Nobel Ocean

A Short Story

A Miss Chan Story

Penang Fairhaven



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# TED Nobel 2044

Good evening

Welcome to TED Nobel 2044

As in previous years, we will be interviewing the new crop of Nobel prize winners, starting with the four newer new prize categories. Climate, Oceans, Land and Water, following SDGs 13, 14, 15 and 6.

These new Nobel prize categories recognise the amazing work that is being done of these four foundation SDGs, the foundation on which all the other SDGs are built, and which now are being vigorously addressed around the world to avoid climate calamity.

In 2040 it was recognised that the 5 original Nobel categories, Economics, the 6th was added later, were no longer sufficient to address the major issues faced by society.

Our first guest is well known to you all.

Please welcome Miss Chan!

Good Evening Miss Chan, welcome to Oslo.

Thanks Chris, I had a good trip on the transcontinental fast train. It has only taken 2 days to travel up from Penang Fairhaven travelling at over 200 km/hr. I’ve enjoyed the view and caught up on some sleep.

Congratulations on winning the Oceans Nobel prize

Thank you. It was not an enormous surprise, as next year I assume the presidency of The Ocean as an Independent State.

But even so, it is a great honour.

And heartening to see so much work being done to address oceanic issues around the world

# The History of The Ocean as an Independent State.

I’d like to start by asking you about your involvement with The Ocean as a State as a concept – you were one of the members of the original team?

Yes, I was one of 7 people who made up the original Oceans team

Can you tell us what was it like back then?

Sure. Though I’d like to start a little earlier.

The earliest record we have of a discussion of ‘The Ocean’ was at the Mexico 2018 World Ocean Summit

It began with a light-hearted conversation over lunch between and engineer and the head of sustainability for a major US bank.

He pointed out that America only became great after it declared Independence from the colonial power.

**‘By extension’, he said, ‘The Ocean can only resolve its problems and become sustainable by declaring independence from the surrounding countries which currently use/take its resources for free.**

This simple idea has passed through stories and conversations into the hands of influencers, film makers, broadcasters, a wide range of activists and eventually politicians. Although, obviously controversial, it was a clear and simple rallying point for many across the whole political and age spectrum.

In 2031 I joined The Ocean Team. The group that worked on making The Ocean as an independent State a reality. It took 7 years, which is astonishingly quick under the circumstances.

## THE OCEAN - INDEPENDENT STATE

In 2031 The Ocean declared independence from The Land and was accepted into the UN

The Ocean sought independence in order to resolve its own problems. It recognised that the neighbouring countries could never truly put the interests of The Ocean on a par with their own.

At independence, the Ocean started to charge for services that have traditionally been provided/taken for free. Levies of 1% on fishing revenues. 1.0% on shipping. $1 per tonne for CO2 sequestration. $10 per tonne for effluent. $100 per tonne for plastics. Managed carefully to avoid advantage being taken of these low charges. The services provided by The Ocean are valued at trillions of dollars were being taken for free. <https://www.worldwildlife.org/stories/ocean-assets-valued-at-24-trillion-but-dwindling-fast>

The Ocean makes extensive use of global fishing watch tracker and satellites. <https://globalfishingwatch.org/> and uses this revenue to fund MPAs and other critical restoration activities. The Ocean assumes full authority of the open Ocean. 50/50 of EEZs. 25% of coastal waters.

People of all nations can become citizens of The Ocean.

The bill for each land-country is calculated and posted regardless of whether they are paying or not.
Four numbers, from the date of the first UN conference on the Oceans, total from the start of the industrial revolution, annual total and per capita. This highly controversial approach raises the profile of the issues The Ocean faces and help focus the discussion on how much the actual amounts are, rather than whether or not it is reasonable to charge for the services.

I am still amazed at how quickly this turned from an idea in a fictional TV show about the near future to a whirlwind 'Our Ocean' social media campaign and then into a reality.

