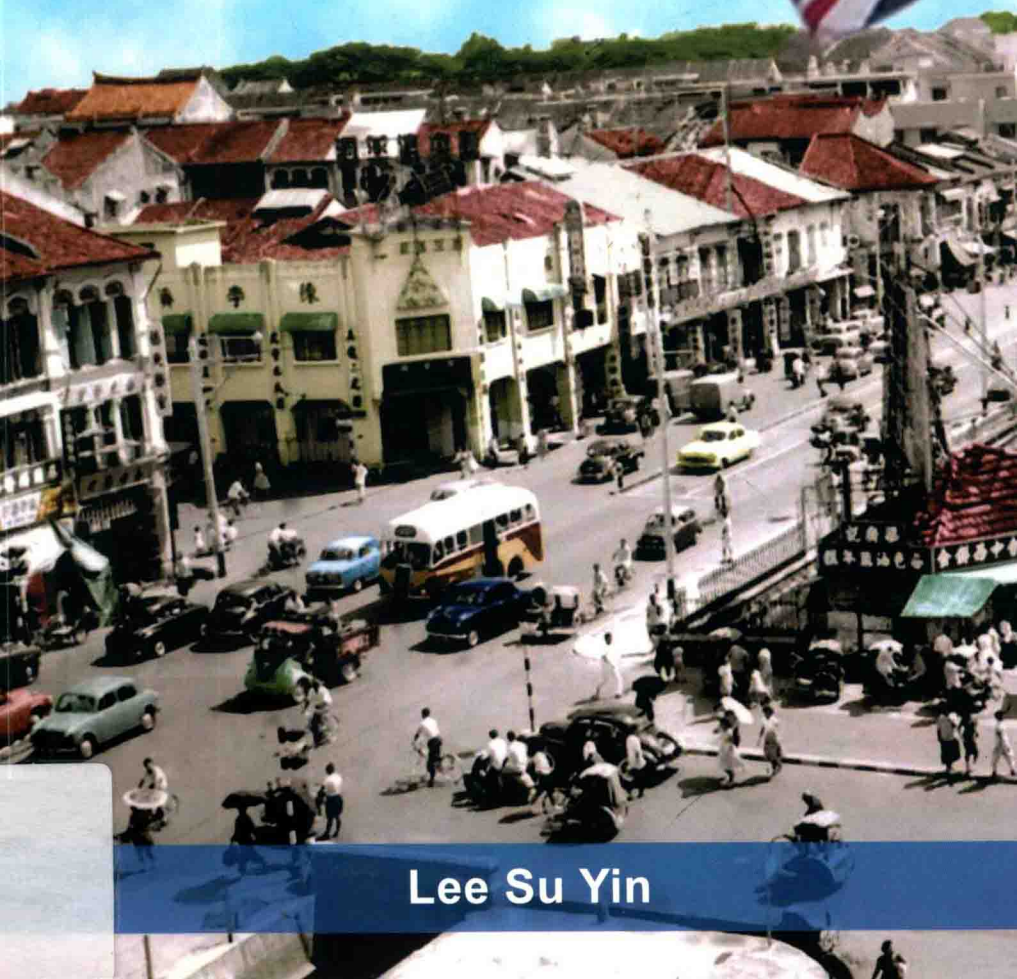


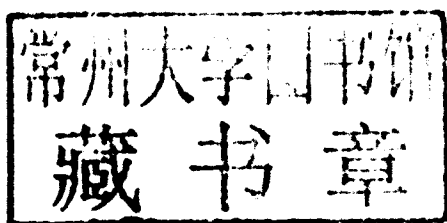
BRITISH POLICY AND THE CHINESE IN SINGAPORE, 1939 TO 1955

*THE PUBLIC SERVICE CAREER
OF TAN CHIN TUAN*



Lee Su Yin

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Front cover

Caption: Chinatown, 1955

Source: Andrew Yip Collection

Back cover

Caption: Deputy President of the Singapore Legislative Council, Tan Chin Tuan, signs documents in the presence of Governor Sir Franklin Gimson

Source: David Ng Collection

Courtesy of National Archives, Singapore

DEDICATION

For my dear friend
Mr. Lee Hah Ing
(1914-2009)

*It is my joy in life to find
At every turning of the road,
The strong arm of a comrade kind
To help me onward with my load.
And since I have no gold to give,
And love alone must make amends,
My only prayer is, while I live, —
God make me worthy of my friends!*

Frank Dempster Sherman, "It is my joy in life".

