

Official launch of The Singapore Biographical Database (SBDB) of Chinese personalities

Singapore, 01 February 2019

ANNEX A

PROFILE HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SINGAPORE BIOGRAPHICAL DATABASE (SBDB) OF CHINESE PERSONALITIES WEBSITE

S/N	Name & Brief Description	Detailed Write-Up
1	See Hoot Kee (1793-1847) (Hokkien) Businessman and Chinese community leader	See Hoot Kee (薛佛记) was a pioneer in the Hokkien dialect community in Singapore. See ran a tin mining business at the Lingle area in Malacca and arrived in Singapore in 1826 to extend his business. He was known for his philanthropic contributions to the Hokkien community in Singapore, and was usually one of the biggest donors to building funds of schools, temples and cemeteries (such as Sin Heng San Teng [恒山亭]). See had six sons and eleven daughters. He returned to Malacca when he turned 46, and was head of the Cheng Hoon Teng [青云亭] until his demise eight years later on 26 September 1847. Cheng Hoon Teng is a Chinese temple practising the three doctrinal systems of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, and is the oldest functioning temple in Malaysia today.
2	Tan Tock Seng (1798-1850) (Hokkien) Businessman and philanthropist	Tan Tock Seng (陈笃生) was an entrepreneur and philanthropist of Hokkien descent. He started out as a humble vegetable seller and rose to become one of Singapore's most eminent philanthropists and a leader of the Chinese community. He was known to take care of burial expenses for destitute Chinese, with his most famous philanthropic gesture a donation of \$5,000 towards the building of the Chinese Pauper Hospital (later renamed Tan Tock Seng Hospital) in 1844. He was also the first Asian to be appointed Justice of the Peace. Tan's role in helping the early Chinese immigrants settle disputes earned him the title "Captain of the Chinese".
3	Hoo Ah Kay (1816-1880) (Cantonese) Businessman and civil servant	Hoo Ah Kay (胡亚基), also known as Whampoa, was a prominent Chinese businessman who ran Whampoa & Co., expanding it after the death of his father. With an uncommon mastery of English, Hoo was the first Asian member, and within a few years became the first and only Chinese to be an extraordinary member in the Executive Legislative Council. He also served as the honorary treasurer of the first Committee of Management of Tan Tock Seng Hospital in 1844 and held positions of Consul of Russia, China and Japan. The honorary C.M.G. (Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George) was bestowed upon him by Queen Victoria for his great contributions to society. Hoo was also known for his Whampoa House at Serangoon Road with its expansive gardens. Whampoa's Gardens was opened to the public during Chinese New Year and was a popular place for gatherings during that season.
4	Lim Nee Soon (1879-1936) (Teochew) Businessman and philanthropist	Lim Nee Soon (林义顺) was a planter and general merchant who founded his own company, Lim Nee Soon & Co in 1911. A rubber and pineapple planter and rubber-factory owner, Lim's businesses were a booming success. Lim played an important role in the development of rubber plantations in Nee Soon (now known as Yishun) by acting as a consultant to other rubber-estate owners. His investments in the pineapple industry also won him the nickname "Pineapple King". A respected community leader and one of the most influential businessmen of the day, he was made a member of the Welfare Board in 1917 and a justice of the peace in 1918.
5	Tan Kim Seng (1805-1864) (Hokkien) Businessman, philanthropist and Justice of the Peace	Tan Kim Seng (陈金生) was a wealthy trader and property owner with business interests in tin. A prominent philanthropist, Tan left behind memorials of his philanthropy in Singapore and Malacca. This includes a donation of \$13,000 to the government for the construction of Singapore's first reservoir and waterworks. A justice of peace, his opinions on Chinese issues were highly valued by the British government. Besides his activities in Singapore, Tan was also a well-regarded member of the Chinese community in Malacca.
6	Seah Eu Chin (1805-1883) (Teochew) Businessman and founder of Ngee Ann Kongsi	Seah Eu Chin (余有进) was a wealthy Teochew merchant who made his fortune from the cultivation of pepper and gambier. A prominent member of the Chinese community in early colonial Singapore, Seah is also well known as the founder of Ngee Ann Kongsi. As an elite member of the Chinese community, Seah interacted frequently with the colonial government and was naturalised as a British subject in 1853. Seah was frequently appointed as grand juror and was often referred cases from Chinese suitors, playing a mediating role during instances of conflict among the Chinese, such as the 1854 Hokkien Teochew Riots. In recognition of his efforts, the British government appointed Seah as a justice of the peace, and he was elevated to the position of honorary magistrate in 1872.

