

Citation for Mr Lee Kuan Yew

By A/Prof Chin Jing Jih

Most of us are familiar with the facts. Our Guest of Honour, Mr Lee Kuan Yew's contributions to the betterment of Singapore need little elaboration.

Many speeches, columns and even books have also devoted many words and much time to describing the life and accomplishments of Mr Lee. These are all on the record and have been delivered with far more eloquence and completeness than I could ever hope to achieve this evening.

Instead, I would like to give the less than obvious reasons why the previous Council, the 52nd Council, where I served as 1st Vice President, decided to unanimously nominate Mr Lee Kuan Yew for the SMA Honorary Membership. The SMA Honorary Membership is the highest honour that the Association can confer.

The reasons go beyond the physical and statistical accomplishments that Mr Lee and his team have achieved in Singapore, for Singaporeans. The reasons transcend the numbers of GDP per capita, life expectancy and literacy rates that all countries and political leaders are measured by. Indeed, Mr Lee has achieved all these in one lifetime, when many other countries and political leaders have taken several.

But there are more layers to the Singapore story and the life of Mr Lee Kuan Yew than the figures tell, or the skyscrapers that dot the skyline of this island suggest. We need to consider the nuances behind the feat – that Singapore's independence was almost unplanned. The medical mind may even euphemise this country's independence as "an unexpected complication" of sorts. And that independence in itself, while being a cause for celebration, is seldom a reason for success. Scottish historian and Harvard professor Niall Ferguson noted that very few among many former British colonies in Asia and Africa have closed the prosperity and development gap with their former master since independence, except for Singapore, Botswana and Malaysia. I might add here that out of this exact exclusive list, it is obvious which one has come the furthest. Many of the rest are failed states.

Many facets of Singapore we take as received wisdom are in fact not indigenous to the cultural norms of ancient societies, from which the Singapore community is derived from. I can, from the top of my head, list five such facets that Singaporeans

often take for granted:

1. The rule of law.
2. A largely corruption-free society.
3. Meritocracy.
4. Interracial and inter-religious harmony.
5. Affordable political campaigning, election rules and processes where all political parties and aspiring politicians can have a contest of ideas and win the ballot, without raising large amounts of money.

To us in the SMA Council, these are the cornerstone beliefs, values and principles that the success of Singapore is built on. Mr Lee Kuan Yew has been often described as the consummate pragmatist. But the SMA Council also recognises that these are the ideals that Mr Lee has held on to, and continues to defend even as he ran Singapore with a large dose of pragmatism. And we deeply appreciate that these are the values that Mr Lee have come to represent. The bricks and mortar as well as the record-shattering statistics are but the consequences of these values, beliefs and principles.

We live in a world now of little conviction and much expediency. Politicians say what is politically correct. Political messages are often now managed through the varnished veneer of media consultants. Leadership is but often a reaction to opinion polls.

But Mr Lee Kuan Yew is an exception. He has always been a politician with a message delivered with deep conviction and robust intellect. And his message will demand your consideration and response, whether in agreement or otherwise. On this alone, Mr Lee already stands unique and tall as a statesman. To quote Dr Mahathir Mohamad: "But I think he will go down in history as a very remarkable intellectual and politician at the same time, which is not a very often thing."

Fellow SMA members, guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is my great honour and indeed, the honour of the SMA to confer the Honorary Membership on Mr Lee Kuan Yew – not just for his achievements and contributions to Singapore, but for his ideals, values and principles.

I present to you, SMA Honorary Member Mr Lee Kuan Yew. **SMA**