

Citation of 1998 SMA Honorary Membership, Prof Chao Tzee Cheng

Prof Chao Tzee Cheng really needs no introduction. His sonorous voice and pre-eminent profile are both easily recognisable in medical circles. Today the SMA has unanimously decided to confer upon him the honorary membership that he so definitely deserves. For none other than ceremonial and officious reasons, I am honoured to now give a citation of Prof Chao's only too well-known contributions and achievements.

Prof Chao is an old boy of Catholic High. He graduated from Hong Kong University in 1961 with an MBBS. His original intention, if I may note from his only son's recollection at his retirement dinner 4 years ago, he was to become a surgeon. A serious accident on the roads of West Malaysia left him with a weak right arm. All the more unfortunate as he is right-handed, it was with sheer determination and grit that he developed tremendous left-handed capability, and accompanied by the residual capability of his right hand, he continued training as a doctor. But what kind of specialist? His original intention of becoming a surgeon of the living was now near-impossible to fulfill. He satisfied his desire to cut by being a surgeon of the dead, a forensic pathologist, instead, and obtained his diplomas in Pathology in 1967. His unfortunate accident in the sixties proved to be fortuitous to both doctors and Singapore alike.

On the academic front, Prof Chao is certainly a giant in his speciality. He has published no less than 140 papers in various journals, and is on the editorial boards of 5 journals. He has held various important posts in the Academy of Medicine and was the immediate past Master of the Academy, serving as Master from 1992 to 1995. He has been conferred a string of fellowships and diplomates by no less than 14 colleges and academic institutions. He is also a Clinical Professor of NUS, Visiting Consultant to the SAF and Visiting Professor to as far as the Criminal Police College of China in Shenyang.

On the local front, Prof Chao oversaw the development of the Institute of Scientific and Forensic Medicine or ISFM in short. He was its founding Director and served until last year, when he retired to become Special Forensic Advisor to ISFM. His contributions to the public sector are as equally luminous as his academic achievements. His balming (not embalming) presence has been felt and appreciated in many of Singapore's unhappy incidents, starting from the Spyros Disaster, The Cable Car Tragedy, the Hotel New World Disaster, The Flor Contemplacion Case and recently the Silkair Crash. For his many notable contributions to the State, he has been conferred 3 national awards by the Government, culminating with the Meritorious Medal in 1995. He is also one of the select few doctors to be promoted to the substantive grade of Superscale C.



Dr. Cheong conferring SMA Honorary Membership to Prof Chao Tzee Cheng

But perhaps equally significant is that Prof Chao is not only about all work and no play. In fact, he is known to be a man of all seasons, many hobbies and many pleasures. He is a budding writer. As many will know, he wrote a book called "Murder Is My Business", which I was told outsold the rest of his other works combined. He is also a leading connoisseur of fine food, notwithstanding the fact that he is known to eat with relish while even in close proximity to the deceased in the mortuary. He has also developed a keen taste for fine whiskey and XO, perhaps to ameliorate the pungency of chloroform and formalin, which he has come into contact with since he was a budding surgeon and over the past 40 years.

On top of these, he is also known as the Pavarotti of the Alumni Karaoke and actually sings in Italian. I remember him singing "Unchained Melody" and dedicating it to "All The Girls I Loved Before" in his wife's presence. But then

he quipped as if to console Mrs Chao, "But Now, I Love You." His signature song is Delilah. Why? Because one of the lines says something about putting in a knife and Delilah could speak no more, bringing him yet another patient, and fame.

Prof Chao is an international singer. He has sung overseas to appreciative audiences. I recall him rendering Irish songs at the first meeting between The Royal College and the two Academies in Dublin, and doing likewise in Malaysia and the surrounding region. Such is Prof Chao's charismatic personality that TCS even had Moses Lim to play and imitate him. Let me give you some work information.

Fact 1: The number of murders has risen ever since Prof Chao relinquished the Medical Directorship of the ISFM to devote more time to surgery than to administration. Even though this week he had wanted a rest to prepare for tonight's conferment, he had to be disappointed. One more tragic murder has occurred.

Fact 2: Some surgeons are participating in a profit guarantee scheme. So I asked Prof Chao whether he is in the scheme. As a surgeon he qualified and murder is his business, he stated long ago.

With a straight face and not under the influence of alcohol, he said no. And I believed him because he is a specialist with tremendously high ethical standards. The SMC has received no complaints against him. Dead men and women tell no tales, except to Prof Chao, hence his illustrious and successful career both in court and in his operation theatre. None of his patients has been known to ever complain about him or his assistants to the MOH.

But we digress, and in line with Prof Chao's expressed gastronomic desire, we must get on quickly with the food and so I have to truncate his citation here. The SMA Honorary Membership is conferred onto a person who is distinguished in public life or who has rendered meritorious service to the medical profession or to this Association. I think all of you who are present tonight have no doubt that Prof Chao Tzee Cheng has more than fulfilled these requirements. Young as he looks but old as I am, I cannot remember a more colourful and senior forensic pathologist than Prof Chao. It is thus my great pleasure now to call upon the President, Dr Cheong Pak Yean to confer the honorary membership on Prof Chao Tzee Cheng.

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