FOREWORD

Lee Su Yin's original and well-researched study offers a fascinating and rare insight into the evolution of British policies in the 1950s towards an inclusive Singapore citizenship, "independent of British nationality", franchise rights and the use of multiple languages including Chinese for the bulk of the China-born community – the major ethnic group in the island. She shows how these concessions and changes in the British administration's "Chinese policy" developed almost parallel to the public career of Tan Chin Tuan, a Straits Chinese banker and a loyal British subject, who was greatly trusted and liked by the British, absorbed into the Executive Council and who played a crucial role as a mediator in bringing about this change of policy. As the Deputy President of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and their nominated representative on the Legislative Council, Tan was handpicked by the British administration to assist in the postwar reconstruction of Singapore. He was eventually appointed Deputy President of the Legislative Council, second in protocol to only the Governor who was President.

Even-handed in her approach, Su Yin presents objectively the struggle of the China-born Chinese for franchise rights, for British patronage, and their contest with their "Straits Chinese" counterparts for prestige, influence and public recognition within the Chinese community. British policy-makers, however, were sceptical of their loyalty and wished to wean them away from their pro-China sentiments. Regarded highly by his kinsmen, clan association, and business associates, Tan also mediated between the two major factions in the Chinese community.

In the early postwar constitutional reforms of 1948 and 1951 for Singapore, in which a partially elected legislature was introduced, the British policy-makers adopted British nationality as a measure of citizenship as well as a franchise right. Only British subjects could stand for elections, or vote, and "non British citizens" were excluded from exercising political rights on the newly established postwar councils. As the conditions for this citizenship were rather stringent including a willingness to declare exclusive allegiance to Britain, most of the China-born Chinese in Singapore refused to apply for this citizenship, or even

register as voters. They adopted an ambivalent attitude, as they preferred to hedge their position by maintaining a dual status – as immigrants in the colony and as nationals of China. Although Tan's nominated position as the SCCC's representative on the Legislative Council helped fill the vacancy temporarily, the pro-China lobby challenged the right of Tan a local-born Chinese to represent Chinese interests by asserting that the "local-born" had only a "colonial education".

Ultimately, the question of franchise rights for the China-born population were resolved due to an external event, the fall of China to the communists in 1949, and Britain's decision to grant partial self-government in April 1955. Tan and the SCCC had been urging the British authorities to institute a form of Singapore citizenship that could be conferred on non-British Chinese so that they could participate in the 1955 elections, arguing that many of the 250,000 China-born Chinese in Singapore did not consider a China dominated by the communist government their home anymore, and should be given citizenship and the franchise. Also, the 1955 elections saw the electorate voting in candidates of left-wing and anti-colonial political parties, such as the Labour Front and the People's Action Party (PAP), which supported these rights.

In 1956-57, despite misgivings about the reception of the Malay-dominated Federation of Malaya government to these demands, the British authorities decided to give in by introducing a new inclusive Singapore citizenship, franchise rights and multiple languages including Chinese in the Legislative Council. Amidst the 1955 elections, Tan Chin Tuan decided to withdraw from politics and from public office to devote his time to business affairs, especially to the Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation, of which he was managing director. He went on to become "an outstanding leader of the business community, whose ideas and actions... have had the most significant and lasting impact on the economic life of Singapore and Malaysia," according to a citation marking the 50th year of his leadership of the OCBC.

