Ex-CJ sought to give back to country, says daughter

His daughter's education was a main reason why former chief justice Yong Pung How immigrated to Singapore from Malaysia with his family.

This was revealed by his only child, Ms Yong Ying-I, in a rare public speech yesterday at a ceremony to mark the renaming of the Singapore Management University law school after him.

Ms Yong, 57, said that when she was due to enter Primary 1, schools in Malaysia were switching to teach in Malay, which her parents did not want for her.

She also shared why her father, then a banker, had accepted the request by founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in 1989 to lead the judiciary. "My family was appreciative of becoming Singaporean. My father wanted to give back where he could, to the country that had accepted us and gave us opportunities to contribute to something bigger than ourselves," she said.

Mr Yong was born in Kuala Lumpur in 1926. He read law at Cambridge University, where he struck up a lifelong friendship with Mr Lee.

Mr Yong's family moved to Singapore in the early 1970s. He went into merchant banking and helped form Singapore's sovereign wealth fund GIC. He also led the Monetary Authority of Singapore before returning to OCBC Bank as chairman.

Ms Yong, a permanent secretary at the Ministry of Communications and Information, said: "We were happy to take up Singaporean citizenship, which came with the GIC role."

She said her father believed in education and talent development, pushing for more degrees and diplomas for those in the legal service.

She said he also believed in service to others. "Your achievements can give the world new services and give you societal recognition and standing. But your legacy, after you have gone, is what you have done for others, how you have done your part to make the world a better place."

Selina Lum