The story originated from a Cli-Fi – climate fiction – anthology at COP27 and was one of three that went on to become Netflix programmes, a climate version of Black Mirror [[1]](#footnote-2).

There was a lot of political resistance initially, but the massive public support through social media for such an out of the box idea quickly won over a small, pivotal group of countries that was just big enough to get the idea off the ground. Switzerland, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, all double land-locked countries, were keen founder members.

Many people identified with The Ocean as the ultimate underdog, the largest occupied, unrepresented territory in the world. Journalists were particularly supportive – in a time where fake news continued to be a problem, it was thrilling that a fictional story could go on to have such influence.

And I love the map, which is the flag you all now know [[2]](#footnote-3).

# The History of Miss Chan

And what is your background?

How did I get here?

I was a young, Malaysian, female, mixed race engineer. Nothing special. I joined the Penang Fairhaven project as part of the first batch. I was initially assigned by the city to support the construction of Bazalgette dock on the north dyke, although of course I had no idea what I was doing.

It was the construction & project team who really supported me, taught me what I needed to know and kept me safe through those treacherous early years, muddy sites, hazard reviews, dull meetings and awkward conversations.

They would cry laughing if they could see me now!

After Bazalgette I worked on the Ocean Orchards project, which is a fabulous integrated habitat restoration approach. It rebuilds the marine habitat, creates loads of new fish and draws down massive amounts of CO2. Where Fairhaven is very much an adaptation and defence project, the Ocean Orchards are a true carbon negative solution and have sequestered many millions of tonnes of CO2. I am still awestruck by the abundance of fish that you can see there.

From there I transferred to The Ocean office, which was also in Penang at the time.

# Ocean Mining

And you were involved in setting up the managed mining concessions

Yes, one of my better pieces of prose, dictated to my phone on a walk around the botanic gardens, one of my favourite outdoor office areas

From the office of 'The Ocean as in Independent Nation'

Dear X+Y mining company

We are writing to you today to invite you to attend discussions on the mining of the deep sea for metallic nodules.

While you may not yet accept our jurisdiction, we are afraid you will eventually have to acknowledge it.

However, before you throw up your hands in despair, we really would like to talk with you about how the valuable resources can be extracted effectively, and would like to arrange a series of meetings.

We have reviewed your previous proposals and frankly, the old-fashioned strip mining of the seabed seems like an unimaginative effort by a Victorian engineer with a hangover. We are sure that you can do better.

We would like trials to be conducted in dive able depth water, picking up mock nodules so we can all see what is going on.

Our spec is for a system that picks up nodules one at a time, without disturbing the seabed.

We have also researched the possible approaches and believe that picking systems are completely practicable.

For example, a large submarine platform can hover over the seabed without much disturbance at all. A low thrust, slow, cili based movement system could be developed. An insect-like set of picking arms (using ttt transfer - patent pending) could be built. A reasonable picking rate could be established without sending a big ugly bulldozer to ravage the seabed.

Areas of 100m x 100m can be picked, with bands of 100m left between them for contiguous connection for any life forms on the seabed.

We can already hear you wringing your hands and saying it will be too expensive. To be honest, that is your problem and not ours. If humans are as smart as they claim to be, you can surely find a way.

For comparison, if the nation of the sea, for some unclear reason, had a taste for apples, and mounted an expedition on to the land to strip mine the central valley of California, the relevant authorities would be unlikely to grant permission.

However, permission would be granted for a careful picking process with a long-term contract and ongoing review.

This is the goal all parties need to aim for.

We are that authority.

Naturally, a suitable split of the revenues arising from the careful harvest of the nodules will have to be negotiated.

As one of the main parties involved, we are keen to see high prices, not low, and for minimal consumption with 100% recycling of these valuable resources as central a key priority.

Profligate, non-circular methods created the current problems. They cannot be allowed to continue. The nodules will only be supplied to industries that are 100% circular.

We look forward to discussing this opportunity with you.

