

He went out of his way to help those in trouble

Former DPM Tony Tan, in a eulogy to his late uncle yesterday, remembered how Tan Chin Tuan made an impact in the corporate world, and also how, as a private individual, he provided assistance to family members and others.

Friends and relatives,

My uncle Tan Sri Dr Tan Chin Tuan was a larger-than-life personality.

His life spanned most of the last century, and he lived through momentous events like the Great Depression, the Second World War and the independence of our country.

He was no bystander, but actively participated in the making of our nation's history.

Tan Sri Dr Tan, or Mr Chin Tuan, as he is popularly addressed at OCBC, was probably best known for his extraordinary success in business, building up the OCBC Group of companies to make OCBC a household name in Singapore and Malaysia.

As a banker and businessman, he had no equal in his generation.

Mr Chin Tuan was noted for his scrupulous honesty in his business dealings and not one breath of scandal or report of misdoing besmirched his name and character throughout his whole corporate career.

But Mr Chin Tuan was more than a businessman.

As a philanthropist, he made substantial contributions to many charitable causes in Singapore, including old people's homes, the Orchid Society and clan associations.

He supported education strongly and made generous contributions to many schools, polytechnics and junior colleges, and especially to his alma mater, the Anglo-Chinese School, as well as to our universities, the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University.

Mr Chin Tuan regularly went out of his way to extend a helping hand to individual Singaporeans who had fallen on hard times, or who were in difficult circumstances. On many occasions, he did not wait to be asked, but took the initiative to see how he could help whenever a worthy cause or an individual in need came to his attention.

His personal intervention has made a difference in the lives of many Singaporeans.

Mr Chin Tuan's business achievements and philanthropic work have been recognised with many honours and awards, including the award of the Commander of the British Empire by the then British colonial government in 1951, the Panglima Setia Mahkota by the Malaysian government in 1969, and the award of the Honorary Doctor of Laws degree by the National University of Singapore in 1991.

These public aspects of Mr Chin Tuan's life have been widely documented in the press and in several books, so I do not intend today to talk more about Mr Chin Tuan's public life.

What I want to focus on this afternoon is Mr Chin Tuan as a private individual: His care and concern for his family and relatives, his wisdom and sound advice that he shared with many of us, and the values that he upheld unwaveringly throughout a long, eventful and distinguished life.

Despite the many calls on his time and the multitude of his responsibilities, family was always uppermost in Mr Chin Tuan's mind. He was a loving husband to his late wife, Helene, and a devoted father to his children, his son, the late Tan Keng Siong, and his daughters, Tan Kheng Lian and Tan Kheng Choo.

He also took a great deal of interest in the welfare of his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, ensuring that all of them advanced as far as they could in their educational careers.

But Mr Chin Tuan's care and concern extended beyond his immediate family. He made time to meet with his extended family comprising his brothers, cousins, other relatives and their families.

He made a point to regularly host lunches and dinners on festive occasions like Christmas and Chinese New Year to enable the family members of several generations to get to know one another to reinforce the importance of strong family ties.

My family and I were fortunate to have a close relationship with him. My father passed away at a relatively young age in 1962, and Mr Chin Tuan took on the role of a father figure to me and my family, inviting us to his house for weekly lunches or dinners, taking a keen interest in our careers and always providing sound guidance whenever we requested his opinion.

His advice was invariably sagacious and remarkably far-sighted, as I can attest from personal experience.

Ten years ago, I had to make a major change in my life.

After leaving the Cabinet at the end of 1991, I had, by 1995, settled happily into my job as chairman and CEO of OCBC.

Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, who was then the prime minister, requested me in early 1995 to re-join the Cabinet and assume the position of deputy prime minister and minister for defence.

Senior Minister Goh explained to me that the Cabinet needed strengthening after the departure of several senior members, including the late Mr Ong Teng Cheong to assume the presidency, and Mr S. Dhanabalan and Dr Yeo Ning Hong to return to the private sector.

