Top NTU honour for former president Tony Tan

He receives honorary Doctor of Letters for contributions to NTU and higher education

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Former president Tony Tan Keng Yam received the highest honour from Nanyang Technological University (NTU) yesterday.

Mr Tan, who served as an Education Minister from 1981 to 1995, was given the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters from NTU for his contributions to the university and Singapore’s higher education landscape.

In a citation, Mr Koh Boon Hwee, chairman of NTU’s Board of Trustees, said Mr Tan played an instrumental role in setting up NTU and the National University of Singapore (NUS) as the minister in charge of both institutions.

Under Mr Tan’s guidance, university education in Singapore became more globalised and was made accessible to more Singaporeans regardless of their family’s financial background.

Apart from shaping university education, Mr Tan also played a key role in advancing research in Singapore as chairman of the National Research Foundation and deputy chairman of the Research, Innovation and Enterprise Council until 2011.

He was NTU chancellor from 2011 until last year, before he passed on the role to President Halimah Yacob, who presided over NTU’s main convocation ceremony yesterday for the first time.

At the event, former NTU president Bertil Andersson was conferred the title of President Emeritus for his leadership from 2011 until last year.

Two other individuals were presented with honorary degrees – former head of civil service Peter Ho and Lee Foundation chairman Lee Seng Tee.

Mr Ho, who was awarded an honorary Doctor of Science, had a career in public service spanning more than 34 years, with 40 years as permanent secretary in several ministries.

Now senior adviser at the Centre for Strategic Futures, Mr Ho is also chairman of the Singapore Centre for Environmental Life Sciences Engineering, set up by NTU in partnership with NUS.

Mr Lee received an honorary Doctor of Letters for his philanthropic contributions to education. His foundation gave $100 million towards the setting up of NTU’s Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine, which saw its first batch of 82 doctors receive their BSc (Hons) in Medicine yesterday.

In recognition of the gift, the medical school was named after the foundation’s late founder and Mr Lee’s father, renowned businessman and philanthropist Lee Kong Chian.

In an acceptance speech, Mr Tan encouraged the graduates to keep learning within and across disciplines.

“Collaboration between disciplines is not only necessary in academia research. It is ethical if we are to tackle the challenges of the future.”

“Medicine needs the humanities to stay ethical, even as technology enables great efficiencies, it is calling into question the very nature of work and what it is to be human.”

From the new academic year starting next month, undergraduate students can take modules in digital literacy, which will cover the ethical and human aspects of digitisation. A total of 9,775 graduates will be conferred their degrees over 20 ceremonies taking place from yesterday until next Thursday.

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