

Biographical Notes

Chan Heng Chee (19 April 1942 -) Academic/ diplomat

Chan Heng Chee was born in Singapore in 1942. She grew up in Joo Chiat with her three siblings. Her sister became a teacher, and her brothers, Heng Wing and Heng Loon, were top civil servants.¹

Chan studied CHIJ Katong Convent before entering the University of Malaya in 1961 (changed to University of Singapore in 1962) where she became the first woman to graduate with a first-class honours in Political Science. She completed her Master's degree at Cornell University (1967) under the supervision of Professor Ruth McVey.² Subsequently, she returned to do her PhD at the University of Singapore (1974).³

In 1971, Chan's MA thesis was published as a monograph, *The politics of survival 1965-1967*.⁴ Her second book, *The dynamics of one party dominance: the PAP at the grassroots* (1976) was based on her PhD. This book, as well as her biography of David Marshall, entitled *A sensation of independence* (published 1984), both won National Book Awards.⁵

After completing her doctorate, Chan began her career as a lecturer at the Political Science department of the National University of Singapore. Between 1985 to 1987, she was Head of Department. In 1988, Chan became founding director of the Institute of Policy Studies.

In 1989, Chan received her first diplomatic appointment and the accolade of becoming Singapore's first woman ambassador when she was made Singapore's permanent representative to the United Nations. She was concurrently High Commissioner to Canada, and ambassador to Mexico. During her stint at the United Nations, she helped rally support around ASEAN and Singapore's position with regards to Cambodia.⁶

After two years, in 1991, Chan returned to Singapore to lead the Singapore International Foundation which was officially launched that year.⁷ She also became a visiting fellow at Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), researching leadership change in the region. Some time after ISEAS Director K S Sandhu died in December 1993, Chan stepped in to head the institute.⁸

In 1996, Chan was recalled to the Foreign Service to serve as Singapore's ambassador to the United States.⁹ She spent the next 16 years in Washington carrying out traditional ambassadorial duties alongside a strong outreach programme to improve Singapore's image in the United States.¹⁰ One of

¹ "Foo, Terence, "Chan Heng Chee", *Singapore Infopedia* (2016), retrieved from https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2013-05-22_121953.html; Zhuang, Justin, "Memories to treasure", *Skyline*, Iss. 6 (2017), pp. 23-24, retrieved from https://www.ura.gov.sg/uol/-/media/User%20Defined/URA%20Online/publications/corporate-publications/skyline/2017/Skyline%20issue%206_FINAL.pdf#page=23

² "Chan Heng Chee is woman of the year", *Business Times*, 6 March 1992.

³ Foo, "Chan Heng Chee", *Singapore Infopedia* (2016).

⁴ "Survival – the faith of the Republic", *The Straits Times*, 1 March 1971.

⁵ "Chan Heng Chee", *Singapore Infopedia*; "Section two", *The Straits Times*, 20 Sept 1986.

⁶ "A woman of substance", *Straits Times*, 11 August 1991; "S'pore's UN envoy to return home tomorrow", *Straits Times*, 25 February 1991.

⁷ "Singapore International Foundation launched with \$25m target", *Straits Times*, 1 Aug 1991; "Prof Chan to head proposed S'pore Int'l Foundation", *Straits Times*, 22 March 1991.

⁸ "Prof Chan to head Iseas", *Straits Times*, 25 February 1993.

⁹ "Chan Heng Chee named S'pore's ambassador to US", *Straits Times*, 14 June 1996.

¹⁰ "US women's group honours S'pore envoy", *Straits Times*, 2 May 1998; "S'pore's ambassador to US comes home after 16 years", Channel NewsAsia, 8 July 2012.

the high points of her tenure was the signing of the Free Trade Agreement between the United States and Singapore in 2003.¹¹

On her return to Singapore, Chan was appointed to the Presidential Council for Minority Rights.¹² She also became chairman of a new think-tank, the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities at the Singapore University of Technology and Design.¹³ While holding these positions, she continued to be an Ambassador-at-Large and served as Singapore's representative to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights.¹⁴

Chan was Chairman of the National Arts Council between 2013 to 2019.¹⁵ In 2019, she became Chairman of ISEAS- Yusof Ishak Institute board of trustees.¹⁶

For her public service and contributions to the nation, Chan received several national day awards: Public Administration Medal (Gold) in 1999, Meritorious Service Medal in 2005 and the Distinguished Service Order award in 2011.¹⁷

¹¹ Koh, Tommy and Chan Li Lin (Eds.), *The little red dot: reflections by Singapore's diplomats*, Singapore: World Scientific (2005), p. 115.

¹² "New faces on Presidential Council for minority rights", *Straits Times*, 17 July 2012.

¹³ "Ex-envoy's focus now on urban issues", *Straits Times*, 30 October 2012.

¹⁴ "Appointment of Singapore's representative to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights", *Singapore Government News*, 31 October 2012.

¹⁵ "Chan Heng Chee to head arts council", *Straits Times*, 31 August 2013; "National Arts Council to get new chairman from Sept 1", *The Straits Times*, 31 August 2019.

¹⁶ "Chan Heng Chee to take over as ISEAS chairman", *The Straits Times*, 31 October 2019.

¹⁷ "Diplomat and banker get top N-Day honours", *Straits Times*, 9 August 2011.