Although I was reluctant to leave OCBC, I felt that I could not refuse the Government's request to re-join the Cabinet and help look after the defence and security of our country.

However, it was not an easy decision for me to make, and I took six months to deliberate on the matter.

Before the news was made public, I thought it wise to inform Mr Chin Tuan privately of my decision, as I knew that he was proud of my work at OCBC.

I went to his house at Cairnhill Road to explain to him why I had to leave OCBC a second time to take on a governmental post.

After I had explained the reasons for my re-joining the Cabinet, Mr Chin Tuan paused for a little while and then unhesitatingly told me in a firm tone of voice: 'You have made the right decision. The security of our country must take priority over all other matters. Although I am very proud to see you as chairman and CEO of OCBC, you are right to leave the bank to re-join the Government.'

This personal touch of Mr Chin Tuan, coupled with his ability to put larger interests above personal consideration, is what makes him a great man.

He always went the extra mile, taking the time to consider all perspectives.

He helped people not only with money, but also with encouragement and advice whenever he thought it to be appropriate. All of us who have had the benefit of knowing him will not forget his generosity and kindness to us.

His commitment to the public good and the welfare of other people will be what we will remember most of Mr Chin Tuan.

Mr Chin Tuan's passing has left a void in our lives.

His family has lost a devoted and loving father, grandfather and great-grandfather. My family has lost a concerned and caring uncle, granduncle and great-granduncle. Many present today have lost a close relative and a good friend.

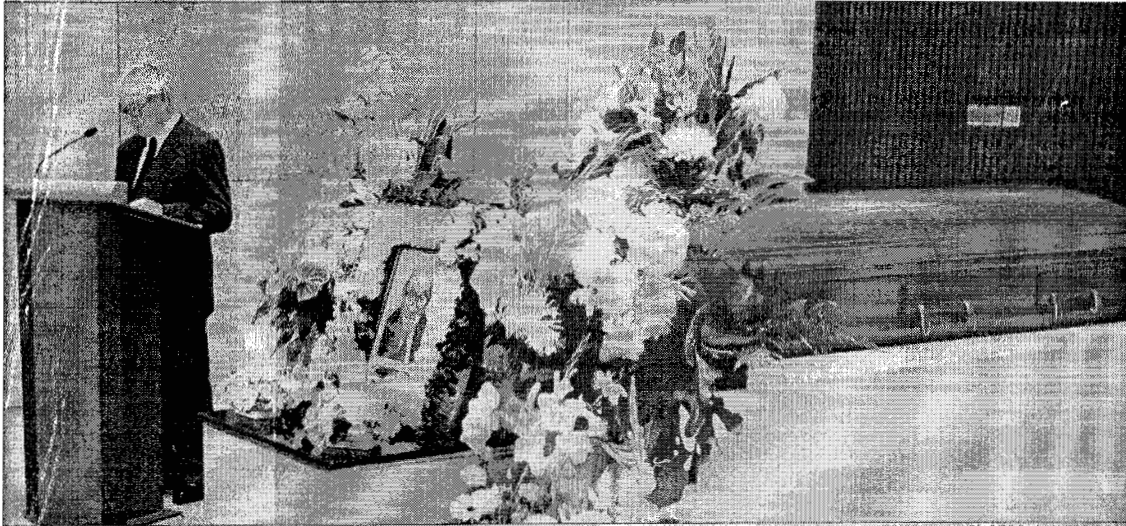
Uncle Chin Tuan, we thank you for your concern and for all that you have done for so many of us throughout your life.

We love you.

We miss you.

We will always remember you.

Uncle, goodbye.



PHOTOS: LAU FOOK KOP
REMEMBERING A 'FATHER FIGURE': In a eulogy to his uncle, Dr Tan recalled how when his father died, Mr Tan became a "father figure" to him and his family.

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SOLEMN OCCASION: Mourners at the service at Mandai Crematorium included Dr Tan (right) and his wife, friends and business associates.