

University Awards 2014
University Cultural Centre, 9 May

Imagination and the Art of the Possible

NUS Pro-Chancellor, Mr Po'ad Mattar and Mrs Mattar

NUS Board Chairman and Trustees

Distinguished Guests

Award Recipients

Ladies and Gentlemen

One of the most famous treasures at the Taiwan National Palace museum is a jade carving of a Chinese cabbage. It is truly exquisite and tourists flock from all around the world to admire it. The carving captures beautifully the form and essence of a Chinese cabbage and if you look closely, a small locust and katydid pair are perched on its leaves.



Source: [Wikipedia](#)

It may therefore come as a surprise to you that the piece of jade from which this masterpiece was crafted, was initially considered to be flawed. It had cracks and opaque patches and was of a variegated colour.

Master craftsmen at that time typically chose flawless jade to work with, without cracks or excessive variation in colour. So this piece of jade was initially considered too poor to be carved into a vase.

But the artist who eventually worked on it saw its true potential – the cracks in the jade were used as leafy edges, and the opaque patches mimicked with remarkable realism the way frost changes the texture of the white stalk. The colour variation from a translucent white to brilliant green was in fact perfect as stalk and leaves.

Unfortunately, we don't know who this master craftsman was, but he clearly had a keen eye for the possible, great imagination and boldness to break away from convention.

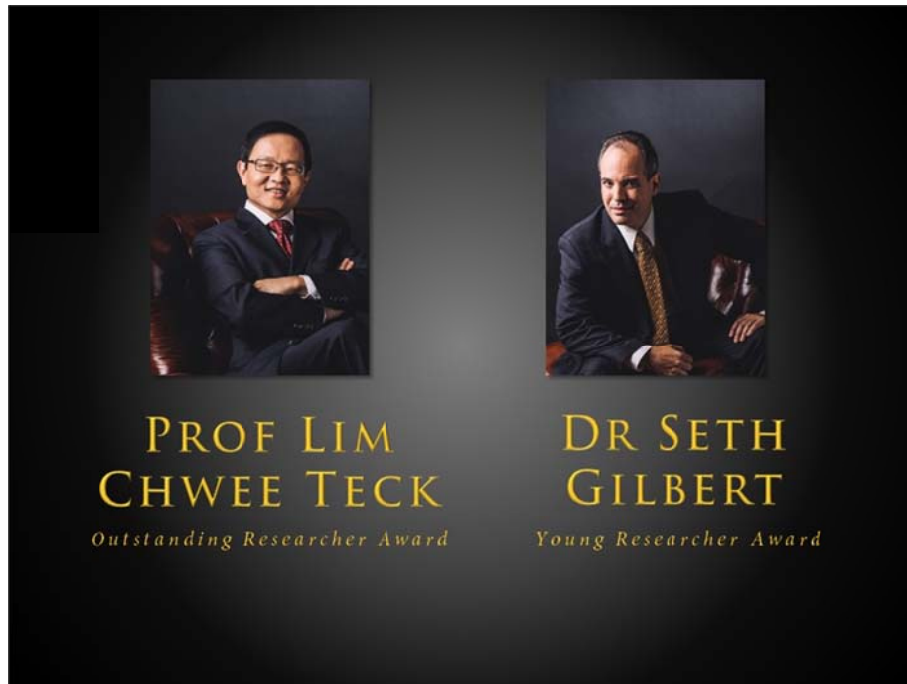
Young Researcher & Outstanding Researcher Awards

In these aspects, Art is akin to research. Most notably, both require a high level of imagination and creativity. George Bernard Shaw, the famous Irish playwright said: *“Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire, you will what you imagine, and at last, you create what you will”*.

Our two truly outstanding researchers honoured today, demonstrate the power of imagination – to think beyond what currently lies at hand, and to be creative in untangling the mysteries and complexities of science – thereby, achieving extraordinary and beautiful outcomes.

