Southeast Asian Personalities of Chinese Descent: A Biographical Dictionary

Volume I

Edited by Leo Suryadinata
Foreword by Wang Gungwu
teaching and research, not only by her home university, but also by prestigious institutions of higher learning all over the world. In 1981, Lim won the SUNY (State U of New York) Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching and, in 2002, was Best Graduate Faculty Advisor. Over the years, she has been visiting fellow, professor, writer-in-residence, invited author and faculty to universities in countries such as Singapore, Australia, Bahrain, and Hong Kong. From 1999 to 2002, she served as chair professor and head of department at the University of Hong Kong.

Lim continues to write whenever time permits and derives themes and material from both her Malaysian and American experiences. In her memoirs, she writes: “home is the place where our stories are told. . . . In California, I am beginning to write stories about America, as well as about Malaysia. Listening, and telling my own stories, I am moving home” (p. 348). In her defence of justice for women and society, as well as in her resistance to colonial and neocolonial ideologies, Lim displays an unwavering conviction and continues to write the stories of the oppressed and the outsider.

Lim is married to Charles Bazerman, and they have a son, Gershon Kean Bazerman.

Agnes S. K. Yew

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Lim Goh Tong

(林梧桐, Lin Wutong, 1918–2007)

Prominent wealthy businessman, Malaysia

Lim Goh Tong, who was born in 1918 in Fujian, China, was one of the world’s most prominent and successful entrepreneurs of Chinese origin. The fifth child in a family of seven children, and second son of a vegetable seed trader, he migrated to Malaysia in 1937 from China’s Fujian province. In 1937, the year the Japanese launched their war of aggression on China, Lim Goh Tong bravely set off for Malaya with a suitcase and 175 dollars. In 1944, he married Lee Kim Hua, whose grandfather founded the Bangkok Bank. His life story is inspiring, seen as a classic “rags to riches” tale, where difficulties were turned into opportunities, with much calculated risks, foresight, and perseverance.

In Malaya he started out as a carpenter and eventually went into iron mining, becoming a middleman for heavy machinery trading and taking on government contracts for development projects. By the early 1950s, Lim had already built a thriving business as an engineering contractor and plantation owner. He established his own construction company called Kien Huat Sdn. Bhd., which became a successful Class A contractor, completing many major public pieces of infrastructures. After Malaysia’s independence, he was awarded the contract to build the country’s first dam — the RM12-million Ayer Itam Dam in Penang. His other major projects included the RM5.2-million Sultan Yahya Petra Bridge in Kota Bharu, the RM20-million Hydroelectric Power Project in the Cameron Highlands,

Lim to contribute regularly to medical and educational institutions, old folks’ homes, and other charitable organizations.

Lim Goh Tong is survived by his wife, Lee Kim Hua, six children (three sons and three daughters: Lim Tee Keong, Kok Thay, and Chee Wah, Lim Siew Lay, Siew Lian, and Siew Kim), and nineteen grandchildren.

Beh Loo See

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**Lim Hak Tai**

(林学大, Lin Xueda, 1893–1963)

*Artist, art educator, founder of Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Singapore*

Lim Hak Tai was one of the most influential first-generation Singapore artists during the British colonial period, from the 1930s to the early 1960s. He was trained in both Chinese and Western art mediums in China and taught at the Xiamen Academy of Art before migrating to Singapore. As an art educator, his most significant contribution was the founding of the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. Holding dual appointments as principal and lecturer, he was the key member responsible for the development of the academy during its first twenty-five years. For his pioneering effort as the prime mover for a “Nanyang style” of painting, he was honoured as “Father of Nanyang Art”. In recognition of his contributions to society, he was the first artist to receive the Singapore Government Meritorious Award in 1962.

Lim was born on 18 May 1893 in Xiamen, Fujian Province in China. He grew up and received his education there. In 1916, he graduated from the Provincial Teachers’ Training College in Fuzhou, majoring in art. He began his career as an art teacher in Siming Secondary School and the Xiamen Academy of Art. Lim later joined the Jimei Teachers’ Training College when it was set up in 1924. With the outbreak of Sino-Japanese War on 7 July 1937, he came to Singapore and was soon hired to teach mathematics and art at the Chinese High School and Nan Chiau Girls’ High School.

In March 1938, together with businessman Tan See Siang and a few alumni of the Jimei High School, he established the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. The premises of the academy was a two-storey old bungalow located in Geylang opposite the Happy World Amusement Park. As art education was relatively uncommon in Singapore then, there were only fourteen students. Since the enrolment was so small, Lim managed the academy with the help of only three part-time lecturers, Kao Fei Tse, Chang Ming Tse, and Qiu Ying Kui, who taught on a voluntary basis. He was the principal of the academy and the lecturer of the water colour and oil painting classes. Two years later, the academy moved to a new site in Serangoon Road near the Whampoa River and it was there that its first batch of students graduated on 20 June 1940, just before the outbreak of the Pacific War. The improved facilities attracted many more students, fifty in total, and the academy’s staff strength also grew to twelve. Unfortunately in 1941, all activities
Querk Leng Chan

