Xiao Yao Tian
(萧遥天, 1912–90)
Educationist, scholar, writer, Malaysia

Xiao Yao Tian is best known for saying that the Teochew people in Southeast Asia are like the blossoms on a branch (东南亚潮人一枝花), constantly renewing themselves as they bloomed. He is best remembered as an author, a sometime poet, a teacher and an educationist. He was one of the committee members of the Curriculum Committee of the Ministry of Education in Malaysia. He also served as a lecturer in the Teachers’ Training College in Penang. As an earnest educationist, he founded the Bing Guang College in Penang where he also served as a teacher. He made extensive contributions to Chinese language education in Malaysia by writing and edited Chinese textbooks for schools. He also wrote over thirty reference books for students of the Chinese language, and edited the journal, *Teaching and Learning Monthly* (教与学月刊) for thirteen years. Xiao was also a notable Malaysian Chinese writer, for he has published many novels, short stories and poems. His contributions to Chinese literature encompassed his post of researcher at the United Association of Poetry in Malaysia.

Little is known about his early life in China except that he was born 1912 and was originally named Xiao Gongwei (萧公畏). As a young man, he had a voracious appetite for books. This eventually moulded him into a well educated man. He spent most of his formative years studying in China and graduated from the Shanghai University of Art in the 1930s. After graduation, he spent six years as a secondary school teacher in the Chao Yang District of Guangdong Province. He must have had been a teacher and writer of some notice, for he was Professor Rao Zongyu invited him to write a book on Teochew Drama and Music in Shantou in 1946. Although Xiao completed the book, neither he nor Rao could publish it due to the political upheaval in China at the time. However, Xiao was not disheartened. Armed with extensive knowledge of Teochew culture and arts, he subsequently became the editor of books on Teochew history. He also edited books titled “On Language” and “A Record of Teochew Drama and Music”.

Due to continued political instability in China curtailed Xiao’s literary career, he migrated from China to Penang in Malaysia. His reputation as a writer and educationist must have preceded him, for he soon accepted an appointment to teach at Chung Ling High School in Penang in 1953. He must have been an exceptional teacher, for he was appointed the head of the Chinese language department after teaching at the school for seven years.

As evinced from the books he edited and wrote, as well as the dedicated way in which he sought to impart Chinese culture to his students throughout his teaching career, Xiao was very interested in traditional Chinese culture, arts and literature. He continued writing in Malaysia, churning out numerous essays, novels and poems. He also continued his research on specific topics in Chinese culture, especially Teochew culture and the way in