

**Welcome Remarks by
Mr Ho Kwon Ping, SMU Chairman
SMU School of Law Official Renaming Ceremony
Held at SMU on 8 April 2021**

Mrs Yong Wei-Woo & Ms Yong Ying-I,
Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon,
Ministers Lawrence Wong and Edwin Tong,
SMU Honorary Patron Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam and Mrs Tan,
Distinguished guests,
SMU faculty, staff, alumni and students,

Good evening.

1. I am delighted to welcome so many of you here this evening – both online and on-campus to mark this very special occasion to celebrate the renaming of SMU's School of Law in honour of the late Dr Yong Pung How.
2. We will hear from the other speakers this evening describe Dr Yong's substantial role in shaping the legal system in Singapore and his long association with and generous guidance to SMU. I know there will be many touching personal anecdotes shared on and off this stage. I too have many warm and humorous, anecdotes of my own – as do many of us – who were privileged to know and deeply cherish our friendship with Dr Yong Pung How.
3. However, first I would like to mention his background and broader influence and immense contributions to Singapore.
4. Dr Yong served on the Securities Industry Council from 1972 to 1981; the Board of Commissioners of Currency from 1982 to 1989; and from 1982 to 1983 was Managing Director of the Monetary Authority of Singapore and Alternate Governor for Singapore of the International Monetary Fund.

5. Aside from his many financial and legal roles and responsibilities, he was Chairman of Singapore Broadcasting Corporation from 1985 to 1989 and Director of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra from 1987 to 1989. The list goes on. In 1988, he became the first Chairman of the newly formed Institute of Policy Studies, and established the Regional Speakers Programme, which invited prominent intellectuals from around the region to discuss the culture and politics of the countries in the region. This initiative greatly helped with the development of Singapore governance.
6. In early 1989, PM Lee asked Dr Yong to become Singapore's second Chief Justice. Despite taking a huge pay cut, Dr Yong agreed out of a sense of duty to the country.ⁱ
7. On three occasions, Dr Yong was appointed by the Cabinet as acting President of the Republic of Singapore.ⁱⁱ Dr Yong was conferred the Distinguished Service Order in 1989 and Singapore's highest Award the Order of Temasek (First Class) in 1999. The citation on the Order of Temasek in 1999 stated that "as Chief Justice since 28 September 1990, Justice Yong Pung How has made the Singapore Judiciary world class".
8. Dr Yong was born in Kuala Lumpur in 1926 and after World War II read law at Cambridge University where he became friends with Mr Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's founding Prime Minister.
9. After returning to Kuala Lumpur in 1952, he practised at his father's law firm, which expanded under his leadership. He was also a leading member of the Malayan Chinese Association and the Alliance Party. However, after he witnessed the May 1969 riots, Dr Yong became disillusioned with political affairs there. When an opportunity came up to head the Singapore branch of his law firm in the early 1970s, he emigrated to Singapore permanently with his family.ⁱⁱⁱ
10. In 1971, he left the legal world to join OCBC as a director. Dr Yong was offered the post of Supreme Court judge by then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in 1976, but he declined.

11. From 1981 to 1983, he was seconded from OCBC to help form the Government Investment Corporation (GIC), a sovereign wealth fund managed by the Singapore government.^{iv} Mr Lee said that he picked Dr Yong because of his “impeccable integrity”^v. Concurrently, in 1983, Dr Yong was appointed OCBC’s chairman and chief executive officer. His vision to build a global bank met with resounding success, with OCBC expanding its network to comprise 88 branches and offices worldwide under his leadership.
12. In all he gave eight years of a very long and purposeful life to SMU, and its community. I remember with great fondness for many occasions and I discussed the law school with Dr Yong when he was its founding Advisory Board Chairman.
13. When I sat with him through innumerable small or big dinners, intimate or massive student gatherings when he was our Pro Chancellor, and then Chancellor, I shall always remember – as many of you do – his robust laughter; the mischievous twinkle in his eyes when you chatted with him; his sharp insights and trenchant comments. Whether it was witty banter, or serious discussions, time spent with Dr Yong was always memorable, and an occasion to learn more.
14. He was always also devoted to Mrs Yong and delighted in sharing family tales.
15. I can think of no better role model for students of our School of Law – and all of Singapore’s youth today – so it is a great privilege for SMU to have its School of Law renamed in his honour.
16. Thank you and I hope you enjoy the rest of the evening.

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ⁱ https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_1199_2010-09-06.html

ⁱⁱ https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_1199_2010-09-06.html

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/Condolence-Letter-on-the-passing-of-Yong-Pung-How>

^{iv} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yong_Pung_How

^v <https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/Condolence-Letter-on-the-passing-of-Yong-Pung-How>