



CULTIVATING THE NEXT-GENERATION OF ACADEMICS

INTERVIEW WITH
LIM YUN FONG

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As Associate Professor of Operations Management at the Lee Kong Chian School of Business, Lim Yun Fong has had multiple papers published in top journals.

A bunch of them are related to e-commerce, online platforms, warehousing and fulfilment, and sustainable urban logistics, some of his key research areas of interest.

However, in discussing the papers and their publication, Associate Professor Lim is less focused on some of the findings but more interested to share what that research has meant for two of his former students, each of whom have been able to embark on academic careers due in part to the success of those papers.

Associate Professor Lim, who is also the Academic Director for the Master

of Science in Management (MiM) programme at LKCSB, worked on two papers with his former Master's student Wu Yue.

One was titled, "Cellular bucket brigades on U-lines with discrete work stations," and was published in the *Production and Operations Management* journal in 2014.

According to Associate Professor Lim, this paper was about coordinating a workforce or a team of workers, for example one on a production line, so that none of them are idle at any one time, in order to maximise the productivity of the team.

He worked again with Wu Yue on a second paper, "Consignment contracts with revenue sharing for a capacitated retailer and multiple manufacturers," which was published in 2015 by the

Manufacturing and Service Operations Management journal.

This paper, he said, was about how sellers work with Amazon to warehouse and fulfil their online orders, essentially outsourcing their logistics to Amazon for a fixed commission. It provides a model for Amazon to set an optimal commission, and for sellers to set an optimal selling price and quantity of goods to supply.

Due in part to the strength of these two papers, Wu informed Associate Professor Lim that he was hired as an Assistant Professor at the University of Pittsburgh Katz Graduate School of Business. He was recently promoted to Associate Professor with tenure.

Wu was merely a young man of 22 years old when he became Associate Professor Lim's student, from 2009 to

2011, and his success has come as a pleasant outcome for both teacher and student.

"We never thought the two papers would actually help him find a decent job. I thought, 'You're just finishing a Master's thesis and that's it,' right? He would move on to continue a PhD and I'm already out of the picture," said Associate Professor Lim.

Lightning, it seems, has struck twice for Associate Professor Lim with another former student of his, Deng Qiyuan, who was his first PhD student in 2015. She earned her doctorate in 2020 and is now Assistant Professor at the School of Management and Economics, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen.

She too credits the start of her academic career to a paper she co-authored with Associate Professor Lim, "Urban consolidation center or peer-to-peer platform? The solution to urban last-mile delivery", which was published in 2021 in the *Production and Operations Management* journal.

The research centred around two possible solutions for minimising the traffic of last-mile delivery in cities, by setting up consolidation centres on the fringe of a city, or by using an online platform to maximise the load of vehicles already bound for urban deliveries.

While the research associated with all the papers cited was already rewarding, their longer-term impact has been even more gratifying for Associate Professor Lim, who keeps in touch with all the students he has advised over the years.

"When you do the research, you just hope that the research will turn into something useful and publishable. If the work of a project can be published, you're already very happy, right?"

"It is very satisfying if you experience this entire process by transforming a fresh graduate to become a person who can think for him or herself, to find a research topic, formulate the problem, solve the problem, and then write a paper."

"And you would never expect that after the papers have been published, you actually play a part in helping your students to find a job and eventually secure their career – you actually indirectly change their lives!"



"So that entire process is actually very fun. I gain a lot as well and I feel very satisfied when it comes to mentoring them," he said.

The act of mentoring and collaborating with his students is not limited to just a transfer of technical knowledge; Associate Professor Lim also imparts knowledge on how to best write a paper for a particular field.

"With a good idea, you can be good in mathematics and be able to formulate and solve a problem. But if you cannot write clearly, or in an elegant way to reflect your thinking, and people don't

understand it, your work will not take off," said Associate Professor Lim.

The father of two added that he had learned the importance of rigorous writing from his own advisor at Georgia Tech, where he earned his PhD in Industrial and Systems Engineering in 2005. He is now transferring these skills to his own students at LKCSB.

Associate Professor Lim also highlights his role in encouraging his students, more of whom he hopes will pursue an

academic career path, so that they can be more adroit and resilient.

"What happens when your research doesn't go to plan? You always need a Plan B. Or if you submit a paper for publication and it gets rejected? This happens to every academic, so I think it's good for students to experience failure early and become mentally strong, so that they will not give up easily."