

## **2012 Business China Excellence Award Recipient**

**Professor Arthur Lim Siew Ming**

**Age: 78**

**Founding Medical Director, Singapore National Eye Centre**

**Professor, Department of Ophthalmology,**

**National University Hospital, Singapore**

### **Background**

Prof Arthur Lim Siew Ming was born on 24 April 1934 in Hong Kong. His parents had strongly encouraged and supported the development of his many talents. Prof Lim completed his early education in Singapore. He was an exceptional student, who excelled in both academic and the sports field. In 1956, Prof Lim graduated from University of Malaya with the degree of MBBS. Later, he proceeded to specialise in ophthalmology and became the first Singaporean to obtain the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of London in 1962.

In 1965, Prof Lim started a private practice named Eye Clinic Singapura, with Dr Khoo Chong Yew and Dr Ang Beng Chong. The establishment of the private clinic became the platform from which he helped to establish the Singapore National Eye Centre (SNEC); Singapore Eye Research Institute (SERI); and the Department of Ophthalmology at the National University Hospital (NUH) and National University of Singapore (NUS).

Over the past four decades, the Eye Clinic Singapura has expanded from three to eight ophthalmologists and younger surgeons like Dr Ronald Yeoh, Dr Adrian Koh, Dr Choo Chai Teck, Dr Ong Sze Guan and Dr Steve Seah have now come onboard. Hence, Prof Lim together with his colleagues aims to serve Singaporeans and foreigners with the best medical treatment and eventually evolving itself into one of the largest private eye care group practices in Southeast Asia.

### **Achievements**

Prof Lim is acknowledged by his peers as the father of this specialist field of medicine in Southeast Asia, and a mentor and icon to eye surgeons all over the world. Yet, recognition alone as one of the pioneers of modern ophthalmology would undervalue his contribution – as a prolific author, teacher, artist and sportsman.

Between 1986 and 2000, Prof Lim was instrumental in the establishment of the Department of Ophthalmology at NUH and NUS. Under the leadership of Prof Lim as the first founding Chief, he attracted more full-time faculty staff, specialists and residents to join the department. In 1990, the department had a major breakthrough in clinical research where the department developed the world's first fully automated software programme for colour vision testing.

In addition, the department also hosted the 26<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Ophthalmology in 1990, the first ever and largest ophthalmic congress to be held in Singapore. The congress saw the gathering of international ophthalmic leaders and

practitioners from 81 countries. The successful hosting of this congress won new recognition and respect for the department under the leadership of Prof Lim.

Another significant high point was when NUS granted the department full accredited university academic status in 1990. Selected clinical staff from NUH joined NUS. This allowed for a greater integration and involvement in teaching and research activities. Prof Lim's leadership over the years helped to raise the reputation of the department to a greater height locally and internationally.

To add on to the list of achievements, Prof Lim founded the Singapore Eye Research Institute and the Singapore Eye Foundation. Hence, the training of many future generations of leading ophthalmic eye surgeons remains a monument to his vision and relentless pursuit of excellence.

Furthermore, Prof Lim has an eye for beauty where his passion for the arts started since young. As an avid art collector, Prof Lim has been listed in "ARTnews" as among the 200 great art collectors in the world. Also, his collections of over 800 pieces range from traditional Chinese paintings to those of western masters.

Prof Lim was also considered as a well-known artist. His paintings include water-colours and pastels, which are strongly influenced by some of his favourite artists, Wu Guanzhong, Chen Wen Hsi and Lin Fengmian.

He used the canvas as a window into his thoughts and feelings on a wide range of issues that impact people and society. His last solo exhibition was held in 1997 at the Opera Gallery in Paris, France. Furthermore, his works have drawn much attention and interest from collectors, artists and the casual observer alike, for their thought-provoking, yet unique and keen perspectives.

In 2008, Singapore Management University (SMU) presented the "*Arthur's Socio-political Art*", an exhibition of works by the multi-talented and distinguished ophthalmologist, Prof Lim. These art pieces were his personal commentary and observations of social, national and political developments, created in the last two decades. These works include *Owl*, *Sterile City*, *Generation Gap*, *Caning*, as well as his impressions of former Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew and the late David Marshall. Therefore, this art exhibition aimed to encourage greater understanding of societies and cultures and to expose SMU students to different ways of perceiving reality.

