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Citation by Professor John Wong, Dean, Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, Public Orator for Mr Philip Yeo, Honorary Degree Recipient

This University has honoured many great women and men over generations. It is fitting that the National University of Singapore today honors someone who, in his own words, is driven by the belief that the “key for Singapore’s success is to develop human capital — they are our only resource, and our most precious resource.”

Born in 1946, schooled at St Joseph’s Institution, Colombo Plan Scholar at the University of Toronto where he graduated in Applied Science (Industrial Engineering), alumnus of the University of Singapore with a Master of Science (Systems Engineering), and a Fulbright Scholar at Harvard Business School where he obtained his Masters in Business Administration, Mr Philip Yeo is credited with being one of the key civil servants who helped transform Singapore from Third World to First.

At the age of 24 in the newly formed Ministry of Defence, Mr Yeo showed his genius in getting things done by equipping a fledging Singapore Armed Forces with everything that a modern fighting force needs from scratch. By the time he was 33, he was the 2nd Permanent Secretary of Defence, where his enormous efforts resulted in proper army camps, uniforms, backpacks, boots, armaments, tanks, artillery, warships and fighter aircraft.

While at the Ministry of Defence, Mr Yeo demonstrated his ability to multi-task by leading Singapore into the era of informatics, formulating and championing Singapore’s first computerization plans as Chairman of the National Computer Board, the predecessor of the current Infocomm Development Authority. He was responsible for computerizing the Ministry of Education for Dr Goh Keng Swee even though he had no appointment in the Ministry of Education!

At the age of 39, he was tapped to lead Singapore’s Economic Development Board. It was 1985 and Singapore was in the midst of one of its worst recessions since Independence and Asia was not the economic powerhouse that it is today.

Under Mr Yeo, the Economic Development Board went into over-drive, attracting multinational companies to develop the chemical, aerospace, and semiconductor industries, and more recently, the biomedical science industry. He was also responsible for developing the enormous talent pipeline of Singaporeans through scholarships at the world’s leading universities.
Mr Yeo was responsible for developing the Batam and Bintan Industrial Parks with Indonesia, the Wuxi and Suzhou Industrial Parks with China, the Bangalore IT Park with India, and the Vietnam-Singapore Industrial Park with Vietnam.

Anyone of these projects would have been the highlight of an individual's career.

In 2001, Mr Yeo was appointed Chairman of the National Science and Technology Board and promptly changed the name to the Agency for Science, Technology, and Research (A*STAR). Those of us who were present at the discussions and email exchanges will remember Mr Yeo's reason why he chose that acronym: all Singaporeans know what an A* means at the Primary School Leaving Examination. Mr Yeo wanted a significant proportion of Singapore's best to go into Biomedical Sciences.

It was as Chairman of A*STAR that Mr Yeo developed even stronger links with the Universities, leading the efforts to develop biomedical sciences as Singapore's next economic pillar. Mr Yeo was inspirational in his recruitment of some of the best faculty in the world, teaching himself molecular biology and medicine to the extent that he could easily embarrass many of the faculty with his deep knowledge and understanding of these subjects. Mr Yeo was also one of the first champions of the development of academic medicine and the need to link the National University Hospital, the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, and the Faculty of Dentistry into a unified health system to synergize clinical excellence with effective education and translational research.

Mr Yeo's current brief is to develop new economic opportunities for Singapore, both as Chairman of SPRING Singapore, as well as being Special Advisor for Economic Development (Prime Minister’s Office). He is also a member of the United Nations Committee of Experts in Public Administration.

For his service to Singapore, Mr Yeo has been conferred many honors by the Singapore Government, with the latest being the Order of Nila Utama (First Class), one of Singapore's highest honors.

He has been honoured by Indonesia with the Bintang Jasa Utama (the First Class Order of Service Award), by France with the Ordre National du Merite (National Order of Merit), by Belgium with the Commander of the Belgium National Order of the Crown, and by Japan with the Order Of The Rising Sun, Gold And Silver Star.

Organizations have awarded him lifetime achievement awards, including the International Society of Design and Process Science, the Nikkei Prize, the Distinguished Service (Star) of Singapore’s National Trade Unions Congress, and Biospectrum’s first Asia Pacific Life Time Achievement Award.

Universities around the world have conferred honorary doctorates and lifetime achievement awards, from the University of Toronto, the Karolinska Institute, Harvard Business School, and Imperial College.
It is fitting that the National University of Singapore today honors one of its most illustrious alumni: someone who has transformed our economy, created thousands of high quality jobs, inspired so many of us to believe that individuals do make a difference, and that Singapore’s destiny is in our hands.

We thank Mrs Yeo, Gene, and Elaine, for sharing Mr Yeo with Singapore and the world. As Harvard University said in their citation of Mr Yeo: “Your extraordinary dedication to your life’s work contributes immeasurably to bettering the lives of others. You are a shining star in the history of your homeland.”

Mr Chancellor, may it please you to confer on Mr. Philip Yeo Liat Kok the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters.