

Conferment of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*
A Citation



Lee Kuan Yew

Lee Kuan Yew was born in Singapore in 1923 to young parents, a father just twenty, a mother sixteen, whose marriage was arranged the previous year by their parents. In *The Singapore Story*, Senior Minister Lee surmises, "Both families must have thought it an excellent match, for they later married my father's younger sister to my mother's younger brother." Lee Kuan Yew's own long and successful marriage, however, was arranged by nobody but Lee Kuan Yew and his beloved wife Choo themselves – and they kept it secret for some time. I am convinced that this was a good legal decision, a wise family move, and a masterly piece of romantic realism.

At the end of the second volume of his brilliantly written memoirs, *From Third World to First*, the Senior Minister remembers himself as a boy of six riding on a bullock-cart "enjoying a hilariously bumpy ride on a dirt track to my grandfather's rubber estate. Fifty years later I flew in a supersonic Concorde from London to New York in three hours. Technology has changed my world." The same technology and Mr. Lee have changed our world, too: wily pragmatism, realism, and grasp of the key consequences of modern conditions have enabled him and his trusted colleagues to make progress a constant in the lives of his fellow Singaporeans. The policies tried and tested in the political crucible or the laboratory of Singapore have changed a third world base for the British into a contemporary first world city state. His influence in the region, in ASEAN, and in the minds of some western leaders, has been constructive.

How did the boy in the bullock-cart become the man we honour here today? An answer as fascinating as it is thorough, he has already given us in his two-volume memoirs. These are so well-written and give such insight into Mr. Lee and the workings of governments in an international setting, that they are masterly examples of their genre and have already earned a high place in the growing canon of new literatures in English. The short answer to my question is that he attended Telok Kurau English School, then Raffles Institution, then Raffles College. Surprisingly, he survived the severities of the Japanese war-time occupation of Singapore; less surprisingly, his formidable intellect survived honing into a double first (starred) in Law at Fitzwilliam House, Cambridge; he then spent a year in London to be called as a barrister at the Middle Temple; back in Singapore, he practised law and later became a partner in the firm, as well as being an honorary legal adviser to a number of trade unions. Seeing the need for a developed political system to replace British colonial rule, he was a founder-member of the People's Action Party (PAP) – now Singapore's dominant political party. He negotiated his way through the political turmoil of the period in Singapore and neighbouring Malaya, with which, as it became Malaysia, he advocated and achieved



integration; he then faced the realities of the times and, with some fear but no trembling, led Singapore to independence and rapidly increasing prosperity. Through successive elections his party has kept power, making him one of the longest serving prime ministers in the history of democracy, achieving the status of a modern "philosopher king".

The quality of his mind and spirit may be seen in his relinquishing of power and the care with which he prepared his colleagues and cabinet for this step, an enterprise that puts him out of step with generations of mediocrities who cling to power, come what may.

That he has won many elections, survived political skirmishes, nurtured important political alliances with leaders in a host of countries, fought court cases against unsubstantiated allegations, been a driving force in the founding of ASEAN and has done an enormous amount with his teams of loyal supporters to make Singapore a clean, vital, and successful modern city state, cannot be denied. Those are some of the landmarks along his bumpy route from the rubber plantation to his role as elder statesman. In addition he has been a good family man forging a real partnership with his wife. Dare I say that behind every great man there is a greater woman?

Apart from that, I believe Lee Kuan Yew could not have achieved what I have listed so far without other qualities: tremendous capacity for work, leadership qualities involving shrewd judgment of people, a steady nerve, and the special kind of courage needed to go it alone, sometimes at the risk of physical harm. There are still other features of this complex person: a combination of realism and vision; willingness to learn from others whatever is necessary to get the job done; an intellect as agile as it is focused, as passionate as it is sceptical. His record proves his compassion for the people of Singapore who, as he has said, are the greatest resource of their society.

In his long political career he has received a host of honours from foreign governments and institutions. He has richly deserved them – something that cannot be said of all politicians. In our academic context let us note just a few, such as his fellowships at Harvard, Yale and his own Cambridge college. His previous honorary degrees come from universities in Britain, America, Australia, Hong Kong and other countries. He was made Companion of Honour and an Honorary G.C.M.G. by the present Queen Elizabeth. He is a Freeman of the City of London. He has met and exchanged views with the great leaders of the last century from the post-war period. His meetings with the Chinese leaders of the People's Republic have been influential and of great moment in the drive for the modernization of China. Many of the most dynamic political minds of our age have been his friends. He can look back with his experienced legal mind, "An old man's eagle mind" the poet Yeats would say, to

Think where man's glory most begins and ends,

And say my glory was I had such friends.



Here is a statesman committed to clean government not corruption, to rule of law, not anarchy, to meritocracy not favouritism, to realism not dogma, to peaceful negotiation not conflict, to racial harmony not hatred, to equal opportunities and prosperity for citizens, not abject poverty and despair.

Here is a man who has been responsible for building a city state, the success of which is in inverse proportion to its size, not least because of the far-sightedness of Lee Kuan Yew and his colleagues. In an interview earlier this year, Senior Minister Lee explained Singapore's plans for encouraging and developing creative, advanced technology capable of supplying about 25,000 new jobs *per annum* over the next ten years. This requires the correct infrastructure, relatively easy for the government to build; it also requires a change of outlook in the people, involving technological awareness, natural in the young, more difficult for the old, readiness to take risks with the new communications technology, and that innovative flair that may be summed up in what journalists are calling "technopreneurship". This is a vision of youthful exuberance, but it lights up the eyes of an elder statesman, whose new e-government system has 300 or so public services online. Already Singapore's broadband access reaches 99% of homes. This is much more than is so in the United States and other developed countries. Like a certain Roman two thousand years ago, he can claim with great satisfaction, "I am a citizen of no mean city."

Mr Vice-Chancellor, a surprisingly young Prime Minister who has become one of the great statesmen of the last century in any country, and a brilliant politician who has become a valued adviser of many governments besides that of Singapore – in short, a man who has a firm belief in peace, order, and good government now stands before us in academic dress. In honouring him, we honour a man of modern vision, one who is pushing high technology and quality education to secure the future of his people, young and old alike: I proudly present to you the Senior Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, for the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.