

**OLLSCOIL na hÉIREANN  
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND**

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY:

**DR. MICHAEL B. MURPHY**, President, University College Cork on 13 March 2013 in the Irish Residence, Singapore, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Medicine, *honoris causa*, on **STANLEY SWEE HAN QUEK**

A Sheansailéir, a Ambasadóir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle go leir

Chancellor, Ambassador, Distinguished academic colleagues, distinguished guests,

The Republic of Ireland has never established a state honours system and, over the decades, it has fallen to the universities to recognise those who have made extraordinary contributions to society, global and



national, through the conferring of the Honorary Doctorate degree. Such awards are rare, made only to men or women who have excelled in academia, the arts, the professions, business, philanthropy, societal leadership or voluntary service.

It is extraordinarily rare that such a conferring should be conducted outside of Ireland, never mind on another continent almost 7,000 miles from home. Consequently, the merits of the graduand must be commensurately extraordinary.

I present to you, this evening, Chancellor, for the conferment of an Honorary Doctorate in Medicine, Stanley Quek – son of Singapore, schooled in the United Kingdom, graduate of Ireland, creator of an extensive built environment in Australia, Singapore and Britain, medical doctor, property designer and developer, diplomat, business executive,

philanthropist, champion of the creative arts, and above all, a tireless nurturer of deep educational bonds between Singapore and Ireland.

Stanley Quek was born in Singapore at a time of turbulence; the new Republic was emerging. And it may be said that the life he has created and followed, is emblematic of the essences of Singapore itself - a life of energy, optimism, creativity, industry, global orientation, results focussed, striving for excellence – all coupled with a willingness to share the bounty of success to enable those who are less fortunate.

When he was 11, Stanley's parents took their five children to live in London. There, he excelled at science in school, but, by his own admission, his greatest accomplishment was winning the English Schoolboy Bridge Championship - I repeat bridge, not poker! He entered Medical School at Trinity College, Dublin in 1967, at the height of the Flower Power revolution and enjoyed what I would describe as the “bordering – on – the –anarchic” culture of student life in Ireland of that era. As he said in a later newspaper interview “They were radical years, terribly radical. We really enjoyed university. And I did meet up with a lot of interesting people, like Mary Robinson, later President of Ireland and United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. They were exciting times”.

Following graduation, the young Dr. Quek returned to Singapore and served his time in the army as was required of all citizens. Thereafter, in 1975, he joined a well-established medical practice where he spent 5 fruitful years. All very conventional! But changes were afoot and I surmise that only the anarchic experiences of his Dublin student days can explain the extraordinary frenetic trajectory of Stanley's life thereafter. He began to buy flats and apartments, refurbishing them and selling them on to others. Particularly significant was his decision to build his own dream house, a modest 9,000 sq. foot mansion, in which he invested countless hours, designing every last detail. However, following its completion, he lived in it for one night, changed his mind, or his dream, and sold it on. Today it is the residence of the Swedish Ambassador.

But the dream house unleashed in Stanley a latent creative bug – the excitement of design, of architecture, of shaping the built environment of the next generation and century, an anarchic bug that challenged traditional views of form and functionality, that questioned the sustainability of then current practices in urban development. He founded a property company. Today, a quarter of a century later, as you scan the rooftops of some of the great cities of the world, Singapore, London, or Sydney you will see Norman Foster or John

Nouvel designed apartment towers, low level “horizontal streetscapes” with luscious green living walls, geo-thermally heated and cooled by recycled sewage, all developed by Stanley - not by corporate Stanley, but by personal Stanley. For years, he has clocked up hundreds of thousands of miles annually to put his personal touch on every project in every city. Stanley is Executive Chairman of Region Development Ltd, the company he founded 26 years ago here in Singapore, Chairman of Frasers Property Australia and Frasers Property UK. Project budgets are counted in billions of dollars. But alongside all of this, while travelling monthly to Sydney and to London, he established and sustained his own a clinical practice for over 10 years in Singapore, a life balancing act which I, a physician, find quite astonishing.

