

Eminent Alumni Award

Professor Chan Heng Chee

Professor Chan Heng Chee is one of Singapore's most successful and longest-serving diplomats. She has been, and continues to be, one of the stalwarts in both academia and international diplomacy.

In 1964, Prof Chan was the first woman to graduate with First Class Honours in Political Science from the then University of Singapore. Thereafter, she obtained a Masters from Cornell University in 1967, and completed a doctorate at University of Singapore in 1974. She was the first woman to head the Department of Political Science, and went on to serve as the Founding Director of the Institute of Policy Studies, Founding Executive Director of the Singapore International Foundation, and Director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Her diplomatic career began in 1989 when she became Singapore's first permanent representative to the United Nations, while serving concurrently as Singapore's High Commissioner to Canada and Ambassador to Mexico. She received numerous awards, including Singapore's first "Woman of the Year" award in 1991.

In 1996, Prof Chan was appointed Singapore's, and East Asia's, first female ambassador to the United States, where she worked to improve Singapore's standing in American eyes. She represented Singapore in Washington between 1996 and 2012, making her one of the country's longest serving diplomats.

During her watch, US-Singapore relations flourished in areas including trade, defence and security, with highlights such as the signing of the US-Singapore Free Trade Agreement in 2003, the first FTA that the US entered into with a Southeast Asian country, and the Strategic Framework Agreement in 2005.

Prof Chan continued to receive more awards and accolades, including the Inaugural International Woman of the Year Award in 1998, the Distinguished Service Order in 2011, and was named by the Washingtonian magazine as one of "100 Most Powerful Women" in the capital.

At the end of her appointment in Washington, she received the Inaugural Asia Society Outstanding Diplomatic Achievement Award, the Inaugural Foreign Policy

Outstanding Diplomatic Achievement Award 2012, and the United States Navy Distinguished Public Service Award. Upon returning to Singapore, she became Ambassador-at-Large for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and served three years as Singapore's Representative to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights.

Not showing any signs of slowing down, Prof Chan took on a range of board and trustee positions in the academic and public sectors locally and internationally.

Prof Chan was appointed by the Constitutional Commission to review the system of elected presidency in Singapore, and in January 2017, she led Singapore's team of delegates to the Universal Periodic Review conducted by the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Prof Chan remains Ambassador-at-Large at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and is Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, and the Deputy Chairman of the Social Science Research Council in Singapore. She is also a Member of the Science of Cities Committee (National Research Foundation), and a Member of the Advisory Council on the Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence and Data at the Ministry of Communications and Information.

The University is pleased to bestow the NUS Eminent Alumni Award on Professor Chan Heng Chee in recognition of her highly decorated and illustrious career and her invaluable contributions in international diplomacy and in building Singapore's diplomatic relations.

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Mr Ong Pang Boon

Mr Ong Pang Boon is one of Singapore's first-generation leaders who laid the groundwork for the stability and success the country enjoys today.

After attaining a geography degree at the University of Malaya, Mr Ong's political career took flight in 1955 as an election agent for founding Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew. In the following year, Mr Ong received a personal invitation from Mr Lee to join the People's Action Party as its Organising Secretary. Accepting Mr Lee's job offer despite a pay cut, his decision was motivated by a firm belief in the PAP's vision of a meritocratic multiracial country. Mr Lee shared in his memoirs that without Mr Ong, he would have been rendered a "deaf and dumb Secretary-General" as Mr Ong bridged the gap between the party and the local Chinese community.

In 1957, Mr Ong was elected City Councillor for Tanjong Pagar and became the first and only Deputy Mayor of the City Council of Singapore. Speaking fluent Mandarin, Hokkien and Cantonese, he artfully communicated with the people to align the party's vision with community needs. At the 1959 Legislative Assembly election, Mr Ong contested as PAP's candidate for Telok Ayer, to much success. He joined the Cabinet and remained as the elected representative of Telok Ayer constituency until his retirement in 1988.

During his political career of 29 years, Mr Ong served as Minister in the Home Affairs, Education, Labour and Environment. Beginning as Singapore's first Minister for Home Affairs, Mr Ong, along with several pioneer leaders, served as a volunteer in the People's Defence Force to demonstrate the importance of national defence.

From 1963 to 1970, Mr Ong took on the challenge as Minister for Education. He set the basis for the country's bilingual policy, a hallmark of Singapore's world-class education system. To imbue students with national consciousness, Mr Ong implemented the recital of the school pledge. This was later adopted as the national pledge, and he was personally involved in drafting the Mandarin version of the pledge.