Su Yin's study fills an important gap in the studies of Singapore's history, as hardly any account has narrated these developments including Tan's role to show how Singapore's China-born Chinese became Singapore citizens in such large numbers, and how they then went on to exercise their franchise rights by voting in the left-wing PAP, a communist united front organization comprising many Chinese-educated candidates, into power in 1959. I enjoyed reading her book, and find her conclusions, interpretation and analysis very perceptive. It is a pioneering work that

makes a significant contribution to Singapore's history. I would highly recommend it not only to students and teachers, but also to the general reader.

Dr Cheah Boon Kheng
(Retired Professor of History,
Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang)
5th May 2010

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is long overdue.

It started out as a thesis I successfully presented to the National University of Singapore (NUS) for the degree of Master of Arts in History in 1995, under the painstaking supervision of Dr Paul H. Kratoska. Since then, the work has been revised and updated as new materials become available.

Thanks to Dr Kratoska, I came to know the late Tan Sri (Dr) Tan Chin Tuan (P.S.M., C.B.E., Hon. LLD., Hon. D. Litt, J.P.), to whom I am indebted beyond words for he took me into his confidence and granted me access to his “world” and the “world of pre-David Marshall politics”. Through these meetings, the Tan Sri gave me an opportunity to discover, understand and in the process, appreciate the man behind the public figure. Ms Chew Gek Khim, grand-daughter of the Tan Sri and the late Ms Tan Kheng Choo, daughter of the Tan Sri, were most helpful and encouraging, and my original work had benefitted from their assistance and cooperation.

Dr Leon Comber, as editor, is encouraging as he is erudite. I cannot think of anyone more eminently qualified for this role than Dr Comber because of the vast, insightful first-hand knowledge he has, among other things, of the war and the postwar period, of Chinese culture and society (many may not know that his first degree was in Chinese studies), and in publishing. He was unstinting and generous in sharing his knowledge and experience with me, and his comments were invaluable. I am profoundly grateful.

I wish to thank Ian Pringle, my publisher, for the confidence he has in my work, and for his support in publishing the book under the Talisman imprint.

A big thank you also goes to Professor Cheah Boon Kheng, distinguished scholar of Malaysian and Singapore history, who very kindly consented to write the Foreword.

The research work was conducted mainly at the Central Library of the National University of Singapore, the National Archives of Singapore, the Nanyang Technological University/National Institute of Education Library and Arkib Negara Malaysia. I would like to acknowledge gratefully the

assistance and cooperation extended to me by these institutions.

My family members were with me throughout the ups-and-downs of my writing process. These are people I am richly blessed with for they have always been there for me.

Needless to say, whatever errors and shortcomings there are, I alone remain responsible.

Lee Su Yin
Singapore
2010

ABBREVIATIONS*

BMA	British Military Administration
CCB	Chinese Commercial Bank Limited
CID	Criminal Intelligence Department/Criminal Investigation Department
CJA	Council of Joint Action
CPA	Communist Party of Australia
CPI	Communist Party of India
FCRFSS	Federation of China Relief Fund of the South Seas
HHB	Ho Hong Bank Limited
JMA	Japanese Military Administration
KMT	<i>Kuomintang</i>
MCA	Malayan Chinese Association
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MDU	Malayan Democratic Union
MNP	Malay Nationalist Party
MPAJA	Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army
MPU	Malayan Planning Unit
OCA	Oversea-Chinese Association
OCB	Oversea-Chinese Bank Limited
OCBC	Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation Limited
PAP	People's Action Party
PMCJA	Pan-Malayan Council of Joint Action
PUTERA	Pusat Tenaga Rakyat
SCBA	Straits Chinese British Association

* Wherever possible, the original names and those which are well-established in local usage (for example, Tan Chin Tuan instead of *Chen Zhenchuan* and Singapore instead of *Xinjiapo*), are used. *Pinyin* is used only when the English or popular local names of individuals, organisations or places are not known.

