influx of misinformation and disinformation.

A genuinely responsive and mindful voice from the academe, Dr. Lim offers us a model of how communication and media studies conducted with the highest level of integrity can elevate the practice of research, open up meaningful discourses, and consequentially impact the academic community and larger society.

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