

Talking Points for Tribute to Professor Ooi Giok Ling

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Today, we want to remember our former colleague, Professor Ooi Giok Ling, who left us suddenly a year ago. I did not have the opportunity to work much with her when I joined IPS, but I was a beneficiary of Giok Ling's academic excellence. She was always willing to share her knowledge with me when I was working in my non-IPS jobs over the years. Many of my IPS colleagues who worked with her spoke highly and warmly of her.

Today, we want to pay tribute to Giok Ling as a founding member of the IPS research team. Giok Ling left her HDB position to join us when being a public policy researcher was not yet fashionable. IPS was just barely two years old then and was still finding its niche. Through the years, Giok Ling helped IPS make its mark in the area of urban and environmental studies and she became the go-to person on urban and environmental issues. Her expertise was in high demand and she was on numerous committees, advisory groups, and resource panels in a wide range of organizations. On secondment from IPS, she played an instrumental role in setting up the Research Department at the Ministry of Home Affairs.

As there are other colleagues and friends speaking about her and her work, I will keep my remarks brief.

Giok Ling was working on a new manuscript on civic spaces in Singapore and revising her index on urban development sustainability before she left us. She has left very large shoes to be filled. Since she left IPS, we have not been successful in finding a successor with her depth of experience, competence and passion on these issues. We hope that in time, we can find suitable persons to help complete the work she started.

Highlights of Her Publications

Her first IPS monograph was on the management of ethnic relations in public housing estates in Singapore, together with Dr Sharon Siddique who is here and Dr Soh Kay Cheng. This is one of the early research monographs that publicly discussed housing policy and how Singapore managed it.

Her next book, *Environment and the City*, has become a standard text on the origins of Singapore's environmental policy. It captures the Singapore experience and the management of environmental policy in a scholarly, yet accessible volume.

Giok Ling's interest in cities as part of her studies on urbanisation led her to her next book which reviewed Singapore's built environment. She co-authored *City and the State: Singapore's Built Environment Revisited* with Dr Kenson Kwok.

With the addition of Dr Gillian Koh to the IPS research team in the late 1990s, Giok Ling pursued her interest in the role of civil society in an urban setting, and worked with Gillian in convening a conference on the state of civil society in Singapore. Together, they published the proceedings from this landmark conference which brought together civil society actors for the first time. This conference also helped build new networks within the civil society community.

In 1999, Giok Ling, together with URA, convened the World Conference on Model Cities, the first of its kind in Singapore. From the conference papers which came from all around the world, Giok Ling developed two edited volumes, which I understand have become a leading resource on best practices in urban management. Giok Ling subsequently published a book on Singapore as the Port City with Associate Professor Brian Shaw.

Giok Ling's own seminal and original ideas led her to two more important contributions: One is her book on the future use and role of space. The other is the first Urban Development Sustainability Index she released in 2006.

Professor Ooi Giok Ling was not just a scholar but a keen observer of and contributor to the lived life – life as lived in the urban setting. While her own life was cut short, her own ideas provided new insights into how our environment may be made more liveable and sustainable.

While we have been made poorer by her passing, we have become richer by her thinking and her scholarly pursuits.

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