Best Regards

The Ocean.

# The Ocean as an Independent State – New Roles

And how did The Ocean become a central player in the global climate refugee situation?

Even before the establishment of The Ocean, refugees that were starting to arrive in Fairhaven in ever greater numbers to join the controversial food for work scheme, building dykes. In the early days, it was a pretty good arrangement with education, health care and family planning. Malaysia was very generous under the circumstances, as well as responsibly pragmatic – the flow of refugees was another type of flood that would be impossible to ignore or prevent.

Refugee relocation has continued to be a tough nut, but we all have a lot to be proud of, so many have passed safely through The Ocean relocation system and on to new lives. So much better than a wall or a fence. Walls are for water.

Everyone was granted citizenship of the ocean in 2042, partly as a way of recording people before they became a refugee. It is built around a new database of all current and future climate refugees – which is in effect a list of all the people on the planet – a database of Ocean Citizenship – everyone can be a citizen of The Ocean. It also contains a lot of their national information which connects them to their previous lives and locations

The Ocean State has provided passports for all and helps coordinate relocation. 150 million globally so far, with many more to come. The Ocean State’s new seat on the UN permanent council helps.

The Ocean as an Independent State is a powerful tool for addressing the crisis, and doing so in a way that respects the displaced, building on their talents, utilising their skills.
But, the equitable treatment of refugees is a means to an end, not the end in itself. It is a powerful climate solution, utilising, not wasting our combined strength, and building a safe new future world. Transferring resources and effort from areas that are lost to sea level rise to areas which need much more effort to defend. The Ocean negotiates transfers of people with countries who will be the future dry-land hosts, and provides part of the funding to support the building of sea defences and - the relocation of infrastructure.
The Ocean has been in a surprisingly strong position to negotiate with even quite large countries – The Ocean is supported by the bulk of the UN members, in principle at least, and this has aided the payment of ongoing service fees and the negotiation of relocated refugee communities. Wherever possible, community size groups of 100-300 people are kept together to provide mutual support and increase their collective community output – 20 people working together with friends and neighbours are far more productive than dispersed individuals.

Penang is now one of 5 Ocean Capitals along with cities in Madagascar, Iceland, Panama and Hawaii.
Charging for the services that were previously used/taken for free gave The Ocean the revenue that had never been available before to sort out its own problems and those of the coastal countries.

The Ocean has been a bright light in a bleak time.

The Ocean as an Independent State is an astonishing collective achievement, and allowed so many ocean, climate, and refugees shared calamities to be addressed from a bigger perspective.

The Ocean coordinates the Ocean Orchardsand the other Ocean CDR work as well as handling 150 million climate refuges so far, and rising every year. The largest carbon drawdown has been through The Ocean, as reforestation and CCS has struggled. The Ocean is also coordinating the refreezing work in the Arctic – we hope to achieve the maximum summer ice extent in 10,000 years very soon, and is also coordinating the even bolder plan to stabilise the ice sheets in Antarctica.

# Personal Life

I’d like to ask more about your personal life and work as a writer

As you know, I am quite reserved about my personal life, and will continue to be so.

I consider myself a poor to average writer who is in the right place at the right time – I also need to thank my longstanding and longsuffering editing team who take my scrappy notes, WhatsApp fragments and dictated messages and assemble them into something like a real story, which we then polish together. There would be no stories at all without them.

And your favourite story?

I still have a strong attachment to the Titanic story. That simple analogy summed up the effort required to address the climate crisis so clearly – and showed that apparently impossible challenges over 100 years old can indeed be overcome.

This story, entirely fictional though it is, helped me a lot though the darker times of this journey.

You have recently received a lot of criticism about your personal wealth

Yes, this is most unfortunate. I have been a civil servant of one form or another all of my life, and a prominent climate solutions spokesperson.

It is unseemly that I should also have acquired a small fortune on route.

