

Loke Yew

In January, 1917, Loke Yew, a little over seventy years old, received a visitor at his Batu Road home in Kuala Lumpur: Charles Eliot, Vice Chancellor of Hongkong University, had come all the way to award him an honorary L. L. D. It was the first presentation of an honorary degree to a Malayan.

Both photographs were taken in the honoree's garden. They've been published before but, oddly enough, it's not clear that they've ever been seen together. There are no colour copies, so, for the record: Loke Yew's academic attire consisted of purple gown, green hood, and black cap. (A group photograph was also taken but is not included here.)

It is noteworthy that Loke Yew died a mere seven weeks after this ceremony. As for



Hongkong University was opened in 1912. The first batch of students had their graduation ceremony in late 1916. Five people were given honorary degrees, including Wu Lien Teh, another person with Ipoh connections, Two others, including Loke Yew, did not attend the ceremony and were given their honorary degrees separately a few weeks later. In the early '50s, the University re-named its Great Hall after Loke Yew.

Low Kway Soo was a frustrated artist. Born in 1881, he was in his mid-thirties when he was commissioned to paint this life-size portrait of Loke Yew. When he tired of portraiture, and decorating stage sets, and penning caricatures, he went off to medical school.



Charles Eliot: after a stint leading the university, he was recalled to the Diplomatic Corps and posted to Siberia. He died in 1931 and was buried at sea in the Straits of Malacca.

Below is a third photograph: painter Low Kway Soo in his studio, applying the finishing touches to the portrait he's working on. His subject: Loke Yew.