Prof Lim Chwee Teck combines with great creativity, approaches to human biology and mechanical engineering which have resulted in truly innovative ways to diagnose life threatening illnesses from small amounts of blood.

Dr Seth Gilbert can weave algorithms in very novel ways that simplify complex processes for multiple real world applications including large scale, dynamic mobile and wireless networks.



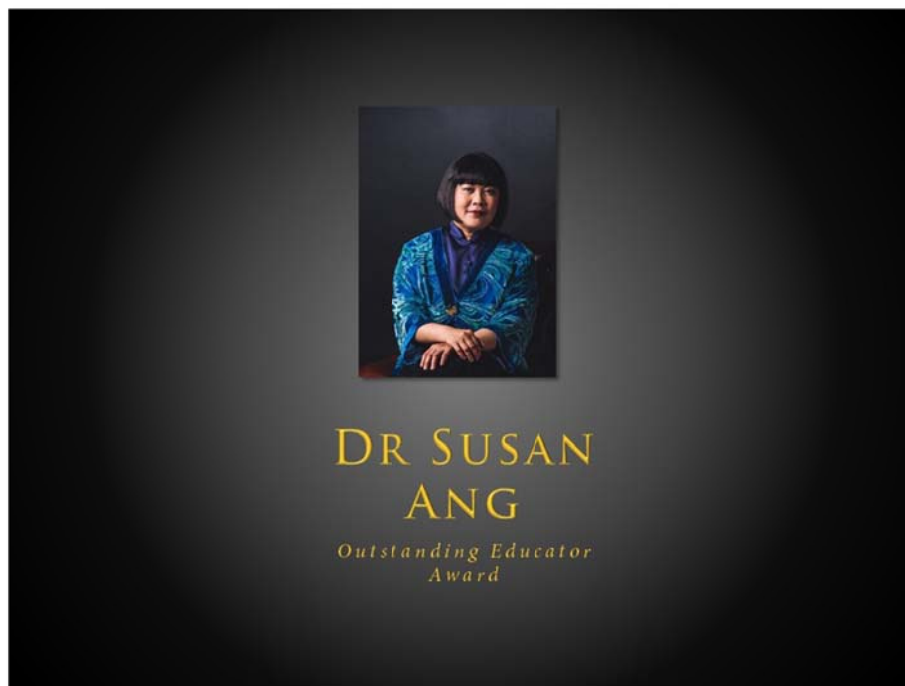
Their individual achievements are great, but very importantly, their work also energises the multidisciplinary teams and networks of which they are pivotal players.

This is crucial since in most research fields, true excellence arises from the combination of creative individual effort, deep extensive collaborations and an enabling ecosystem. NUS continually strives to build the vibrant intellectual environment and multidisciplinary academic culture that is so critical for ground-breaking research. In this regard, the work and example of our research award recipients this evening add powerfully to this effort.

Outstanding Educator Award

Beyond imagination, I believe the story of the jade cabbage, also carries a strong cautionary message. The message is this: We must be careful not to have an overly rigid conception of excellence which leads us to make judgements of quality and potential in excessively narrow ways. For example, if educators behave like master craftsmen who think that only vases made from perfect jade pieces represent true excellence, we will overlook many students with interesting qualities and fail to help them blossom to full potential.

To discover and develop such qualities in all our students require our educators to have immense passion, patience and dedication. Our Outstanding Educator Award winner, Dr Susan Ang is a stellar example of how a caring teacher who goes the extra mile, can actively enable each student to realise his or her potential in different ways.



