

Eulogy for Mr Lee Kuan Yew

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**NUS Memorial Ceremony – A Tribute to the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew
24 March 2015, 2.00pm at Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, NUS**

Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the founding father of modern Singapore.

Born on 16 September 1923 to Lee Chin Koon and Chua Jim Neo, Mr Lee Kuan Yew grew up in Singapore where he emerged as top student, in Singapore and Malaya, in the School Certificate examinations. This earned him the John Anderson scholarship to attend Raffles College, where he studied English, Mathematics and Economics. It is thus very fitting that we gather to pay our tribute to Mr Lee at this very location.

The Second World War and the Japanese Occupation of Singapore interrupted his university education. After the war, he went to England, where he completed his law education at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge University, obtaining a rare double first. He was called to the bar there and returned to Singapore to practise law but only for a short period. Driven by his conviction that Singapore should strive for self-government and provide a much better life for ordinary people, he entered politics. In 1959, he became the first prime minister of Singapore, a position he held for 31 years until November 1990, when he handed over to ESM Goh Chok Tong.

Mr Lee is deeply respected and admired for many things. His unique and remarkable accomplishments are well-known and widely recognised. His single greatest achievement is the transformation of Singapore, through his strong and visionary leadership, from a Third World country to a First World nation in just three decades. He is held in the highest regard as a profound and far-sighted thinker, a global visionary and the pre-eminent international statesman of his age.

Much has been said and written about Mr Lee, his remarkable qualities and his many lasting contributions.

Of these, I would like to say something about education which was always one of Mr Lee's key concerns. In 1966, a year after Singapore obtained independence, he met with school principals and pushed the idea, which was novel at that time, that every child should be developed to his or her fullest potential. He said "***The ideal product is the student, the university graduate who is strong, robust, rugged, with tremendous qualities of stamina, endurance, great intellectual discipline and most important of all, humility and love for his community; a readiness to serve whether God or king or country or, if you like, just his community***"¹

Mr Lee was truly instrumental in the shaping and development of higher education in Singapore, and in particular, the university sector. He firmly believed that talent development was not just crucial, but absolutely essential for Singapore's progress and continued success; as people is Singapore's only resource. In the late 1970s, even though Singapore had enjoyed strong sustained economic growth for several years, he identified the need to raise skills training and talent development to a higher plane – to meet the growing demands of a newly industrializing economy. He foresaw that the demand for more and better trained graduates and professionals would continue to grow, a responsibility entrusted to the National University of Singapore which was formed in 1980. Today NUS is widely recognised to be one of the leading universities in the world, and in this, as with many institutions and achievements in Singapore, we owe much to the leadership and foresight of Mr Lee Kuan Yew.

I have had the good fortune to have interacted with Mr Lee on several occasions in the past. I remember in particular a presentation to him on the biomedical sciences, which I coordinated in the year 2000. All of us who were present were awed by the sheer power of his intellect, his penetrating insights that went straight to the heart of the most central issues, and his strategic and far-sighted perspectives.

Mr Lee was indeed a very rare talent. His deep sense of purpose, the many outstanding qualities and values that he exemplified – these will serve as a powerful and enduring beacon not just for all of us in NUS, but for the broader community in Singapore and beyond.

Today we reflect with deep sadness and profound gratitude on the passing of a truly great man.

A person of exceptional qualities and who encompassed a unique combination of remarkable talents.

A leader whose singular passion, powerful vision and tireless efforts have created the thriving and successful Singapore that we love and enjoy today

Today, the NUS community, together with all Singaporeans, bids farewell and thank you to Singapore's founding father, Mr Lee Kuan Yew.

May I invite you all to stand and join me in a minute of silence in tribute to our eminent alumnus and Singapore's first prime minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew.

Footnote:

1. Lee Kuan Yew, The Man and His Ideas – Schools must have character, pg 393