SCCC	Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce
SCRFC	Singapore China Relief Fund Committee
SEAC	Southeast Asia Command
SOE	Special Operations Executive
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation
WFDY	World Federation of Democratic Youth

Biographical Data of Tan Chin Tuan*

1908 Born in Singapore to Tan Cheng Siong (General Manager of Oversea-Chinese Bank Ltd and Hokkien community leader) and Lee Guay Eng (21 November).

1922 Tan Cheng Siong passed away (19 October).

1923 Completed Senior Cambridge and joined Senior Commercial Class at Anglo Chinese School, Singapore.

1925 Completed Senior Commercial and joined Chinese Commercial Bank Limited as a clerk (1 March).

1926 Married Helene Wee, former classmate and sixth daughter of Wee Theam Seng, General Manager of Chinese Commercial Bank Limited (18 September). They had one son and two daughters.

1927 Secured judgement of the Supreme Court of the Straits Settlements of Singapore by which Charles Clement Dunman was appointed the new Trustee of the will of Tan Cheng Siong (26 May).

1932 When the Chinese Commercial Bank Limited merged with Ho Hong Bank Limited and Oversea-Chinese Bank Limited to become the Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation Limited (OCBC), Tan was appointed Liquidator of Chinese Commercial Bank Limited (31 October).

1933 Appointed Manager of OCBC (Properties Department) and concurrently Manager of Eastern Realty Company Limited, a newly incorporated subsidiary of the OCBC.

1937 Appointed Director of Overseas Assurance Corporation Limited (2 March).

Designated Treasurer of the Straits Chinese China Relief Fund Committee.

* The dollar figures in this book are in Singapore dollars unless otherwise stated.

-
- 1938 Appointed President of the Anglo Chinese School Old Boys' Association, a position Tan held till 1940.
-
- 1939 Promoted Managing Director of Eastern Realty Company Limited in April.
- Appointed Committee Member of the Straits Settlements (Singapore) Association (29 June).
- Appointed Committee Member of the Straits Chinese British Association (SCBA).
- Appointed Singapore Municipal Commissioner (29 September). Tan's tenure was till 28 November 1941.
- Designated Committee Member of the Singapore Branch (Chinese section) Malayan Patriotic Fund.
-
- 1940 Nominated member of the Panel of Special Jurors of the Straits Settlements.
-
- 1941 Nominated Municipal Commission representative on the Passive Defence Council.
- While on holiday in Australia, Tan made enquiries about keeping OCBC's records with the Bank of New South Wales Limited (OCBC's principal agent) and other banks there. Tan rushed back to Singapore when he learnt of the Japanese attack.
- Appointed Divisional Commander of Air Raid Precaution.
- Appointed member of the Evacuation Committee to handle the evacuation of British subjects of Chinese descent from Singapore.
-
- 1942 Colonial Treasurer appealed to Tan to find men to help transport currency notes in the Treasury vaults to the incinerators for disposal. The objective was to prevent the Japanese from using the money. Tan turned to Tan Kah Kee for help and managed to rally a substantial number of volunteers for the task.
- Appointed joint Managing Director of OCBC and held the Power of Attorney to take charge of the bank's overseas operations (2 February).
- Left Singapore on instructions from the bank (4 February).
- Appointed Committee Member of the Malayan Association (Australia).
-

1943 From Australia, travelled by steamer to Colombo. Eventually arrived in Bombay in September and registered the OCBC headquarters there.

Appointed Vice-President of the Oversea-Chinese Association (OCA) of India.

1944 In Calcutta, Tan was asked to register as a foreigner under the Registration of Foreigners Act 1939. He protested against the application of the Act to Chinese British subjects.

Helene Wee and children joined Tan in India, their passage aided by John Galvin of the British Secret Service.

1945 Appointed President of the Malayan Association (India) (January).

Re-registered the OCBC headquarters in Bombay (30 January).

Accorded priority travel back to Singapore with three British bankers: R.A. Stuart of the Hong Kong Bank Limited, J. H. Kortright of the Chartered Bank Limited and Stanley Stocks of the Mercantile Bank Limited (14 September).

