

**Speech by Prof Tan Eng Chye, President, NUS at the Book Launch of “Tan Kim Seng – A Biography” (Author Mrs Vivienne Tan)
Friday 15 February 2019, 11.30 am at NUS University Cultural Centre**

Mrs Vivienne Tan and Professor Walter Tan,

Mrs Alice Tan and family,

Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam and Mrs Mary Tan,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon. It gives me great pride to be present today at the launch of the biography of Mr Tan Kim Seng.

I wish to congratulate Mrs Vivienne Tan for writing this important biography. I also wish to thank Prof Walter Tan, the great, great, great grandson of Tan Kim Seng, for encouraging his wife to write the book. Biographies like this are important as they chronicle the lives of men and women whose contributions have shaped Singapore’s society to what it is today. For NUS, Tan Kim Seng’s legacy of entrepreneurship and giving back to society are values that the University holds dear and which we hope will be embodied in the lives of our students.

Born in Malacca in 1806, Tan Kim Seng came to Singapore, attracted to its free port status. He started his trading firm, Kim Seng and Company in 1840 and built his fortune as a highly successful trader, tin miner and property owner.

Beyond his personal success, Tan Kim Seng was passionate about public service and philanthropy.

One of Tan Kim Seng's best-known gifts was towards building Singapore's first public waterworks to ensure a better supply of fresh water to the town. Through his initiative, the municipal government eventually constructed the first impounding reservoir in Singapore, which was later enlarged to become the beautiful MacRitchie Reservoir that we enjoy today.

Tan Kim Seng also donated generously to education. He founded a school for boys known as the Chinese Free School or Chui Eng Institute. The school

originally taught in Hokkien and was one of the better schools in Singapore at that time.

As Vivienne says in her book, Tan Kim Seng would probably be quite pleased that some of his descendants have followed in his footsteps to serve society and to give. His two sons Beng Swee and Beng Gum supported a variety of educational and medical causes including the Kim Seng Free School, the Malacca High School, the Malacca Hospital, Tan Tock Seng Hospital and the Anglo Chinese School in Singapore.

Tan Kim Seng's grandsons Tan Jiak Kim and Tan Jiak Chuan also contributed much to society.

Closely related to NUS, Tan Jiak Kim is most remembered for petitioning the colonial government for the establishment of a medical school in 1904. Then Governor John Anderson had requested the Singapore community to contribute \$71,000 to demonstrate genuine interest for the project. Under Tan

Jiak Kim's leadership and perseverance, \$87,000 was swiftly collected within 3 months from his friends and business associates, as well as his cousin Tan Jiak Chuan. The medical college is the predecessor institution of NUS today.

Tan Jiak Chuan himself bequeathed a scholarship. The Tan Jiak Chuan Scholarship was historically administered by the then Department of Education, prior to it being transferred to the Raffles College in 1940. It is now administered by NUS.

Several generations later, Tan Jiak Chuan's grandson Peter Tan and his wife Alice Tan, brought up six children who all became alumni of NUS. And in 2012, the University received a transformational gift – one that provides financial aid for four faculties in NUS. To date, nearly 1,000 students from NUS have benefitted from study awards and bursaries from this generous benefaction. Some of the student beneficiaries are here attending this book launch. In recognition of the gift, the University named one of its residential colleges in University Town, the College of Alice and Peter Tan.

Another interesting fact related to NUS is that this piece of land that Kent Ridge campus now stands on was once owned by Tan Kim Seng, who in the 1800s was the owner of probably the largest single piece of land in Singapore – nearly 3,000 acres in Pasir Panjang.

I hope Tan Kim Seng is pleased to know that generations later, Singapore's flagship university has been built on this land; NUS has educated nearly 300,000 graduates including several of his descendants.

The Chinese have a saying “饮水思源” which means, when you drink water, remember its source. Tan Kim Seng and many of his descendants have certainly exemplified this. The family's legacy lives on, we see a long line of philanthropists who have contributed to Singapore and to education for two hundred years, and counting.

To the Tan Kim Seng descendants and family members who are gathered here today, on behalf of the National University of Singapore, I wish to thank you deeply for your consistent and strong support of the University and society. You have a unique family heritage that I am sure you are most proud of. I hope that Tan Kim Seng's spirit of entrepreneurship and philanthropy will continue with you and for many generations to come.

I wish to congratulate Vivienne once again for writing this book. I hope you and your book will inspire other authors to work on their family biographies too.

Thank you.