7	<p>Lim Loh (1852-1929) (Hokkien) Builder (Lim Bo Seng's father)</p>	<p>Lim Loh (林路), also known as Lim Chee Gee (林志义), 林露, or 林云龙, was born in Nan'an County in Fujian Province, China. He arrived at Penang in 1880 and moved to Singapore a few months later. He was a pioneer building contractor who built several well-known buildings like the Victoria Memorial Hall, Old Parliament House, Goodwood Park Hotel and Hong San See Temple. Besides being in the trading and construction businesses, he also owned a rubber plantation that was then bounded by Braddell, Woskel and Upper Serangoon roads; two brick factories and a biscuit factory around Braddell Heights. He had six wives, 19 sons, 10 of whom were adopted, and nine daughters. War hero Lim Bo Seng was Lim Loh's 11th child and first son. Lim Loh passed away at 77 on 11 December 1929.</p>
8	<p>Chew Joo Chiat (1857-1926) (Hokkien) Businessman. Street named after him</p>	<p>Chew Joo Chiat (周如切), also known as the "King of Katong", owned several parcels of land in the Joo Chiat and Katong districts. In the 19th century, land prices in these districts had been cheap as the areas were undeveloped. After World War I, more people bought land in Joo Chiat and Katong and developed them into coconut plantations. Land prices soared after the nearby Geylang area became a business district. During this time, Chew sold off his land and made a fortune. For his contributions to the local community, several places were eventually named after him, such as Joo Chiat Road, Joo Chiat Street, Joo Chiat Avenue, Joo Chiat Place, Joo Chiat Terrace, Joo Chiat Lane and the Joo Chiat district itself. He passed away in February 1926.</p>
9	<p>Teo Eng Hock (1871-1957) (Hokkien) Rubber tycoon and one of the founders of the Chinese Revolutionary League branch in Singapore</p>	<p>Teo Eng Hock (张永福) was a revolutionist, with ancestral roots in Raoping County in Guangdong province, China. He invested in rubber plantations during the early days and established a rubber shoe factory. His domination of the rubber shoe industry, along with Tan Kah Kee, in the early 20th century, provided him with the finances to support his revolutionary activities.</p> <p>He supported Sun Yat Sen and his revolutionary activities. Together with Tan Chor Lam, Teo set up and was the editor of the newspaper Thoe Lam Jit Poh. The newspaper folded after two years due to financial issues. Despite this, Teo continued to share his revolutionary ideas through the Sin Chew Reading Room (星洲书报社).</p> <p>His bungalow, Wan Qing Yuan, also served as the headquarters of the revolutionists. In 1906, Sun Yat Sen established a Tongmenghui branch in Singapore with Teo as the deputy chairman. At the same time, Teo set up another newspaper, Union Times. However, control of the newspaper fell into other hands three months later, and the newspaper became an anti-revolution paper instead. Sun Yat Sen returned to Singapore from Japan in June 1906 to reorganise the Singapore branch and Teo became its chairman. In 1907, together with Tan Chor Lam and Lim Nee Soon, Teo again launched a newspaper, Chung Shing Yit Pao. He also established and headed the Tung Teh Reading Room (同德书报社) that year.</p> <p>Teo's daughter, Teo Soon Kim was the first female lawyer to be called to the Singapore Bar.</p>
10	<p>Tan Boo Liat (1874-1934) (Hokkien) Businessman and Chinese community leader</p>	<p>Tan Boo Liat (陈武烈) was the great-grandson of Tan Tock Seng and grandson of Tan Kim Ching. Like his great-grandfather and grandfather, he was a leader in the Hokkien community and was one of three key figures heading the renovation of Tian Hock Keng Temple (天福宫) in 1906. He was also one of the founding members of the Straits Chinese British Association, established in 1900. He was also conferred a title by Thai royalty. Tan helped to establish the Singapore Chinese Girls' School in 1899 and was one of the trustees of the Anglo-Chinese Free School. Tan was also a member of the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance (中国同盟会) and contributed to the Chinese revolution, hosting Sun Yat Sen when he stopped over in Singapore en route to China after the success of the revolution.</p>
11	<p>Eu Tong Sen (1877-1941) (Hokkien) Businessman and philanthropist, street named after him</p>	<p>Eu Tong Sen (余东璇) was a businessman and philanthropist who established his fortune in Malaya, and subsequently Hong Kong and southern China. The foundation of his business empire was established through tin mining and rubber plantations. As an influential member and leader of his community, Eu was engaged in many social issues, donating to causes such as education and being a leader of the Anti-Opium Movement during the early 1900s. Eu also contributed financially to causes in China, including the Royalist reform movement of Kang You Wei, disaster relief efforts, children's welfare and anti-Japanese resistance during the Sino-Japanese war. Today, he is most famously known for the Eu Yan Sang chain of medicinal shops, which is the only business that survived after his business empire disintegrated after his death.</p>

