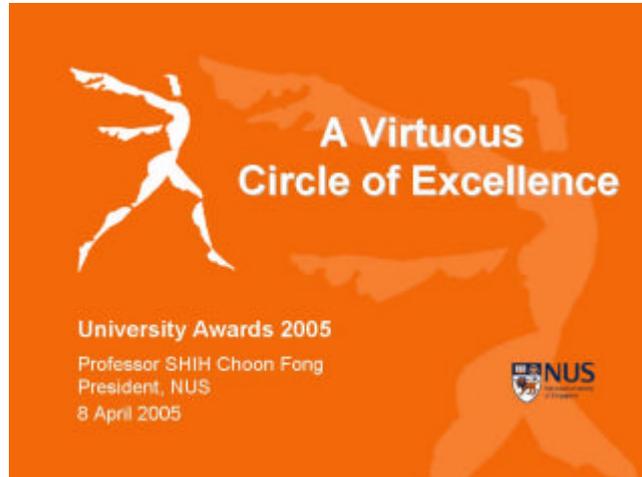


**Speech by Professor Shih Choon Fong,
President, National University of Singapore,
University Awards 2005, 8 April 2005**

A VIRTUOUS CIRCLE OF EXCELLENCE



Council members
Distinguished guests
Alumni, members and friends of the NUS Community
Ladies and gentlemen

Celebrating Excellence

Good evening. Welcome to University Awards 2005.

This evening, we recognize and honor members of our community for their accomplishments in education, research and service. The University Awards is our highest tribute to excellence.

We congratulate our eleven 2005 University Award winners.



Our Outstanding Educator Awards have been presented to Chan Wai Meng, Cheng Li, Kulwant Singh and Alex Ip. We applaud their passion for engaging minds and inspiring curiosity in our students' personal exploration and discovery of knowledge.

Our Outstanding Researchers – Hong Yunhan, Shazib Pervaiz and Marie-Veronique Clement – have pushed the frontiers of knowledge and helped position NUS at the leading edge of biomedical research. We celebrate their courage and perseverance.

We also salute the promising work of our Young Researchers – Joseph Ooi, Edward Teo and Yao Shao Qin. They have made an excellent start in their endeavors to advance knowledge. We cheer them on to persevere in their quest for excellence.

Wang Gungwu, our Outstanding Service Award recipient, has distinguished himself by his sustained contributions to community and nation. We celebrate his deep sense of mission and duty in serving the University and society.

Our award recipients' passion and perseverance inspire and set new standards for us. They, together with all our earlier award recipients, have helped to raise our University's standing.

It is often said that a "high tide raises all boats". Our winners' accomplishments impact and uplift the whole university. When members of our community scale peaks of excellence, we want to honor them and rejoice with them. Our University Awards is one way that we as a community celebrate excellence together.

Excellence – An End in Itself?

I have often spoken about the pursuit of excellence as a shared aspiration of our NUS community. Let me now ask a question: Is excellence an end in itself?



Are trophies, prizes, and adulation the sole reason for striving for excellence? Is the Nobel Prize only about money and fame?

This evening, I would like to reflect on a virtuous circle in which the quest for excellence serves a larger purpose. In promoting curiosity and a spirit of inquiry as well as creating new knowledge and innovative technologies, the university transforms the lives of individuals, the life of society. A great university is measured by the contribution of its community to society, country and the world.

At the 2004 University Awards, I highlighted two individuals who personify excellence in education and research – Arnold Sommerfeld and Stephen Hawking.

Five of Sommerfeld's students received Nobel Prizes. Despite severe physical limitations, Hawking is one of the most influential minds in science today.

This year, I would like to highlight another two exceptional individuals. These men of distinction pursued excellence with passion and perseverance. Having achieved personal success, they dedicated themselves to the betterment of society. In serving society, their impact has endured well beyond their lifetimes.

Jonas Salk, the Scientist-Entrepreneur

First, let me speak of Jonas Salk, the visionary scientist who founded the Salk Institute.

Salk is widely-quoted for saying: “Hope lies in dreams, in imagination and in the courage of those who dare to make dreams a reality.”

Salk developed the vaccine for the crippling and much-feared disease – polio. When his discovery was announced on 12 April 1955 – 50 years ago almost to the day – he was hailed as a miracle worker. To everyone’s surprise, Salk did not patent his anti-polio vaccine.

When asked why, he responded by saying that the patent on his vaccine was owned by “the people”. He remarked: “Could you patent the sun?”

Salk had no wish to profit personally from his discovery; he desired only to see it being used as widely as possible to save lives. Salk’s compassion and selfless sharing of the fruits of his labor led to the virtual eradication of polio worldwide.

Following his success in the war against polio, Salk pursued a dream – to create an institute that would be a “crucible for creativity” and serve society. He envisioned a collaborative environment for biologists and scientists from different disciplines to engage in basic research and consider the wider implications of their discoveries for the future of humanity.

Salk became personally involved in fund raising, securing a gift of land and working with the architect to design what he felt would be “a facility worthy of a visit by Picasso”. After much perseverance, the Salk Institute for Biological Studies was established. In 1963, Salk’s dream became a reality.

For Jonas Salk, scientific achievement was not an end in itself.

