

PRESTIGE MALAYSIA Top 40 Under POISED FOR POWER 2010

CREATIVE SCIENCE

SCIENTIST **DR ERIC CHAN** STRIVES FOR RESEARCH EXCELLENCE SO THAT WE CAN ALL ENJOY THE FULL POTENTIAL OF OUR NATURAL WORLD

The signs were already there, signs that Dr Eric Chan was destined to be a scientist in the biotechnology field. After all, he grew up in a family that was very passionate about science. Eric's ecologist father exposed him to biology and chemistry at a very early age. "My father remains my mentor till today," he says.

However, that was not the only indication that Dr Chan would end up a renowned researcher. When

speaking of his childhood years, he says, "My greatest joy as a child was when my aunt bought me a microscope from Toys 'R' Us. Besides observing the slides that came with the set, I made my own slides by pulling my hair, plucking flowers from the garden and killing some ants."

Since then, Dr Chan has achieved high honours and distinctions as a biotechnology scientist and researcher. His area of specialisation lies in food

chemistry. He explains, "Most of my research involves natural products and bioactivity of Malaysian wild and cultivated gingers, as well as local and imported herbal teas."

The implications of Dr Chan's research are powerful. After completing his PhD work on ginger leaves, he discovered a variety of benefits that have not yet been taken advantage of. In an interview with Sunway University College, Dr Chan

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Society for Mangrove Ecosystems based in Olinawa, Japan.

His PhD work alone resulted in the publication of six papers and his findings were presented at an international ginger symposium held in Singapore and China. Before he even graduated in March, 2010, he had already been offered a lecturer's position at the University College Sedaya International.

Dr Chan's journey was not always a walk in the park. There were obstacles to face and hurdles to jump over. He shares about the biggest barrier he faced in the scientific community, "When people are pressured to perform, they become more conservative and less likely to take risks. Tried and tested methods allow people to address immediate issues. Conservative methods are more likely to work than new creative ones. Creativity is required to develop new methods to address issues that may occur in the future. Creative ventures are inherently risky as they involve trying new ideas. Therefore, the biggest hurdle for most scientists in this publish-or-perish world is to convince people of the need to take chances and to invest time and money in risky creative ventures."

This hurdle is not unique to Dr Chan; it is something every scientist faces. Fortunately for the scientific community, he has the ability to inspire and motivate people into action. "I consider myself to be adept at rallying the people around me to take up a cause. I am good at getting colleagues or students to try out a new idea or embark on a new research project," he says.

His main mission, however, is to excel as a university lecturer and continue to "pursue research excellence." While he has already achieved much, he still remains humble. He admits, "There are many years ahead of me and I have much to learn before greater accomplishments can be achieved."

PHOTOGRAPHY SHAWN LOK/BLANK STUDIO
TEXT: GABRIELLE LIM

"I consider myself to be adept at rallying the people around me to take up a cause"

explains, "Leaves of Etlingera elatior (aka Torch Ginger) have strong antioxidant, antibacterial and skin-whitening properties." This was just the beginning. By the time he turned 28, Dr Chan already had countless scientific achievements under his belt. He is a Life Member for Academic Excellence at Monash University Chapter of the Golden Key International Honour Society, as well as a member of the International

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