12	<p>Tan Chor Lam (1884-1971) (Hokkien) Businessman and one of the founders of the Chinese Revolutionary League branch in Singapore</p>	<p>Tan Chor Lam (陈楚楠, also known as Tan Lian Chye, 陈连才), was the youngest son of Tan Tye, a wealthy merchant. Along with his childhood friend and neighbour, Teo Eng Hock, Tan Chor Lam was noted for his contributions towards the 1911 Chinese revolution. Both Tan and Teo set up a newspaper, Thoe Lam Jit Poh (图南日报), in 1904 to advocate revolutionary ideals. They first met Sun Yat Sen in 1905 through both the newspaper and an introduction from Yau Lit, and became Sun's supporters.</p> <p>When a branch of Zhongguo Tongmenghui (中国同盟会, Chinese Revolutionary Alliance) was set up in Singapore, Tan was elected as the president. A few months later, in a second election, he was elected as the vice-president and played an integral role in supporting Sun Yat Sen's revolution. After the success of the revolution in 1911, Tan held various appointments in the Chinese government, such as Head of the Office for Industry in the Fujian Provincial Government. He gradually relinquished his involvement in China in 1932.</p> <p>Tan Chor Lam had played a role in female education in Singapore. He founded the Nanyang Girls' School with Teo Eng Hock, Chuang Hee Tsuan and others in 1917, and sat on the board of directors of the school for several years. He was also on the advisory committee to the British Military Administration in 1945. After World War II, he led a retired life largely focusing on his family and attended activities of United Chinese Library occasionally till his passing on 22 September 1971, aged 87.</p>
13	<p>Neo Tiew (1884-1975) (Hokkien) Early pioneer of Lim Chu Kang. Streets named after him</p>	<p>Neo Tiew (梁宙), also known as 梁后宙, was born and raised in Nan'an County in Fujian Province, China. Due to his impoverished circumstances, he left home for Singapore in 1897. Among his many jobs, he worked in a provision shop, started a bullock cart business, and spent about two years in Selangor as rubber plantation supervisor. In 1912, his uncle handed over his brick-kiln business to him.</p> <p>He became acquainted with landowner Alexander William Cashin, who was to become one of his biggest clients. In 1914, Cashin invited him to clear and develop his land at Lim Chu Kang. Together with 800 men, Neo Tiew planted pineapples, coconut and rubber trees. He eventually became the headman of Ama Keng Village, and led in the setting up of Kay Wah School (present day Qihua Primary School) and a maternity clinic at Lim Chu Kang.</p> <p>Neo Tiew was one of the founding members of the Singapore Lam Ann Association, and very active in the anti-Japanese resistance movement before World War II. Unfortunately, during the Japanese Occupation, while he and his fourth son managed to escape to China, 35 of his family members were massacred.</p> <p>After the war, Neo Tiew returned to Singapore, rebuilt his life and established the Nam Hoe and Thong Hoe Villages (both named after the provision shops he opened there). The latter had a population of 10,000 by 1953. He was active in community work, clearing undeveloped areas and maintained law and order in the villages under his care.</p> <p>He was conferred the Order of the British Empire in 1954 and honoured by King George VI with a certificate in recognition of his "many years of loyal and valuable work for Singapore and his community". For his commitment to community work, he received a commendation certificate from the Singapore Government. Neo Tiew Road, Neo Tiew Crescent and Neo Tiew Lane are named after him.</p> <p>He passed away aged 91 on 13 November 1975. He had six wives, 16 sons and 12 daughters.</p>