Today, Salk’s noble vision continues to be a compelling inspiration for the Salk Institute community. Knowledge acquired there paves the way for potential new therapies and treatments for a range of diseases – from cancer to cardiovascular disorders, from Alzheimer’s to AIDS.

Seven Nobel Laureates are among the Institute’s faculty. The Institute has trained more than 2000 scientists, many of whom have gone on to positions of leadership in other prominent research centers around the world. Five of the scientists trained at the Salk Institute have won the Nobel Prize.

Jonas Salk’s compassion for others led him to create value in order to give back to society. He was a social entrepreneur whose legacy lives on. He left an enduring impact on the well-being of billions of people around the world.

Lee Kong Chian, the Entrepreneur-Philanthropist

The second singular individual I would like to highlight is someone closer to home – Dr Lee Kong Chian.

Lee Kong Chian was the first Chancellor of our predecessor institution, the University of Singapore. His appointment was a departure from the established practice of appointing British chancellors.

Dr Lee, an outstanding son of Singapore, was a stalwart friend of education. At his installation as Chancellor in 1962, Dr Lee set the vision for the university.

He said: “Our responsibility is to guide students along ever higher levels of learning, to broaden and clarify their vision to grasp the ever grander vistas of knowledge, wisdom, truth and beauty.”

As a pioneer of philanthropy in Singapore and the region, Lee Kong Chian’s spirit of giving and compassion for the less fortunate is well-known. He was entrepreneur-philanthropist *par excellence*.

Lee Kong Chian started the Lee Rubber Company and later diversified into pineapples, sawmills and other areas. He made strategic investments in a range of businesses, including banks as well as insurance and trading companies. Having built up personal wealth, he did not keep his fortune solely within the family.

For Lee Kong Chian, accumulating wealth was not an end in itself.

He was dedicated to fulfilling a larger purpose – that of giving back to society and helping the less fortunate. Believing that education is the key to long-term prosperity, Lee Kong Chian set up the Lee Foundation in 1952 for “the advancement of education, medicine, cultural activities” as well as “the relief of the poor and needy, and victims of fire, flood and famine.” The Lee Foundation was well ahead of its time in philanthropic endeavor to improve the lives of people in Singapore, Malaysia and beyond. Indeed it was set up at a time not long after Lee Kong Chian’s fortunes had just recovered from the ravages of the Japanese War in Malaya, which had destroyed most of his assets. His philanthropic commitment was courageous and inspiring.

Education has been the abiding object of support for the Lee Foundation. It has given hundreds of millions of dollars to a broad spectrum of educational institutions and initiatives. By enriching the educational landscape, the Foundation is helping to shape our future.

Lee Kong Chian’s vision lives on in the continuing good work of the Lee Foundation under the leadership of his son, Dr Lee Seng Gee.

Now the “head and heart” of the Foundation, Lee Seng Gee shares a deep desire to give back to society and improve lives through education. His spirit of compassion and generosity are reflected in his commitment to “share what you have with those who have not”.



The Lee Foundation is a special benefactor of NUS with a history of steadfast support going back more than half a century. Just two weeks ago, the Foundation gave \$30 million to our University. This generous gift signifies their enduring faith in us and our mission to educate the young and nurture future leaders. A portion of the gift will endow the Lee Kong Chian Scholarships, which will help NUS to attract talented students from around the world, in the spirit of the Rhodes scholarships at Oxford.

Excellence – A Greater Purpose

The two individuals I have highlighted – Jonas Salk and Lee Kong Chian – represent the class of scientist-entrepreneurs and the class of entrepreneur-philanthropists.

The scientist-entrepreneur, Jonas Salk, was more than a creator of knowledge. He was generous in sharing his discoveries with the rest of the world. The entrepreneur-philanthropist, Dr Lee Kong Chian, was more than a creator of wealth. He was magnanimous in sharing his wealth for the betterment of society. Both possessed an abundance of passion and compassion. Both left legacies of priceless value to future generations.

Other examples of scientist-entrepreneurs who have contributed to humanity are Alfred Nobel, Marie Curie, and Louis Pasteur.

Society has also benefited from the good works of entrepreneur-philanthropists. Over the years, NUS has received gifts from many entrepreneur-philanthropists including Tan Chin Tuan, Yong Loo Lin, Lee Hiok Kwee and the Shaw brothers, Runme and Run Run as well as his son, Shaw Vee Meng.

In the same spirit, the Shaw Prize, inaugurated in 2004, has parallel aspirations with the Nobel Prize. They recognize the value of knowledge creation for the betterment of society. Clearly, success is not an end in itself. Perhaps, the words of Jonas Salk sum up what it means to be successful:

"I feel that the greatest reward for success is the opportunity to do more."

We are proud of our diverse and motivated community of scholars who have come to NUS to learn, to give and to share in the enterprise of education, research and service. As we continue to pursue excellence and advance knowledge with passion, perseverance, curiosity and courage, we have the potential to make an enduring impact on society and the world we live in.

Let us be steadfast in pursuing excellence in education, research and service. Let us go beyond excellence for excellence's sake.

Collectively, we have a shared responsibility to move this university forward – towards a larger purpose – the public mission to serve country and society.

Friends and colleagues, let us seek opportunities to serve – with an abundance of passion and compassion.

Thank you.