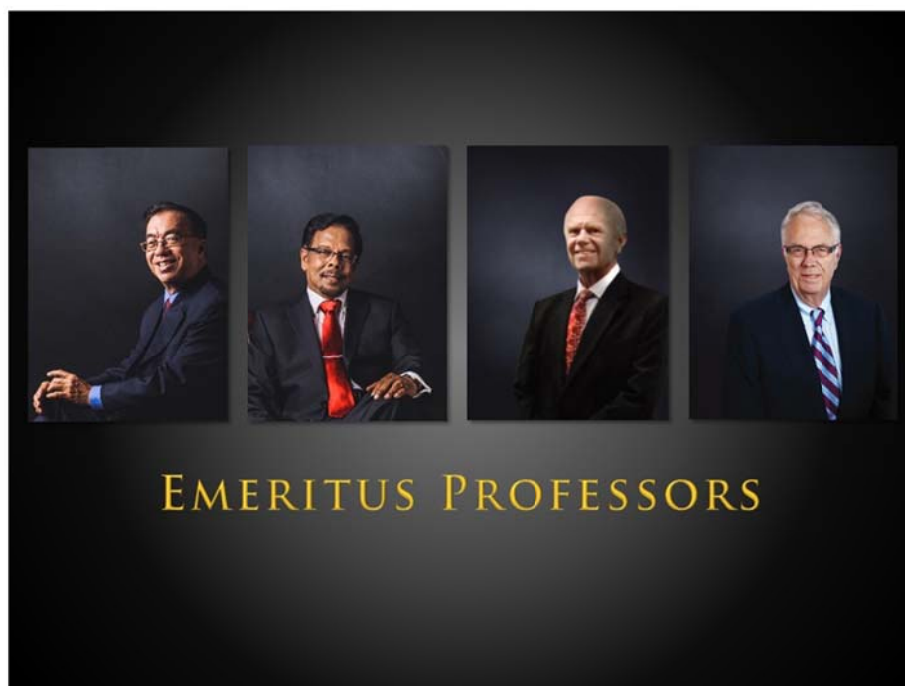
In NUS' unrelenting drive to continually enhance the educational experience and outcomes of our students, we see in Dr Ang an excellent role model for the passionate, committed and caring educators who will be vital in delivering transformative education.

I was told that Dr Ang is a huge Tolkien fan, so I thought I should add a quote from a poem from The Lord of the Rings:

“All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.”
- *JRR Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring*

Emeritus Professor

In the context of this award ceremony, the reference to deep roots is apt in a different way. For tonight, we also recognise four distinguished colleagues who have served our students and University with distinction over the course of academic careers which have spanned many years.



We honour our newly awarded Emeritus Professors: Emeritus Professor Cheong Hin Fatt, Emeritus Professor P Gopalakrishnakone, Emeritus Professor Doyle Graham, and Emeritus Professor Augustus John Rush. All are internationally renowned researchers who have made significant impact in their fields - coastal engineering,

animal toxins, Parkinson's and psychiatry. They have also contributed in important ways to education and academic leadership either as deans or by establishing special programmes in their departments.

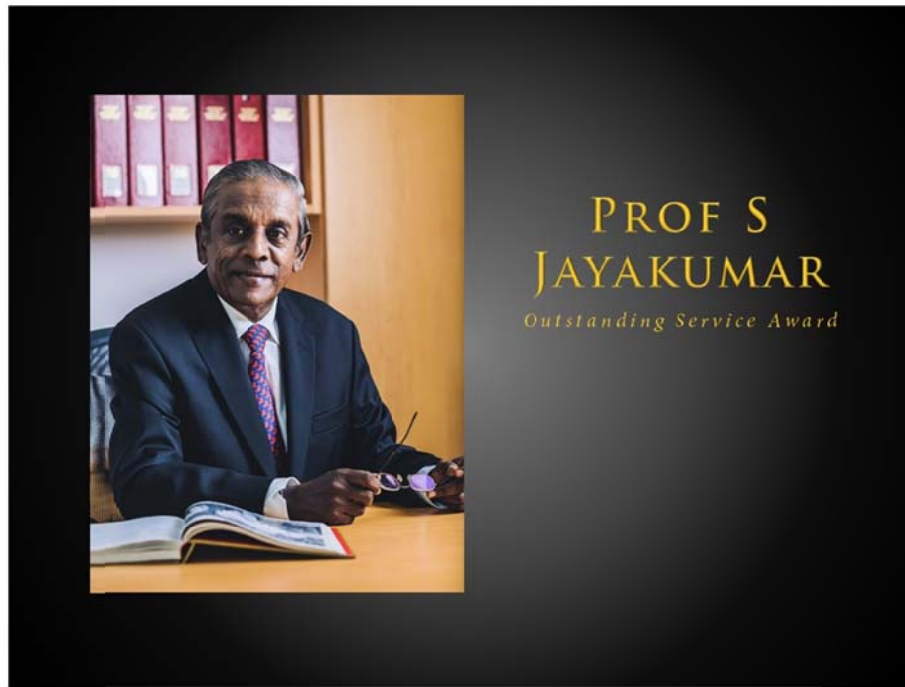
On behalf of our University, I am very grateful to them for their leadership and achievements, and am delighted that they will have a continued close association with our University as Emeritus Professors.