I will spend just one moment on his third profession. In his spare time, he has for many years been business manager for Benny Ong, the internationally acclaimed Singaporean *haute couture* fashion designer, just one more outlet for Stanley’s passion for creative talent. But, it is his fourth profession that I wish to highlight and celebrate – Stanley, the bridge builder.

Ireland and Singapore are twin republics; identical in population, we are situated at polar opposite ends of the planet’s largest landmass – Northwest of Europe and South East of Asia. Both of our countries have been, for many years, among the top three most open economies in the world (only Hong Kong separates us). We both manufacture high tech goods, we create and trade services to our larger neighbours. We have been described as “aircraft carriers”, offering global corporations entrée to our respective continents. We have much to learn from each other, much to share, and rarely need to compete. Stanley made this geo-political analysis early, decades ago and for the past quarter of a century he has constructed not just city buildings, but also bridges of friendship, stretching 7,000 miles between our two countries. At a formal level, he was for many years, until the establishment of our Embassy here, Honorary Consul General of Ireland, promoting inter-governmental exchanges, building relationships between state agencies, promoting trade and tourism, and replacing the odd lost passport.

But his real passion was for shared education, which he believes to be the most effective tool in building trust and confidence between countries and cultures. For a number of years he had been Education Attaché at the Consulate, prior to promotion to Consul. Stanley had enjoyed Ireland and enjoyed his medical education there so much that he wanted other young Singaporeans to share the experience. Over the past 25 years, he personally persuaded almost 200, young, intelligent and energetic Singaporean students to enter our Irish medical schools. At a time when we sought to make our campuses globalised and cosmopolitan, committed,

like Singapore to preparing the next generation for globalised life, Stanley's contribution was remarkable. Every year he canvassed applicants across this island; he personally assessed each candidate (I have no idea where he has found the time!) to ensure that only the best – academically talented, with resilient personalities and the personal fortitude to withstand Irish anarchy, were chosen for presentation to the Deans! Every year for two decades, the Deans of Medicine from Galway, Trinity, University College Dublin, and from University College Cork descended on Singapore for the March encounter with Stanley - ostensibly to select a new cohort of bright students. In truth, what all have enjoyed most, is the annual re-union with Stanley, a few days of wonderful conversation, unbounded hospitality in the very best restaurants, and an annual refresher on the economy of Australasia - house prices and sales of Tiger beer being among the key indices!

The success and positive experiences of students of Medicine spilled over into other disciplines and into a range of formal collaborations in research between our universities, in particular with the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University. Both of our national science-funding agencies have shared intelligences. The acorn Stanley planted has become an oak tree.

Throughout his life, Stanley has manifested many extraordinary qualities – boundless energy, the work rate of four people, courage in business, creative flair. But there is one, above all, that is remarked on by everyone touched by him – his generosity. He is generous with his time and with his ideas and he is generous with the wealth he has created. He chairs the Board of the Singapore Ireland Fund which has helped raise over 2 million dollars during the past 4 years for charities here in Singapore, supporting children with special needs and Eldercare. He has been generous to his alma mater and has served on the Trinity Foundation Board as TCD Medical School celebrated its tercentenary.

There has, of course, been a power behind the throne – his wife BeBe who forged her own career in banking and whom I welcome here this evening along with their son Derrick, an investment banker.

When the Irish Medical School Deans set out to celebrate, in 2013, the first quarter century of their co-operation in international medical education, they pondered an event in Singapore, home to so many of our alumni. They pondered briefly; there was no need for a second option on the agenda. We are here to say thanks – thanks to the many parents of Singapore who entrusted their children to us, at a great distance, trusted us to teach them the arts and

science of Medicine. But, foremost for all of us, mile buiochas (a thousand thanks) from UCD, TCD, UCC and NUIG, to Ireland's greatest friend in South East Asia, Dr. Stanley Quek.

**PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:**

**Praesento vobis, hunc meum filium quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in Doctoratus in Medicina, idque tibi fide mea testur ac spondeo totique Academiae**