14	<p>Tan Yeok Seong (1900-1984) (Hokkien) Chinese scholar and businessman</p>	<p>Tan Yeok Seong (陈育崧) was a historian specialising in Southeast Asia and a collector of books and historical artefacts. Educated at Amoy University (now known as Xiamen University, China), Tan was well versed in both English and Chinese. With experience gained as an inspector of Chinese schools with the Education Department of the Straits Settlements in Penang and a study trip to Shanghai, Tan ventured into the publishing business. In 1935, he set up Nanyang Book Company with some friends. In 1938, Tan left his government post and concentrated on producing textbooks that catered to the needs of Chinese schools in Malaya. He became the supervising director of Nanyang Book Company in 1941.</p> <p>He donated his private collection of books and periodicals to the National Library of Singapore in 1964. He passed away on 1 April 1984, aged 81.</p>
15	<p>Chou Sing Chu (1905-1986) (Sam Kiang) Founder of Popular Book Co.</p>	<p>Chou Sing Chu (周星衢) was born in Shanghai, China. His family was originally from Pinghu City, Zhejiang Province. Founder of the Popular Bookstore, Chou was also recognised as a leader in the Chinese publishing industry in Southeast Asia. Due to impoverished circumstances, Chou only received three years of education before becoming an apprentice in a bookstore. His affinity with books was due to his time spent at the bookstore. Chou came to Singapore when he was 19 and set up the Cheng Hing Company in 1924. The company imported new year pictures and western paintings from Shanghai.</p> <p>In 1934, he established World Book Company to publish and distribute Chinese books. Popular Book Company was established in 1936 as the retail arm of World Book Company. Chou expanded his business to Hong Kong in 1949, setting up the World Publishing Company and later, Educational Publishing House. These two publishing houses played a vital role in promoting Chinese culture for youths. Popular Holdings Limited was listed in the Singapore Exchange in 1997. It is the largest bookstore chain selling bilingual and educational products. Chou's youngest son, Chou Cheng Ngok, established the Chou Sing Chu Foundation in 2004 to continue his father's spirit in promoting Chinese language and education.</p>
16	<p>Lim Bo Seng (1909-1944) (Hokkien) Businessman and war hero (Son of Lim Loh)</p>	<p>Lim Bo Seng (林谋盛) was a prominent Hokkien businessman who undertook active leadership in anti-Japanese activities during World War II and is recognised as a local war hero in Singapore.1 Lim was part of the British resistance group, Force 136, and was trained by the British for intelligence work to coordinate guerrilla operations in support of the planned British invasion of Malaya. Lim's whereabouts and espionage involvement were betrayed to the Japanese and was caught by the Japanese while fleeing and eventually died in Batu Gajah Jail, Perak. In February 1946, the Chinese Nationalist government posthumously awarded him the rank of major-general. A public memorial dedicated to Lim was erected at the Esplanade and on 28 December 2010, the Lim Bo Seng Memorial was gazetted as a national monument.</p>
17	<p>Liu Kang (1911-2004) (Hokkien) Artist</p>	<p>Liu Kang (刘抗), also known as Liu Kai, was a pioneer oil painter who was key in establishing a local style in Singapore's visual arts. Having received his art education from the best of both hemispheres, Liu translated these influences and incorporated local Southeast Asian flavours into his work to create the distinct Nanyang style. As a renowned artist, Liu Kang not only produced a wide portfolio of works but also influenced the next generation of artists and painters in Singapore through his various positions in art schools and through his leadership in the Association of Chinese Artists of Singapore and the Singapore Art Society.</p>
18	<p>Teng Mah Seng (1915-1992) (Hokkien) Composer, musician and lyricist</p>	<p>Teng Mah Seng (丁马成) was a musician, lyricist and composer. A father of eight, Teng was born in December 1915 in Fujian Province, China and came to Singapore in 1935. In 1945, he started an import-export business.</p> <p>Teng's first song was called The Spring Light. In the 1970s, he organised the first Asian International Nanyin Conference, which sparked a revival of interest in nanyin. He was later appointed the president of the Siong Leng Musical Association.</p> <p>Teng was hailed as the saviour of nanyin music, an ancient form of Chinese opera music that dates back to the 7th-century Tang Dynasty. Teng is credited not only for reviving nanyin, but also for taking it to greater heights by injecting fresh elements to make it more attractive to contemporary audiences, as well as introducing it to the international arts scene. For his artistic contributions, Teng was awarded the Cultural Medallion for Music in 1988.</p> <p>Teng passed away in 1992 but left behind a rich legacy. The beautiful tunes of his nanyin songs continue to mesmerise many in Singapore and around the world.</p>