

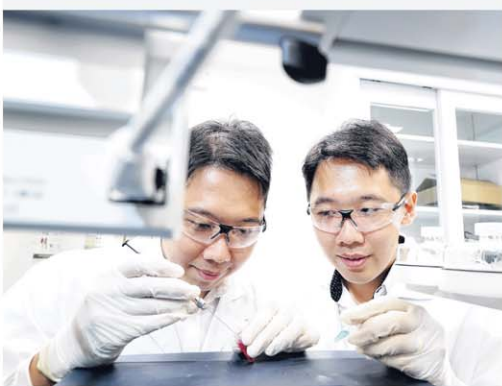
### Inseparable duo



**1988:** Identical twins Xin Xiang (left) and Xin Shan, seen here at four months old, were born seven minutes apart. PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE LIM FAMILY



**1995:** Xin Shan (left) and Xin Xiang at about seven years old. They twins attended Xinmin Primary School together. PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE LIM FAMILY



**2018:** Xin Xiang (left) and Xin Shan are currently research fellows at NUS' Department of Biological Sciences. ST PHOTO: KELVIN CHNG



Identical twins Lim Xin Xiang (left) and Lim Xin Shan will graduate with PhDs in biological sciences at the same ceremony come Friday. The 30-year-olds attended the same schools for nearly 20 years, including all six years as classmates at Xinmin Primary School. ST PHOTO: KELVIN CHNG

# DOUBLE ACT

## Twins who have gone to same schools for nearly 20 years will receive their PhDs this week

**Calvin Yang**

Not only do the Lim twins Xin Shan and Xin Xiang look identical, they also appear to be inseparable.

The 30-year-olds attended the same schools for nearly 20 years, including all six years as classmates at Xinmin Primary School. The brothers also spent two years at Nanyang Junior College and another eight years as coursemates – first as undergraduates and later as doctoral students – at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

On Friday, the pair will end their education journey together with PhD degrees in biological sciences at the same ceremony.

Currently, both are research fel-

lows – sitting at desks a mere metre away from each other – at NUS' Department of Biological Sciences.

The siblings are similar in so many ways that their colleagues and friends often have trouble telling them apart, said Xin Shan, who is older by seven minutes.

Even their parents, who dressed them in similar attire when they were younger, would get confused at times. Xin Xiang, the younger twin, said: "Sometimes, our parents would mistake me for my brother when my back was facing them."

The only time they did not attend the same school was when they went to different secondary schools. Xin Shan attended North Vista Secondary School while Xin Xiang went to Deyi Secondary.

Once, one sibling even stood in for the other at a secondary school fun fair – without anyone noticing that they had swapped places.

At NUS, they enrolled in the life sciences degree course, where they

took most of the modules together.

The pair, who received scholarships for their doctoral studies, have been intrigued by the natural phenomena around them since they were young.

They pursued PhDs in the same field after graduating in 2013. They shared notes, worked on projects and ate lunch together.

Even after spending most of their day together, the pair would spend their nights bouncing ideas off each other for their experiments.

Many times, the duo – who are now married and live apart – are so close that words are not needed for them to understand each other.

When they team up in sports, they make up for the other's weaknesses. In basketball, for instance, Xin Xiang hones his shooting skills, while his brother works on lay-ups.

"This has allowed us to score from both close and far," Xin Xiang said. "We know how the other would react. It is this natural, unspoken teamwork that I enjoy the most."

CONSTANT COMPANION

**I am glad Xin Xiang was with me on this journey, as we figured it out together.**



**LIM XIN SHAN**, on struggling with uncertainties.

The brothers do have different personalities and interests. While Xin Shan, who is easy-going, focuses on innovations in water technologies, Xin Xiang, the more headstrong sibling, looks at solutions for fighting infectious diseases.

Xin Shan and his wife, a 29-year-old civil servant, are expecting a baby girl in November, while Xin Xiang is married to his junior college sweetheart – a 30-year-old teaching assistant – and has a 10-month-old son.

Xin Shan said they struggled with uncertainties, including their future careers. "I am glad Xin Xiang was with me on this journey, as we figured it out together," he added.

They believe they would not have been able to go so far in their academic pursuits without the support of their family.

Their father, 65, has been a taxi driver for over 20 years, and their mother is a 61-year-old housewife. They have an elder sister, 32, in the business development line.

The three children, all married, have moved out of the family's four-room flat in Hougang, where the brothers used to share a room.

They had to rely on their father, the sole breadwinner who worked long hours to put his kids through school. "When he left for work, we would still be asleep and when he came home at night, we would already be in bed," said Xin Shan. "To make up for it, he would drive us to school daily until we were in university."

Their sister, Ms Wendy Gracia Lim, said the twins delighted in doing everything together growing up and "were practically inseparable".

Ms Lim, who moved to Sydney for work about three months ago, said her family is proud of the twins' achievement. "We came from a humble background and the growing-up years were a struggle for us. This is a defining moment for my family," she said.

The brothers' diligence will pay off on Friday when they receive their doctoral degrees.

Xin Xiang, who is the valedictorian, said: "It is a special moment because we started our education journey together over 20 years ago, and now we are ending it together."

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