Some of this money has come from the books and subsequent films, but more than half has come from ‘The Club’. This has been a hobby activity all of my life, and I have contributed numerous small fragments, ideas and thoughts, informally, to dozens of climate solutions start-ups. The Club uses an algorithm to allocate the value of the contributions from the participating Club members and assigns a proportion of the 5% of shares set aside for this to the most appropriate contributors. It is a fair and fun system. And has the agreeable side effect of distributing foundation shares across hundreds of contributing members who often continue to support the climate start-ups as they grow.

The biggest ownership I have through this route is a 1.2% share of one of the first start-ups I assisted, the infamous ‘Pink Post-it’. A simple idea contributed at the right place and time.

This company is now worth billions of dollars, and I am a happy, non-exec director.

What am I doing with this wealth? I’m not going to tell you. I still live in the same shared apartment I moved into all those years ago, with friends, colleagues and an informal community that has gradually shifted over the years as we have grown older and changed in so many ways. Changing, but still home.

But rest assured, the money is used in a highly appropriate way to progress very specific climate related issues I have come across over the years. No fortified-machine-gun-nest-island-boltholes. No yacht. No plane. No gold bars. It’s the right stuff and you don’t need to know about it.

You have also been called a politically incorrect hypocrite. How do you feel about that?

To which Hypocrisy do you refer?

Travelling when it has a high carbon footprint?

Meeting people in person?

Not being a proper vegan?

By not using public transport all the time?

Not prioritising your highest priority SDG?

Or by seeing the need to cooperate with an opponent?

Establishing companies that aim to make a profit?

By focussing on big things rather than the small?

That I occasionally let my temper and frustration show?

By saying out loud things you don’t want to hear – and none of us, in our heart of hearts, wants to do?

Working on projects that are not yet, or never will be truly carbon negative?

By acting on projects without first addressing all of the social and historical injustices?

That my personal carbon footprint is more than 1 tonne?

Or the more potent FS Fitzgerald contradiction? Where I know it cannot be done, but I am determined to do it anyway? Is that not even more hypocritical?

The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.

One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise.

Or that I can hold several, contradictory opinions at the same time?

Or act to progress things that are at first sight and even second sight, contradictory?

Or, like almost everyone, say one thing, do another and mean a third? Or fourth?

Of course I'm not consistent. Who is?

Perfect? Of course not. Are any of us?

Am I trying to be Perfect? Probably not.

Trying to do the right thing, yes,

But Perfect is too high a bar for me.

You didn’t mention the personal carbon footprint that a school calculated for you last year

I always feel I need to apologise for all the travel I have done and will continue to do. Last year a school team calculated my personal carbon footprint and it was over 200 tonnes CO2e. Shameful.

But they also estimated the carbon negative contribution I have made over my career, and they reckon that my share of all the projects I have been involved in, plus those I have helped push through, plus some other rather fuzzy thoughts I didn’t fully agree with, my tally is around minus 150 million tonnes.

All in all, not too shabby.

If that is anywhere near correct, I will embrace my hypocrisy, and press on.

What are your aspirations for the Presidency of The Ocean?

Here we are in 2045. The current president is stepping down after his maximum 2 terms – although he can come back again after 4 or 8 years off if he is re-elected. He is totally my hero. One of the greatest marine biologists of all time, a glorious public speaker, and so patient.

I fear that I lack enough of his skills, his virtues.

But as Commodus says in the film Gladiator, I have other virtues.
Dogged persistence, a clear view of the big picture, an encyclopaedic understanding of the details of the scale of the challenge ahead. Hopefully these skills are suitable for the next phase.

And I am female, mixed race and non-European.

All of these things cleared my path as a candidate. I just hope I am up to the job.

Well thank you for your candour. As ever, it has been inspiring taking to you.

Good luck, soon to be Madame President!

# Appendix 1 – …

1. <https://climateimagination.asu.edu/clificontest/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/756bcae18d304a1eac140f19f4d5cb3d> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)