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Malaysia's Sunway 30th Anniversary Event
WMU President John M. Dunn
July 05, 2017

• Good morning/afternoon/evening. It's really my honor and privilege to be here with you today to celebrate the success of a really good idea from 30 years ago. That idea led to the outstanding legacy we celebrate together today--Sunway University.

• I am pleased to be here to offer the congratulations of the entire Western Michigan University community to our colleagues and friends here at Sunway. WMU played a part in Sunway's beginning. We were the original international educational partner for what was then the fledgling Sunway College. That partnership idea, which grew into an international education innovation came, of course, from Dato Jeffrey Cheah, president of the Sungei Way Group and Sunway's founder. Together, and at Jeffrey Cheah's invitation Sunway and WMU established a "Twinning Program"--a 2+2 program that would start students at the new Sunway College and allow them to finish in the U.S. at WMU in Kalamazoo.

• For years, that enormously successful program brought hundreds of Malaysian students to WMU to complete their degrees and resulted in today's strong WMU presence in your beautiful city and nation. We have more than 2,600 Bronco alumni in Malaysia--most near Kuala Lumpur. And while the Kalamazoo Cafe may not carry the fame of the Twin Towers, it always brings a quick smile to the face of Kalamazoo travelers visiting Kuala Lumpur. It is a touch of home--and a reminder of the strong friendships we have built.
Over three decades, Sunway grew, established additional relationships with some 60 U.S. universities and matured into the wonderful university it is today offering its own full undergraduate and graduate degree programs. From its beginning with 67 students in 1987, Sunway has experienced explosive growth to enrollment numbers today that surpass 16,000. The twinning program evolved into an American Degree Transfer Program as Sunway constantly worked to enhance student opportunities. And today, Sunway has educational partners around the globe.

Through the years, Western Michigan University has remained a steadfast partner. We remain connected through articulation agreements, study abroad initiatives, research opportunities and faculty exchanges. We expect that to continue for many years into the future. And every year, we still welcome Malaysian students to our campus in Kalamazoo. Last fall, 52 students came from Malaysia to study with us—40 at the undergraduate level and 12 graduate students.

In fact, there is a group of students here today who will be joining us this fall, and I would ask you to recognize them with a round of applause. We can't wait to see them in Kalamazoo, and I understand they're already learning our campus mantra: "It's a great day to be a Bronco!"

We have remained your proud friends over the decades and will forever treasure the connections between Kuala Lumpur and Kalamazoo that have grown out of our 30-year friendship and the power of that good idea.

There has been occasion over the years to recognize the source of that first very good idea—Dr. Cheah. We welcomed him to the WMU campus in Kalamazoo in
1994 to award him an honorary Doctor of Education degree from WMU. And one of our historians, Dr. Howard Dooley, who was traveled here a number of times, wrote about the remarkable success of the original Sunway concept and about the founding chancellor as a man who poured his heart and energy into ensuring Malaysian students had access to the very best in higher education.

In fact, our Dr. Dooley has likened Jeffrey Cheah to Andrew Carnegie--the American 19th century industrialist who spent the latter half of his life devoted to large-scale philanthropy, with special emphasis on local libraries, world peace, education and scientific research. Noting the work done by the Jeffrey Cheah Foundation to support universities and schools, scholarships and research grants, Dr. Dooley opined that Jeffrey Cheah "seems destined to be the Andrew Carnegie of Malaysia.

I could not agree more. And I'm reminded today/tonight of a famous quote from Andrew Carnegie about how he assessed the accomplishments of others.

"As I grow older," he said, "I pay less attention to what men say. I just watch what they do."

By that measure, he like all of us, would be amazed at what has been accomplished here by Dr. Cheah. The dramatic transformation that took a good idea and turned it into a higher education powerhouse will pay dividends for years to this nation, this region and the world.

Congratulations. We can't wait to see what the next 30 years brings!
Notes:
While I did not find a convenient way to work this in, I thought you might like to know that our first Malaysian students were at WMU in 1971, and by 1987 when Sunway was established, we had 300 Malaysian students already on campus. Clearly, there was a reason Cheah came to us to help develop Sunway.

In August 1987--and unrelated to the Sunway initiative--WMU’s 300 Malaysian students invited Malaysian students from universities around the Midwest to come to WMU to celebrate the 30th anniversary of their nation's independence from England. The Merdeka (mer-DEHK-ah) celebration at WMU drew another 200 students from 11 universities for three days of festivities. A couple of Malaysian political dignitaries also traveled here to be part of the event.

Also in 1987, December, we awarded an honorary Doctor of Public Service degree to Malaysia's Minister of Defense Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.