



The UNIVERSITY  
of NEWCASTLE  
AUSTRALIA

7330434

## CITATION

# Khaw Boon Wan

The presentation of Khaw Boon Wan for the degree of Doctor of Engineering *honoris causa*

13 December 2002

Chancellor,

Khaw Boon Wan was born in Malaya in 1952 and grew up in a village of farmers in Penang. His parents instilled in him three important fundamental values: discipline, respect for elders, and education. As the seventh child, Khaw Boon Wan was studious and consistently scored high marks at school. The importance of education to the family's prospects was recognised. After completing his GCE "A" levels he applied for a number of scholarships. In 1973 at the age of 21, he was awarded a Colombo Plan Scholarship from Singapore. This event changed the course of his life in a significant and positive way.

The Singapore scholarship gave him the opportunity to study at a university in Australia where he completed a combined degree program in Engineering and Commerce at the University of Newcastle.

Khaw Boon Wan achieved an outstanding academic record during his University study. He was awarded the Shell Prize in Economics and Commerce, the Australian Institute of Management John Storey Memorial Prize in Organisational Behaviour, the Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited Prize in Accounting I, the W E Clegg Memorial Prize in Engineering, the Australian Institute of Management John Storey Memorial Prize in Industry Economics and the Institution of Engineers, Australia Prize for the Newcastle Division. Khaw Boon Wan graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce degree. He also graduated with a Bachelor of Engineering degree with Honours Class I and was awarded the University Medal for academic performance at an exceptionally high level.

On graduation in 1977, he began a career in the public service in the Government of Singapore. When he returned to Singapore in 1978 the Public Service Commission asked him to choose where he wanted to work. He chose Singapore Airlines but was instead dispatched to the Ministry of Health. Khaw Boon Wan was initially unhappy with this decision wondering what was an engineer going to do in health care? However, as he read more about health economics and rising health care costs in the United States he became fascinated and deeply engaged with the issues. In the first seven years, he worked in the Ministry of Health drafting health care policies. A key assignment was to implement the Medisave Scheme which is now very much a part of Singapore life enabling Singaporeans to save for their future medical expenses.

The next seven years were spent restructuring the public hospitals helping to upgrade their services for all patients. Khaw Boon Wan was consecutively the CEO of the National University Hospital, KK Hospital and the Singapore General Hospital. While working in these positions, Khaw Boon Wan undertook a program of part-time external study. In 1982, he was awarded a Master of Science degree in Industrial Engineering from the National University of Singapore.

In 1992, Prime Minister Goh appointed Khaw Boon Wan as Principal Private Secretary. After serving three years with Prime Minister Goh, he joined the Ministry of Trade and Industry in 1995 and served as Permanent Secretary until October 2001. During his time with the Ministry he became directly involved in managing the economy to secure economic growth and job creation. During his term, Singapore was able to navigate through the 1997 Asian financial crisis, forge ties with other economic regions through free-trade agreements and brace itself to face competition from China.

Khaw Boon Wan never entertained the idea of straying from the position which gave him his “first break”, despite receiving attractive salary offers elsewhere. That was until the Prime Minister convinced him that “formulating macro-policies is important, but sorting out marginal cases at the micro-level is equally important”. He says he was won over by the ‘unique phenomenon’ called Singapore and the need to sustain it, especially now. Since 2001, Khaw Boon Wan has held positions as Senior Minister of State in the Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.

On a personal level, Khaw Boon Wan is married with three daughters. Besides work and family, he devotes the rest of his time to his Buddhist practice but notes that he spends less time at home now with his retired pharmacist wife and has also “discarded” his hobbies such as golf.

There is a Chinese Buddhist saying: “Be always mindful of those who have brought you benefits, and remember to reciprocate”. It is by this principle that Khaw Boon Wan lives.

Chancellor, it is with great pleasure that I present to you Khaw Boon Wan, Bachelor of Engineering with Honours Class I and the University Medal, Bachelor of Commerce from the University of Newcastle, Master of Science in Industrial Engineering from the National University of Singapore, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Engineering *honoris causa*.

---

Roger S Holmes  
Vice-Chancellor and President

*By virtue of the authority delegated to me by the Council I hereby admit Khaw Boon Wan to the degree of Doctor of Engineering honoris causa.*

---

Ric Charlton AM  
Chancellor