



Song Chaeyeon

– The economist

Enjoying a peaceful evening at Chijmes with my favorite matcha drink, surrounded by its beautiful architecture

You decided to study in Singapore rather than your native Korea. What drove you to that decision?

Growing up with an international background since middle school shaped my perspective in ways that staying in Korea couldn't have. The diverse experiences I was exposed to broadened my worldview, and I realized I didn't want to confine myself to a smaller, more homogenous environment. Choosing Singapore felt like the natural step to ensure my

life and career paths aligned with that global perspective. Professionally, Singapore offers significantly broader opportunities, particularly in finance and economics, making it an ideal place to grow and thrive in my chosen field.

And then you joined NUS. Was there a reason for that?

The strength of the Economics program was a key deciding factor. NUS has one of the largest and most respected

economics faculties in Asia, offering diverse fields of study and specialized learning opportunities. This combination of academic excellence, professional advantages, and a vast alumni network made NUS the ideal place for me to pursue my goals.

Why did you decide to study economics?

My interest in economics began during my IB Economics class in high school. The subject's relevance to real life immediately stood out, as the theories I learned directly connected to the news I followed. This practical application and its ability to provide a framework for understanding and solving real-world problems are what drew me to it.

How was your experience studying economics at NUS?

Studying economics at NUS was a transformative experience that blended theoretical and technical knowledge, which has been invaluable in my professional journey. The COVID-19 pandemic brought disruptions, but the smooth transition to online learning minimized its impact. In terms of environment, the highly competitive atmosphere was both overwhelming and inspiring. Seeing students "camping" in study rooms overnight was a shock at first, but their dedication pushed me to work harder and make the most of my time there. The combination of rigorous academics and an intense, motivating environment made my NUS experience both challenging and deeply rewarding.

Any interesting memories from your university years?

Looking back on my university years, I do regret not fully diving into campus life, which made my experience feel less vibrant than it might have been. However, my final year at NUS truly stood out as the most fulfilling. It was a time of growth and transition, where I applied everything I had learned through projects, my honors thesis, and roles like being a teaching assistant in the economics department and a cluster leader in my residence. These roles gave me the chance to connect with diverse people. While balancing it all was challenging, it was incredibly rewarding and made that final year the highlight of my university journey.

Can you share some background on your career and what factors influenced your career choices?

I began my career at Goldman Sachs, working in the economics team of Global Investment Research department, where I focused on ASEAN-5 economies. The role provided valuable experience and recognition, but it also made me question my career priorities. Producing reports aimed primarily at generating investment profit for a select group of clients didn't align with my belief that knowledge should be shared widely to drive meaningful change. This realization prompted me to reflect on what I truly valued in a career.

Within a few months, I transitioned to a fiscal surveillance role at the ASEAN+3 Macroeconomic Research Office (AMRO), where I could engage in work that felt more meaningful. At AMRO, I study how ASEAN+3 countries manage their budgets and fiscal policies. This work allows me to focus on policy research and regional economic development, aligning with my passion for creating positive change. Here, I've found a role that is not only intellectually stimulating but also deeply fulfilling, as it enables me to leverage my expertise in economics to contribute to the greater good.

Has your degree helped you in your first professional steps?

My degree was instrumental in launching my career. Interestingly, it wasn't just the classroom theories that

proved useful, but the practical experience I gained through various projects during my time at NUS. Certain modules, such as EC4304 (Economic and Financial Forecasting), EC4308 (Machine Learning and Economic Forecasting), and EC4401 (Honours Thesis), stood out as particularly helpful, though they were challenging. They equipped me with hands-on skills in economic modeling, data analysis, and forecasting, which were directly relevant to my job. These modules also played a significant role in securing the position—during the interview process, the interviewers were especially curious about my projects, and much of the conversation revolved around the work I had done. In this sense, I believe that what truly makes a difference in a competitive job market is the ability to translate theoretical knowledge into practical applications, whether through coursework, research projects, or extracurricular activities.

In the future, you want to pursue a career in law. Has this always been your intention and do you think your economics background will come in handy?

It has been a long time since I first aspired to become a prosecutor in Korea, and I might want to revisit that dream in the future, but for now, I am exploring other ways to pursue my passion for law. Law has always resonated with me for its efforts to ensure justice and provide clarity by defining what is permissible. I also believe that a sound understanding of legal principles is invaluable to anyone, as it equips individuals to navigate today's increasingly complex world.

At the same time, I've realized that my background in economics can complement my interest in law. Fiscal management often intersects with legal and political frameworks, offering unique opportunities to address challenges at their intersection. By pursuing advanced studies in both disciplines, I aim to create a career that not only aligns with my values but also allows me to make a meaningful impact in governance, law, and economic policy—while keeping the possibility of returning to my original dream of becoming a prosecutor open for the future.

Do you have any advice for juniors who have academic interests similar to yours?

My advice is simple: don't blindly follow others' opinions when choosing your career path. Many, even your family, may push you toward "safe" or "prestigious" options that sound impressive but don't align with what you truly want. Whether you're considering a conventional path or a more creative career, reflect on what you genuinely value and aim to achieve. You'll spend much of your life working, so it's vital to choose a path that excites and fulfills you rather than settling for one that feels empty or forced.

Once you've identified your direction, focus on building meaningful experiences that align with your goals. These don't have to be internships—while valuable, other projects can also showcase your skills. Many students feel stressed when they can't secure an internship, especially during summer, but don't let that discourage you. I managed to secure a role at Goldman Sachs without prior IB experience by showcasing relevant work I had done inside and outside of university. What matters most is creating experiences that reflect your aspirations.

Lastly, enjoy campus life. Embrace opportunities, engage in activities, and discover who you are. Your college years are as much about personal growth as career preparation. Stay true to yourself, and fulfillment will follow in both your career and life.