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Family, friends bid farewell to Tan Chin Tuan

Over 180 mourners from all walks of life pay tribute at service of ex-OCBC chairman

By Grace Ng

IN A moving tribute, former deputy prime minister Tony Tan yesterday bid farewell to the man who became his 'father figure' - his uncle, well-known banker and philanthropist Tan Chin Tuan, who died on Sunday at the age of 98.

Some among a gathering of more than 180 family members, friends and business associates of the former OCBC chairman sobbed during Dr Tan's eulogy, delivered at a half-hour funeral service at Mandai Crematorium.

The mourners included people from all spheres of life. There were members of the board of OCBC - which Mr Tan helmed from World War II to the 1980s - such as Mr Lee Seng Wee, Mr Lee Seng Tee and Mr Wong Nang Jang; along with banking industry names like Ms Elizabeth Sam.

And then there were elderly people in their 60s and 70s, some on walking sticks, who simply turned up to bid farewell to a man they admired for his generosity of wealth and spirit.

Mr Tan's nephew, Dr Tan, touched the hearts of all present as he recalled that after his own father died, his uncle 'took on the role of a father figure to me and my family...and always providing sound guidance whenever we requested his opinion'.

Granddaughter Chew Gek Khim also saluted Mr Tan as a 'devoted family man'.

A tearful Ms Chew said: 'Although he came from a generation where men were patriarchs and did not get involved in the growing up of their children, in his own way he did.

'He once confessed to me that he had never carried a young baby or washed dishes in the kitchen, but he realised the most important thing to bring up children is to set a good example.'

He was a man 'who stood up and fought for the principles he believed in', she said, adding: 'He would rather lose a deal, walk away or make less than do anything against his principles.'

Earlier in the morning, mourners attended a 45-minute service at Grange Court - home to some of Mr Tan's family - where the body had lain in rest for the last three days.

The Anglo-Chinese Junior College choir and string ensemble accompanied the audience in singing hymns such as All The Way My Saviour Leads Me.

The coffin was solemnly carried to the waiting funeral car to the strains of Amazing Grace played by the Anglo-Chinese School (Independent) chamber orchestra and symphonic band.

In light drizzle, a crowd of people - some shedding tears - followed the funeral procession along a 100m stretch of road, lined by members of the ACS (Barker Road) 12th Company Boys' Brigade.

At the service at Mandai Crematorium, Dr Tan also mentioned an incident that showed his uncle's 'personal touch', which when 'coupled with his ability to put larger national interests above personal consideration', made him a great man.

Dr Tan recalled that he went to 'Mr Chin Tuan' in 1995 to explain why he had to leave his post as OCBC chairman, because then-prime minister Goh Chok Tong had asked him to re-join the Cabinet as deputy prime minister and defence minister.

Dr Tan said his uncle told him firmly that he had made the right decision, and that 'the security of our nation must take priority over all other matters'.

And yesterday, echoing that commitment to the greater good, the service ended with Mr Tan's favourite hymn, Onward Christian Soldiers.

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