Querk Leng Chan, who was born in 1941 in Malaysia, is married with three children. He qualified as a barrister-at-law from Middle Temple in the United Kingdom. He is also a brother of Kwek Leng Hai and Kwek Leng San. His personal lifestory has remained quite private compared with his corporate affairs. Quek was honoured with the title “Tan Sri” from HM Yang di-Pertuan Agong for his contribution to the nation. From its humble beginnings as a trading company in 1963, the Hong Leong Group has grown progressively and tremendously into a diverse range of industries, thanks to Tan Sri Quek, who is the chairman and chief executive officer of Hong Leong Company (Malaysia) Berhad, the ultimate holding company of Guoco, and he sits on the boards of directors of the major public listed companies of the group. He has been the executive chairman of Guoco Group Limited since 1990. The Hong Leong Group was named after one of the brothers, Kwek Hong Leong.

The Kweks established Hong Leong in Singapore in 1941 and expanded into Malaysia. They moved from trading in the 1940s to plantation investments and manufacturing in the 1950s, real estate and property development in the 1960s, finance and heavy infrastructural activities in the 1970s. Although it was public listed in 1982, many of the component companies remained privately owned through family ownership of the holding company in which the Quek family of Malaysia (Quek Leng Chan) and the Kweks of Singapore (Kwek Leng Beng) hold significant proportions in a complex interlocking shareholding structure.

Hong Leong’s accelerated expansion was through takeovers, mergers, and joint ventures with the state and foreign multinationals. In 1982, Hong Leong purchased the Dao Heng Bank in Hong Kong to integrate its financial initiatives, as well as to exploit its relationship with the Kuwait Investment Office, a shareholder in the bank. The bid for the Malayan United Industries Bank (MUI Bank) in the 1990s was motivated by its large cash reserves, as well as its property assets and the need to incorporate a bank in Malaysia. Hong Leong paid US$370 million to Khoo Kay Peng for MUI Bank and US$250 million for MUI Finance in 1993. Immediately after the acquisition, MUI Bank was changed to Hong Leong Bank, listed on the stock exchange, and raised US$700 million. Hong Leong Credit and the Quek family held 61 per cent equity, with Bumiputra (5.3 per cent) and the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank, Chase Manhattan, and Citicorp holding 15 per cent in total. The subsidiary, Hong Leong Finance (Malaysia), also increased its capitalization from US$4 million to US$6 million in 1983 by using shares in a Bumiputra enterprise, Beraya Sdn. Bhd. Its counterpart, Hong Leong Finance (Singapore), similarly increased its capitalization from US$35 million to US$80 million in 1982. Sovran Industries was transformed into Hong Leong Credit Berhad and Fancy Tile Works into Hong Leong Industries Berhad.
Hong Leong Foundation is a charity body set up to cater to old and needy folks. In addition to the charity run, other projects undertaken by the foundation include the annual Student Assistance Programme where the foundation sponsors less fortunate schoolchildren in terms of uniforms, books, examination and school fees subsidies, as well as through an annual scholarship award programme for local undergraduate studies and diploma courses.

Quek, via his Hong Leong Group has emerged unscathed from the Asian Financial Crisis 1997, and his Hong Leong Bank Bhd. is the only other Chinese-controlled bank in Malaysia besides the also Chinese-controlled Public Bank, that has been allowed to remain one of the main anchor banks in Malaysia after the national bank merger exercise who also took over EON Bank Bhd. in 2011.

Beh Loo See

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Quek Suan Hiang
(郭全强, Guo Quanqiang, 1930–)
Industrialist, educationist, Malaysia

Quek Suan Hiang (also known as Quek Chee Hiang) is a well known entrepreneur and leader in the Chinese education movement in Malaysia. He was chairman of the United Chinese School Committees Association of Malaysia (UCSCAM) for more than a decade. He worked closely with the United Chinese School Teachers’ Association of Malaysia (UCSTAM) to further develop Chinese education in Malaysia and whilst working with them, established the Dong Jiao Zong Higher Learning Centre (董教总教育中心). Although Chinese education in Malaysia traditionally faced many unfavourable government policies, Quek was undeterred. He travelled extensively throughout Malaysia to garner support for the continued survival and development of Chinese education.

Although Quek’s ancestors hailed from Hainan in China, he was born in Segamat in Johor in 1930. He then attended Pay Fong Chinese Primary School in Malacca, but the outbreak of the Second World War and the Japanese invasion of Malaysia in 1941 curtailed the rest of his education in the country. He and his family consequently fled to China where he completed his secondary school education. He then gained admission into Peking University and studied politics. He eventually married his university classmate, Leung Lai Ming, and returned to Malaysia seven years later.

When Quek’s father passed away in 1956, he had to take over the family business in Malaysia. As a result, he settled down in Malaysia and ventured into business. With shrewd business acumen, hard work, and a pioneering spirit, Quek expanded the family business to encompass interests in tin mining, housing development, timber, oil palm, and the sundry goods trade. As a result, he became chairman of Kee Siang (Malaysia) Sdn. Bhd. and Suan H. Q. Holdings Sdn. Bhd. Due to his success in business, he became a pivotal figure in the Malaysian Chinese business community, and served in the Malaysian Chinese Chamber of Commerce.


