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Tan Chin Tuan led 9 other blue-chip firms

By Richard Lim

SAY Mr Tan Chin Tuan, and people will associate the name with OCBC Bank, and his slogan for it, Rock Solid. But Mr Tan, who died last November, had actually played a much larger role than just being the chairman of the bank from 1966 to 1983.



THE LAUNCH IS A CELEBRATION OF HIS LIFE, said Mr Tan's granddaughter, Ms Chew, presenting a copy to Mr Teo. In the background are Dr Tony Tan and the author, Madam Lee. -- LIM WUI LIANG

Between the mid-1950s and the mid-1970s, he led nine other blue-chip Singapore companies. Known as OCBC group of companies, these were: Eastern Realty; Overseas Assurance Corporation; Raffles Hotel; Fraser and Neave; Malayan Breweries; Robinsons; Straits Trading Company; Great Eastern Life Assurance and Wearne Brothers.

The business empire covered Singapore, Malaysia, Britain, Papua New Guinea, Australia and New Zealand.

Madam Lee Su Yin's book, *Rock Solid: The Corporate Career Of Tan Chin Tuan*, which was launched yesterday, chronicles the businessman's roles in these companies, besides the bank.

Madam Lee, 43, felt that although there had been two books published on the legendary figure - *Building Bridges, Carving Niches* (2000) and *The Life And Times Of Tan Sri Dr Tan Chin Tuan* (2003) - they had focused on his bank career and his life. 'My book fills the gaps of the previous books by detailing Tan Chin Tuan's corporate contributions in greater breadth and depth, right up to the time of his death,' she said.

The author is well placed to write the book. She got to know the late Mr Tan when she did a master's thesis on his 16-year political career in the British colonial service, before Singapore's independence. After completing her thesis in 1995, she joined S.E.A. Specialist Services, which is part of a group of companies now run by Mr Tan's granddaughter, Ms Chew Gek Khim.

In the 10 years before his death, she had regular interaction with Mr Tan and his family, and access to his private papers. She had also struck up friendships with his numerous associates.

She finished the book after working on it for three years. The late Mr Tan had actually seen the book and the cover. *Rock Solid's* language is kept simple and accessible to the lay reader, as the author's aim is to reach a general audience.

Her account shows how astute and nationalistic a businessman Mr Tan was. With Singapore's independence, he foresaw that many Europeans would go, leaving behind well-organised companies which provided employment for many people.

He moved into firms like Robinsons and Fraser and Neave so that they would continue as viable operations. He made them into even more profitable entities by changing the products and services to suit local needs, instead of just the expatriates'.

In the epilogue to the book, Madam Lee writes: 'I admired the values he upheld - honesty, integrity, loyalty, compassion and commitment. Through my interactions and observations of Tan over the years, I appreciated more and more his steadfastness to those principles.'