

Introduction of the Inaugural Goh Keng Swee Professor, Professor Jean Oi

By Prof Alfred Schipke, Director, East Asian Institute

Dear Friends and Colleagues,
Ambassador-at-Large Professor Tommy Koh,
Provost Prof Aaron Thean,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great honour to introduce Professor Jean Oi as the inaugural Goh Keng Swee Professor at the East Asian Institute.

Jean is the William Haas Professor in Chinese Politics at Stanford University, a Senior Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, and the founding director of both the Stanford China Program and the Stanford Center at Peking University.

Her work focuses on comparative politics, with a deep and longstanding expertise in China's political economy and institutional reform. Jean's research has illuminated how local governments in China navigate fiscal politics and central-local relations, particularly under mounting societal and economic pressures. Her theory of "local state corporatism" reshaped our understanding of China's economic transformation—showing how local governments acted as entrepreneurial agents driving growth.

Her most recent co-edited volume explores one of the most critical issues for China: the limits of its growth model. Today, she is working on two timely issues—the paradox of rising local government debt despite borrowing restrictions, and the Belt and Road Initiative, which she examines through an institutional, micro-level lens to uncover the interests of key actors.

What makes Jean's work truly extraordinary is her ability to navigate both sides of the Pacific with scholarly rigour and cultural fluency. She interprets China's complexities for global audiences while remaining deeply grounded in field-based, empirical research. And where better to host such a scholar than here in Singapore, at EAI—a place that, like Jean, sits at the intersection of East and West.

Much like Dr. Goh Keng Swee—who brought together Asian pragmatism with global vision—Jean embodies the spirit of bridging divides. At a time when understanding China is more important than ever, serious academic inquiry is facing new challenges. Federal funding for China studies in the U.S. has been cut, including programs like Fulbright. The risk of misunderstanding China has never been greater, *and the stakes are high*. Scholars like Jean remind us that careful, nuanced analysis is indispensable.

But Jean is not only a path-breaking scholar—she is also a mentor, a builder of institutions, and a leader who has shaped generations of China experts. Her legacy includes establishing Stanford's China Program as a premier research hub and maintaining an active role in academic exchanges.

And if you ever find yourself in Beijing—Jean is also the person to ask for the best duck in town.

We are thrilled to welcome her to EAI, where she will enrich our work, guide our growth, and inspire the next generation of scholars in China Studies.

Please join me in welcoming Professor Jean Oi.