Over the past three decades, Prof Lim had published more than 350 scientific papers and written 24 books in the past 40 years. He had also delivered 19 named lectures and had been on the editorial board of 13 international journals, which made him an international renowned ophthalmologist.

### **Contributions to Singapore-China Relations**

Prof Lim had a passion in the area of ophthalmology and aimed to explore new medical technologies and processes to help patients with vision problems to regain their sight.

In particular, Prof Lim was interested in assisting the patients in China, as he felt that China was in its developing stage and more aid should be provided to help patients

recovered from the vision illness. Thus, since 1986, Prof Lim led a major movement in China to control mass cataract blindness, advocating the use of modern method of cataract extraction with intraocular implant, which had restored the normal vision of those blind cataract patients.

At that time, China had around 4 million people with cataract problems and there was a lack of professional doctors to perform operations on these patients. As a result, in 1986, Prof Lim founded the International Intraocular Implant Training Centre Tianjin in China, which subsequently became the Tianjin Medical University Eye Centre. Prof Lim had helped the Centre to raise US\$500,000 (S\$635,000) during its inception and in 1996, Prof Lim continued to raise funds of more than US\$250,000 (S\$318,000) to help its expansion plan.

Tianjin Medical University Eye Centre has since established itself as a model for eye centres throughout China. The centre has trained more than 3,000 ophthalmologists and restored vision to more than 250,000 cataract victims.

Furthermore, Prof Lim continued to extend his reach to more cataract patients in China by establishing the Xiamen Eye Centre in 1997. SNEC worked together with the Centre in China to help more than 100,000 patients with cataract problems by sharing the technologies know-how and resources. Prof Lim donated US\$660,000 (S\$839,000) to the centre and helped to raise additional US\$220,000 (S\$280,000) so that it could be equipped with better medical facilities to serve the patients.

Apart from these two centres in Tianjin and Xiamen, Prof Lim established another three eye centres in Shandong, Gansu and Ningxia. As usual, Prof Lim not only provided valuable medical opinions, he also played a crucial role in raising funds to ensure these centres' operations would be able to run smoothly.

In recognition of his contribution in China, Prof Lim was given the Friendship Award in 1996 by the China government. It is the highest award that can be bestowed on a foreign national. Singapore Ministry of Health even commented that his great contribution to China over the past 10 years from 1986 to 1996 had indeed boosted the positive image of Singapore which has ultimately enhanced the close cooperation of Singapore and China.

### **Philanthropy Work**

As an ophthalmologist and philanthropist, Prof Lim's reputation precedes him. What places him a cut above the best is how he has put his talents and success into the active service of community and humanity. For Prof Lim, compassion expressed in the mere issuance of a cheque donation is never good enough. He channels it into actions that contribute most effectively to society.

Leading by example, he has been remarkably effective as a fund-raiser in appealing to the generosity of others. Under his Chairmanship of the Universities' Endowment Fund, \$60 million was raised, far surpassing the original target of \$50 million in 2002. As Campaign Chairman of the NUS Endowment Fund, he defines alumni volunteerism with his tireless energy and commitment. The fund presently stands at \$128.4 million. Prof Lim dedicates these awards to the future generations of NUS graduates, and hopes that they will be able to build a civil society where

compassion and care for the less fortunate run parallel with economic and professional success.

Prof Lim has also been in the committee of many charity and welfare organisations, one of which is the Handicaps Welfare Associations. He believed in helping the needy in whatever he can so that their lives can be improved.

Prof Lim is someone who never fails to provide great assistance to anyone who needs the help. He will continue to do so as long as he has the ability and resources. His experience in the field of ophthalmology has enabled him to gain the necessary support and in turn generating better medical aid to improve the lives of the people.

### **Selected Awards**

- International President's Medal of Distinction by the Lion Club International in 2008
- World Glaucoma Award by the World Glaucoma Congress in 2007
- Special Recognition Award from the American Academy of Ophthalmology in 2007
- Distinguished Alumni Service Award in NUS University 2005
- Outstanding Service Award in NUS University Award 2002
- Ernest T. Stewart Award for Alumni Volunteer Involvement in 1999
- Staff Achievement Award in NUS University Award 1998
- State Science and Technology Commission (SSTC) Award in 1997
- Friendship Award by China government in 1996
- Public Service Star and Public Service Star Bar awarded by Singapore government in 1995
- Honorary Citizen of Tianjin and Xiamen awarded by China government in 1990