Teh Hong Piow
(郑鸿标, Zheng Hongbiao, 1930–)
Banker, Malaysia

Teh Hong Piow was born on 14 March 1930 in Singapore and attended the Anglo-Chinese School there. He obtained three degrees in all: one at the Pacific Western University, and two honorary PhDs, one from Clayton University and the University of Malaya. He has been married to Tay Sock Noy since 1956 and they have four children. He joined the 3rd Singapore Company of the Boys’ Brigade and was active from 1947 to 1951, rising from rank and file to sergeant, before being appointed second lieutenant (now known as warrant officer). The Boys Brigade of Malaysia has been around for 124 years and Teh has attributed the moulding of his character and personality partly to the discipline training of the Boys’ Brigade.

Teh’s career in banking took off in 1950 when he was a bank officer at Singapore’s Overseas-Chinese Banking Corp. Ltd. Ten years later he moved on to Malayan Banking Bhd. where he was made a manager. Later in 1964, he was promoted to the position of general manager at the young age of thirty-four. He left Malayan Banking in 1966 to set up Public Bank, which currently has 241 domestic and three overseas branches. Public Bank is currently the country’s second largest lender and is setting its sights on regional markets. Teh was awarded the “Tan Sri” title in 1983, and numerous other titles of recognition including “Dato Sri” and “Dato”. His net worth is estimated by Forbes to be US$3 billion, making him the fourth richest in Malaysia and 287th in the world in 2008.

Teh has received numerous lists of awards and recognition in his own name and his institution’s for his outstanding achievements. In July 2007, Public Bank received the “Best Company in Malaysia for Corporate Governance 2007” award from Asset Magazine. Tan Sri Teh was also named “Best CEO in Malaysia 2004”, “Malaysia’s CEO of the Year 1998”, “Malaysia’s Business Achiever of the Year 1997”, “Ascan’s Most Astute Banker 1994”, etc. In August, Public Bank was named Alpha South East Asia’s “Best Bank in Malaysia” and also received the same award and “The Best Managed Company in Malaysia” awards for 2007 from FinanceAsia. It was also named for the ninth time by Euromoney to be the “Best Bank in Malaysia 2007”. In 2008, Teh received the Honorable Medal for National Contribution in appreciation of his contribution of one unit of five rooms at Hun Sen Prat Secondary School in Khun Prat, Srok Sontok, Thom Province, Cambodia. Prior to that, he was also awarded the Medal
recipients include the National Heart Institute Foundation, the Girl Guides Association of Malaysia, and the Kuala Lumpur Traffic Police Club.

Continuous improvement in productivity and efficiency has always been the cornerstone of Teh’s philosophy and strategies to leverage capability in expanding their multidelivery channels, and to remain the top Chinese-controlled anchor bank in Malaysia. He has demonstrated his personal and professional development of exceptionally high standards of growth, performance, and premiums.

Beli Loo See

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Teo Bak Kim

(张木钦. Zhang Muqin. 1937–)

Leader writer, Malaysia

Zhang Mu Qin, originally from Raoping, Guangdong (广东饶平), is one of the most prominent and prolific Chinese writers in Malaysia. Born on 31 October 1937 in Kota Tinggi, Johor, Zhang Mu Qin later migrated to another town in Johor, Skudai.

During the Japanese Occupation, he and his family settled in the nearby area of Tangkak, Johor. After the Second World War, Zhang’s father and uncle formed a joint venture to start a retail shop. However, the retail business was short-lived when Zhang’s father and a group of residents were suspected of being Communist supporters and arrested under the Emergency Ordinance.

Zhang’s father was imprisoned in Kluang Camp and was on the waiting list of detainees to be shipped to Chaoshou (潮州), China. However after three years, he was released and exiled to the city of Muar. The outcome of the sentencing resulted in, yet again, the uprooting of the entire Zhang family to Muar.

Zhang was an extremely hardworking and intense student. Being an ardent admirer of the famous poet, Li Bing Ren (李冰人), he immersed himself in Li’s collection by reading a roomful of Li’s books. Aware of his diligence, his teacher, Xie Qing Sheng (谢庆生), saw his potential and urged him to acquire the Malaysian Cambridge Education (MCE) certificate. After finishing secondary school, he spent two years preparing for the MCE exams. During this time, he polished his English reading and writing skills which proved to be valuable in his career later.

Zhang completed his primary and secondary education in Zhong Hua School, Muar (麻坡中化中学), in the 1950s. In one of his articles, he reminisced about his student activist days which were greatly influenced by the Chinese education leader, Lim Lian Geok (林连玉). In 1957 in his final year at high school, Zhang was actively involved in the student movement at the time. During this period, student movements were regarded as improper and quite unacceptable. Consequently, Zhang was nearly dismissed from high school. Fortunately with the intervention and goodwill of the board of directors, Zhang was let off with a stern warning.

Armed with the MCE certification, Zhang stepped into the working world as a temporary teacher for a short period of time. When Namyang Siang Pan conducted