In 1971, Mr Ong became the Minister for Labour, a role he served in for the next decade. Thereafter, he was appointed the Minister for the Environment and first Vice-Chairman of the PAP. Mr Ong stepped down from the Cabinet in 1984 and retired from

politics in 1988. For his sterling contributions to the government and the nation, Mr Ong was conferred the Order of Nila Utama (First Class) in 1990.

After his retirement, Mr Ong founded the Centre for Activity & Recreation for the Elders to organise pastimes for older Singaporeans. He also served as Governor of Hong Leong Foundation and a Council member of the Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan. Today, he continues to serve on the boards of Hong Leong Foundation, Nanyang Girls' High School and Mee Toh Foundation.

In March 2019, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong hosted a dinner to celebrate Mr Ong's 90th birthday, where he thanked Mr Ong for his "lifetime of dedicated service to the PAP and many illustrious contributions.", adding that Mr Ong is "one of the Old Guard who had laid the basis for Singapore's survival, sovereignty and eventual success."

The University is pleased to bestow the NUS Eminent Alumni Award on Mr Ong Pang Boon in recognition of his stalwart commitment to public service and his indispensable contributions to Singapore during its early years of nation-building.

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Mr Philip Yeo Liat Kok

As a prominent leader in the Singapore Administrative Service for nearly three decades, Mr Philip Yeo Liat Kok was instrumental in spearheading groundbreaking developments in Singapore's military, economic and biomedical fields.

After graduating from the University of Toronto under a Colombo Plan scholarship in 1970, Mr Yeo obtained a Master of Science from the then University of Singapore in 1974 and a Master of Business Administration from Harvard University under a Fulbright scholarship in 1976.

Mr Yeo served in the Singapore Administrative Service from 1970 to 1999. He took on various appointments in the Ministry of Defence in December 1985, and served as Permanent Secretary for multiple ministries.

Credited for the game-changing shifts in Singapore's economic development as Chairman at the Economic Development Board in 1986, Mr Yeo led economic and infrastructure development projects at home and abroad, such as Jurong Island, Biopolis, Fusionopolis, and the industrial parks in Wuxi, Bangalore, Vietnam and Suzhou.

As the first Chairman of the National Computer Board, now Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore, Mr Yeo championed Singapore's first national computerisation plan and ushered the country into the information age between 1981 and 1987.

From 2001 to 2007, Mr Yeo served as Chairman of Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR), building A*STAR into a world-class centre with leading scientific research capabilities.

In 2007, Mr Yeo was appointed the Chairman of the Standards, Productivity and Innovation Board (SPRING Singapore), and Senior Advisor for Science and Technology to the Ministry of Trade and Industry. He was also made Special Advisor for Economic Development in the Prime Minister's Office from 2007 to 2011, during which he assisted with strategic government partnerships with foreign governments and established new economic links.

A man tireless in his endeavours, Mr Yeo became a member of the World Health Organisation Expert Working Group on R&D Financing in 2009, and a member of the

United Nations Committee of Experts in Public Administration from 2010 to 2013. He is also Chairman of Economic Development Innovations Singapore, helping governments and related entities stay ahead of industry trends.

In the private sector, Mr Yeo served as Board Member and Chairman of the Executive Committee of Singapore Technologies Holdings from 1987 to 1993, Chairman of Sembawang Corporation and its successor SembCorp Industries from 1994 to 1999, and the Chairman of CapitaLand from 2000 to 2005. He joined the Board of Kerry Logistics in Hong Kong and the Board of Sunway Berhad in 2013 and 2020 respectively, and concurrently serves as Chairman of Accuron Technologies, Advanced MedTech Holdings and Project Fishermen.

For his extensive contributions, Mr Yeo was awarded the Singapore Public Administration Medal (Silver) in 1974, the Public Administration Medal (Gold) in 1982, the Meritorious Service Medal in 1991, and the Order of Nila Utama (First Class) in 2006. He was also conferred multiple awards by countries such as Indonesia, France and Belgium for fostering bilateral ties.

Abroad, Mr Yeo received the Japan Nikkei Prize for Science and Technology, the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Star by the Japanese Government in 2007 and 2008, and the Distinguished Service (Star) award by the National Trades Unions Congress. In 2011, he was conferred the honorary Doctor of Letters by NUS.

The University is pleased to bestow the NUS Eminent Alumni Award on Mr Philip Yeo Liat Kok in recognition of his outstanding leadership and boundless contributions at both the national and global level.

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