

Harvard Business School Inaugurates New Executive Education Center: First Building at HBS Named After a Woman & First at Harvard named for Asian-American

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The Ruth Mulan Chu Chao Center, Photo: Susan Young

BOSTON—Harvard Business School (HBS) inaugurated its new anchor building in the Executive Education program - Ruth Mulan Chu Chao Center—with a dedication ceremony on June 6, 2016. The ribbon-cutting ceremony included remarks by Harvard University President Drew Gilpin Faust, Harvard Business School (HBS) Dean Nitin Nohria, Massachusetts Governor Charles Baker, U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), U.S. Senator Ed Markey (D-MA), and speaking on behalf of the Chao family: the 24th U. S. Secretary of Labor (2001-2009) The Honorable Elaine Chao (HBS MBA 1979) and Deputy Chairman, Foremost Group Angela Chao (Harvard A.B. 1995; HBS MBA 2001).

The building was made possible by a \$40 million gift from a Dr. James Si-Cheng Chao and family foundation. This generous gift was given in tribute to the life and legacy of the late Ruth Mulan Chu Chao, beloved matriarch of this most prominent and accomplished Chinese-American family.

“The Ruth Mulan Chu Chao Center epitomizes the ideals of its namesake, who so valued the broadening of minds that

takes place when people come together to engage, share and learn,” noted Harvard President Drew Faust. “Her progressive views on the importance of education live on in her daughters, each of whom has used their education to improve the world around them.”

Chao family patriarch Dr. James S. C. Chao said, “We are humbled to dedicate this building to memorialize the life and legacy of my beloved Ruth to advance Harvard’s mission to educate leaders who make a difference in the world. Ruth and I drew on the culture of our ancestral land, China, to give our daughters an appreciation for education and that strong foundation allowed them to advance in America.” He added, “We believe the learning and exchange of knowledge that takes place in the Ruth Mulan Chu Chao Center will develop better leaders who will gain greater understanding, insight, and wisdom to lead in the world of the future.”

Angela Chao, the youngest of the Chao daughters said, “When people enter the Ruth Mulan Chu Chao Center, our family hopes they will feel inspired by my mother’s spirit to contribute in impactful

ways to improve the world. The world today and in the future needs leaders with vision and integrity to solve the increasingly complex challenges facing the global population.”

Dr. James S. C. Chao and Mrs. Ruth Mulan Chu Chao have six daughters: Elaine Chao, Jeanette Chao, May Chao, Christine Chao, Grace Chao and Angela Chao, four of whom attended Harvard Business School, the only family in HBS history to have four daughters attend. This gift was made in April of 2012 during the 50th anniversary celebration of the admission of women to Harvard’s two-year MBA program and the 375th anniversary of Harvard University. It is the first building named after a woman on the Harvard campus and the first building named after an American of Asian ancestry. As part of the gift, the Chao family has also endowed the Ruth Mulan Chu and James S. C. Chao Family Fellowship Fund to outstanding students in need.

May Chao, the second of the daughters to attend Harvard Business School, said her mother believed education was a cornerstone to a fulfilling life. “My mother

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believed that education broadens the mind thus allowing us to create and innovate in ways that make the world a better place for everyone, and this was a guiding principle that my parents always emphasized and lived their lives daily – how can each one of us make a positive difference in this world?”

Christine Chao, Colgate University & Columbia Law School, remarked: “I hope that when people enter the Ruth Mulan Chu Chao Center at Harvard, they will know that they can make a difference in the world, because they can. We all can. And I think my parents’ example – coming to this country from China and fulfilling the American dream – is a great and inspiring one to follow.”

The Honorable Elaine Chao added: “My mother believed in the transformational power of education and being a very modest person, she would have been humbled to have this building bear her name. It will be a living memorial to her values and her belief that the world will be a better place when people can come together in a meaningful exchange of knowledge and ideas.”

Harvard Business School Dean Nitin Nohria believes that the Ruth Mulan Chu Chao Center reinforces the importance of the physical campus in the age of online learning. “Online learning creates many new possibilities in the educational arena,” he said. “But the human interaction that takes place on our campus is at the heart of transformational learning. And for generations of executives from all of the world, that transformational experience will begin in the Ruth Mulan Chu Chao Center”.

“Our Commonwealth is blessed to be home to some of the greatest educational institutions in the world, attracting the best and brightest people with the ambition, creativity and intellect to change the world,” said Governor Charlie Baker. “The work of Dr. James Chao and his beloved late wife, Ruth, have inspired millions, and their legacy will live on with future generations through the mission and work

of the Ruth Mulan Chu Chao Center.”

U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren praised the Chao family for their philanthropic efforts in service to educating leaders. “Mrs. Ruth Mulan Chu Chao and her husband, Dr. James Chao, raised six accomplished daughters, and the Chao family clearly has a deep appreciation for the importance of education in shaping leaders. The Ruth Mulan Chu Chao Center will be an important and valuable addition to the Harvard community.”

“The Chao family’s story is an uniquely American experience told through a uniquely special family, and it resonates and inspires us all” said U.S. Senator Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.). “As we celebrate the opening of the Ruth Mulan Chu Chao Center, we know that it will be a vibrant hub of learning and connectivity across cultures. The center will reflect the lasting contributions of the Chao family and will honor the inspirational trailblazer, Ruth Mulan Chu Chao.”

The family also received letters of congratulations from President Barack Obama, George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George Bush, Jimmy Carter and Vice President Joe Biden.

The Ruth Mulan Chu Chao Center is a 90,000-square-foot, four-story Gold certified LEEDs structure that will be the gateway to the University’s Executive Education Program. This building anchors the Executive Education campus and is the center where all executives attending these programs will be greeted. In addition to a reception and registration area, the building offers an open theater-style forum with expansive seating capacity, state-of-the-art classrooms, meeting rooms, offices and dining facilities and an elevated outdoor terrace. Architectural firm Goody Clancy designed the new building, which was completed in 2 years. Photos for use by media are available [here](#).

Background on Dr. James S. C. Chao and Ruth Mulan Chu Chao Family: The Chao family is the quintessential American success story. Dr. James S. C. Chao and

Mrs. Ruth Mulan Chu Chao saw their ancestral home torn apart by civil war, foreign invasion, and domestic upheaval yet they maintained their optimism and hope. Accomplished at a very young age, Dr. Chao became one of the youngest sea captains of his time in the merchant marine at the age of 29 and earned the top score in the national examinations breaking all previous records. This achievement gave him the opportunity to study in America. At that time, Mrs. Chao was seven months pregnant with their third child but she supported his bold decision to build a better life for the family. The family was reunited three years later and Dr. Chao founded what is now the Foremost Group, an internationally respected shipping company in New York. A scholar of Asian history and literature and generous philanthropist, who left her mark on all who knew her, Mrs. Ruth Mulan Chu Chao was the mother of six daughters who went on to successful careers after receiving undergraduate and graduate degrees from some of America’s finest universities. Elaine Chao: Mt. Holyoke College and HBS; Jeanette Chao: Smith College, MBA from College of William and Mary; May Chao: Wellesley College and HBS; Christine Chao: Colgate University and JD from Columbia Law School; Dr. Grace Chao: Wellesley College, HBS, Ph.D. Columbia University; Angela Chao: Harvard College and HBS.