Outstanding Service

A final lesson we can draw from our jade cabbage masterpiece is that boldness to break away from convention, coupled with talent and unique ability, can create remarkable and lasting value.

Tonight we honour two truly exceptional individuals who have made a tremendous impact in Singapore and the world. Both awardees have faced and surmounted many challenges. In turn, they have also challenged conventional thinking, and through this, have worked powerfully and imaginatively for a better future.

In Professor S Jayakumar, we have an illustrious statesman, an esteemed academic and a celebrated lawyer. In his three decades of distinguished service to our country, Prof Jayakumar not only transformed Singapore's legal landscape, he also led some of the most challenging assignments from national security to negotiating sensitive matters such as water, land and air issues with our neighbours. We are also very proud of Prof Jayakumar's long and deep association with our University. In 1964, he joined the Law Faculty and in just 10 years, was appointed Dean where he made many important contributions. He earned a reputation as a kindly but firm mentor to faculty members, and was known as a teacher who encouraged his students to think about the policies and values underlying the law.



For all his successes, Prof Jayakumar, an extremely modest person, he generously said, “against the backdrop of an uncertain era in those days, the University provided a rich and all-rounded experience, not only in formal legal studies, but in encouraging me to expand my horizon and think broadly about current affairs and to approach issues and problems in a systematic and rational manner. This foundation has helped me later in life when I joined politics.” I am really happy that our University has played a part in the development of this multi-talented individual who has contributed so much in different fields of endeavour.

Tonight, NUS is also delighted to present Prof Victor Dzau with an Outstanding Service Award. Prof Dzau is a pre-eminent leader in academic medicine and one of the most respected leaders in global health and innovation. Apart from being a world-class clinician-scientist and a trailblazer in his research, he has also distinguished himself as an academic leader who has made Duke Medicine one of the leading academic health systems in the US and the world. Prof Dzau has also played a pivotal leadership role in the setting up of the Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School, and its great success over a short period of time. He has been a truly wonderful partner for NUS, Singhealth and Singapore.



In the early stages of setting up the Duke-NUS collaboration, I asked Prof Dzau about the goal of Duke Medicine. His response to me was unexpected and truly inspirational: “To give the best clinical care to our patients today *and* to develop the new treatments that will be in the medical textbooks of the future.” This powerful idea recognises the vital need to continually transform medicine through research, and it also powers the momentum of translational research work done at the Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School.

Tonight, we honour Prof Dzau and Prof Jayakumar for all their contributions and impact they have individually made to our University, to Singapore and the world. They truly are beacons of inspiration to us all.

Closing

In closing, our University Awards is an occasion to celebrate individual excellence as well as the collective NUS spirit. Tonight, with our entire NUS community along with family members and friends, let me say on behalf of all of us here how immensely proud we are of our nine award recipients.



They were able to look beyond the obvious or even apparent flaws, and through imagination and the creative exercise of their talents, made pioneering discoveries in their research, discovered and developed the potential of our students, and made a real difference to society.

In so doing, they support the University's *raison d'être* which is to create distinctive new value for the wider community – through transformative education, research and service.

My heartiest congratulations to all our award winners and I wish everyone a most pleasant evening ahead.

Thank you.

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