

**SPEECH BY PROFESSOR TAN CHORH CHUAN  
PRESIDENT, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE  
AT THE HONORARY DEGREE CONFERMENT CEREMONY FOR MR LEE KUAN YEW  
TUESDAY, 4 JUNE 2013, 5.30 PM, AT THE ISTANA, SINGAPORE**

Your Excellency Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam, President of the Republic of Singapore and  
Chancellor, National University of Singapore

Mr Lee Hsien Loong, Prime Minister, and Mrs Lee

Mr Lee Kuan Yew, Honorary Graduand

Ministers

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

The National University of Singapore traces its roots to a very modest medical school founded in 1905. Since that time, our university, like Singapore, has undergone a series of dramatic transformations. The advances in our educational approaches, the range and nature of our courses, and the quality and impact of our research all make NUS unrecognisable as an institution from even 20 years' before.

Despite these rapid and profound changes, however, there are a number of constants. From its inception, our university has had a rich and distinguished tradition of service to Singapore, not just supporting, but actively catalysing and driving economic growth and societal advancement for our country.

This tradition of service requires us to go beyond providing our graduates with technical strengths, but also a strong sense of the attitudes, character and qualities, that have been crucial in Singapore's success in the past, and which are perhaps even more vital for our continued advancement into the future.

One very important way of doing so, is to celebrate and uphold the qualities of pivotal leaders and individuals who serve as beacons for the entire NUS and broader Singaporean society, reminding all of us of the personal and collective character that would help us navigate daunting challenges and seize new opportunities.

This evening, NUS is truly honoured that Mr Lee Kuan Yew has graciously agreed to accept the Honorary Doctor of Laws from our university.

This award recognises Mr Lee's unique and remarkable achievements in leading Singapore from the Third World to First, and his standing as a highly respected international statesman, and a global visionary.

However, there can also be no better person who exemplifies the personal attributes that would inspire and energise our students, graduates and broader community in NUS and beyond, as we seek to thrive in a more complex and volatile world.

We all recognise that the gathering together of so many remarkable qualities in one person is an extremely rare event - yet there remain important insights for each of us.

For myself, personally, it is the powerful and constructive balance that Mr Lee has managed to achieve that is most impressive, and which can help illuminate our own thinking and action as we grapple with complex issues in the course of our work and lives.

Please allow me to explain briefly through three quick examples.

First, the balance between "zooming out" to see the big picture and long view, and "zooming in" to go deeply into specific areas. Mr Lee's big picture perspectives are well-known and widely followed, but many of us also have our own personal recollections of his legendary mastery of details. For example, he knows much more about the botany and horticulture of tropical plants and trees than most professionals, and may I dare say, perhaps some of our faculty in the field.

Second, the balance between a great openness to learn from others and the boldness, courage and imagination to pursue a different, and often unconventional, course. This balance must have become more difficult to strike as Singapore became more successful, but this is certainly one of the key reasons for Singapore's differentiation and success.

Third, the balance between theory and its practical application. Mr Lee is a truly deep-thinker who cuts through wildly complex issues with precision and clarity. Yet, Mr Lee is also an intensely pragmatic leader. The acceptance of evidence and sound theory as the basis for good governance, without being entrapped by rigid frames of thinking and action, was a dimension which Mr Lee truly excelled in, and in which he was once again well ahead of his time.

The National University of Singapore is therefore most privileged to confer upon Mr Lee Kuan Yew an Honorary Doctor of Laws.

We are also most grateful to President Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam for presiding over this ceremony, to Prime Minister Lee and members of the Lee family for gracing us with your presence, to DPM and Ministers and all our honoured guests for so graciously joining us for this special event.

Thank you for joining us in celebrating a most remarkable leader and individual.

Beyond Mr Lee's unique and extraordinary achievements, he is a true inspiration for the NUS and wider community.

Beyond being an inspiration, he dedicated his entire life in service of his people and our country. While always realistic about Singapore's limitations and vulnerabilities, his leadership was always marked by hope and a sense of collective purpose, qualities that have continued to the present day and which energise all of us to do even better for Singapore for the future.

Thank you.

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