

About Professor Ooi Giok Ling



It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of IPS Adjunct Professorial Fellow Ooi Giok Ling.

She left us on the evening of 5 October 2009 at age 57.

Professor Tommy Koh, IPS Chairman said, "I join the IPS family in mourning the loss of our dear colleague and friend, Ooi Giok Ling. She made two enduring contributions to the intellectual capital of IPS: in her research and publications on cities and in her pioneering work (together with Gillian Koh) on the relations between the State and the civil society in Singapore."

She will be fondly remembered by the IPS community.

Dr Ooi joined IPS as one of its first Research Fellows in February 1989, after leaving her research position at the Housing and Development Board (HDB). A year later, she was promoted to Senior Research Fellow and subsequently spent close to 13 years at IPS leading the research in the area of Urban and Environmental Studies. Professor Ooi was concurrently seconded to the Research Division at the Ministry of Home Affairs as its Director from 1995 to 1997. She had wide-ranging interests from fostering a vibrant civil society to improving the use of urban and civic spaces. Some of the key projects that Professor Ooi worked on included convening the first conference on state-society relations in Singapore, together with Dr Gillian Koh, Senior Research Fellow, at IPS in 1998. It was published as *State-Society Relations in Singapore*. Dr Ooi also helmed the first World Conference on Model Cities that Singapore hosted in partnership with the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) and IPS in 1999. The proceedings were edited by her and published in 2000 as *Model Cities: Urban Best Practices* (Volumes 1 and 2).

In 2003, the call to return to teaching led to her appointment as an Associate Professor at the then newly-formed Humanities and Social Studies Education Department at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University. She was promoted to Professor in 2006. She was also the President of the Southeast Asian Geography Association from 2006 until her passing. While at NTU, she continued her association with IPS as an Adjunct Professorial Fellow and, in this capacity, devised the first IPS Urban Sustainable Development Index and embarked on a book project on citizenship, civic space and the city. Among her other works are *Sustainability and Cities: Concept and Assessment* (2005), which she wrote, and *World Cities: Achieving Liveability and Vibrancy*, which she co-edited and which was published this year.

Mr Arun Mahizhnan, Deputy Director of IPS, recalled in a eulogy at Dr Ooi's funeral that her untimely death had robbed IPS of a good scholar and gracious colleague. "When she worked in IPS, she showed us the way to relentless labour, rigorous analysis, and unfailing courteousness. She took on more than all of us because she had an insatiable curiosity. In areas where she

specialised, she shared remarkable insights. And when the occasion demanded it, she demonstrated the courage of her conviction.” She had little time for small talk but never failed to extend a warm and gracious hand to her fellow researchers regardless of their rank or status, he said. “She was infectious in her enthusiasm and many younger colleagues flocked to her for her mentorship.”

When Dr Ooi took ill, she did not let the physical illness get the better of her mental wellness, Mr Mahizhnan said. “To the end she was spirited and cheerful. She believed in spreading happiness, not misery. For someone so good to die so young. Perhaps, God needed her more than we did. We will miss her greatly.”

Dr Ooi leaves behind her husband and two sons.

Career in brief

- Senior Tutor, Department of Geography, University of Malaya, 1975-78
- Lecturer, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 1981-82
- Lecturer, University of Malaya, 1982-83
- Executive Systems and Research Officer, Housing and Development Board, Singapore, 1983-89.
- Research Fellow, Institute of Policy Studies, 1989-90
- Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Policy Studies, 1990-2003
- Director, Research Division, Ministry of Home Affairs, Singapore [on secondment 1995-1997]
- Associate Professor at the Humanities and Social Studies Education Department, National Institute of Education, 2003-06
- Professor at the Humanities and Social Studies Education Department, National Institute of Education, 2006-09
- President, Southeast Asian Geography Association, 2006 till 2009