Appointed sole Managing Director of OCBC (1 October).

Appointed to the British Military Administration (BMA) Advisory Council.

Assisted the colonial government in the distribution of new postwar currency.

1946 Appointed President of the Singapore Ratepayers' Association.

Appointed to the Governor's Advisory Council.

Appointed to the Committee for the Reconstitution of the Singapore Legislative Council.

1947 Appointed to the Finance and Revenue Committee of the colonial government of Singapore (1 January).

Appointed Justice of the Peace (1 January).

Re-registered the OCBC headquarters in Singapore (17 April).

1948 Nominated Vice-President of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce (SCCC) in February.

Appointed Unofficial Member of the Legislative Council (SCCC representative), a position Tan held till 1955.

Appointed Unofficial Member of the Executive Council from 1948 to 1955.

Sat on the Board of Currency Exchange, Select Committee on the draft Debtor and Creditor (Occupation Period) Bill, and the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council.

Appointed member of the Board of Visiting Justices for the Colony of Singapore for the month of July.

Elected by the Justices of the Peace to sit on the Committee of Appeals, Cinematograph Films.

Appointed by the Governor as a member of the Singapore Harbour Board for 3 years.

1949 Appointed member of the Select Committee on Schedule to the Emergency (Travel Restriction) Regulations.

Appointed President of the Royal Singapore Island Club, a position Tan held till 1951.

1950 Appointed Director of Raffles Hotel Limited (7 July).

Appointed Director of Fraser and Neave Limited (14 October).

Appointed Director of Robinsons and Company Limited (9 December).

1951 For distinguished public service in the Executive and Legislative Council, was made a Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (Civil Division) by King George the Sixth (1 January).

Appointed member of the Police Pay Code Committee (14 March).

First and only Asian to be appointed Deputy President of the Legislative Council (23 April).

Appointed Director of Malayan Breweries Limited (16 May).

Appointed Deputy Chairman of Overseas Assurance Corporation Limited.

Appointed Member of the Management Committee of the Singapore Turf Club on 9 October, a position Tan held till 21 July 1954.

1952 Appointed to head the Select Committee on Elections.

Helped to resolve the Postal and Telecommunications Uniformed Staff Union strike (May).

1953 Awarded the Queen's Coronation Medal in recognition of Tan's services to the Legislative and Executive Councils (2 June).

Appointed member of the Rendel Constitutional Commission (21 July).

1954 Appointed Director of Straits Trading Company Limited, the first Chinese to sit on its Board (1 June).

1955 Appointed Chairman of Raffles Hotel Limited (5 January).
Stepped down from public office (April).

1957 Appointed Chairman of Robinsons and Company Limited (28 February).

Appointed Chairman of Fraser and Neave Limited (24 July).

Appointed Chairman of Malayan Breweries Limited (26 July).

1960 Made personal contributions of \$100,000 over three successive years to establish the Tan Chin Tuan Fund at the University of Singapore. To date, the total market value of this capital sum has appreciated beyond \$15 million.

1962 Appointed Director of Great Eastern Life Assurance Company Limited (5 November).

1963 Rejoined as Committee Member of the Singapore Turf Club (10 February 1963), sitting till 21 March 1986.

1964 Trip to the Taipei Film Festival. Decided not to board the plane which subsequently crashed (20 June).

1965 Presided over the first meeting of the Association of Banks in Malaysia and Singapore.

Appointed member of the Board of Commissioners of Currency, Malaysia.

Lee Guay Eng – Mrs Tan Cheng Siong – passed away (4 March).

Acquired South Pacific Brewery/Guinea Brewery for Malayan Breweries Limited (22 April).

Appointed Chairman of Straits Trading Company Limited (10 June).

1966 Appointed Concurrent Vice-Chairman and Managing Director of OCBC (28 January).

Appointed Vice-Chairman of Eastern Realty Company Limited (May).

Appointed Chairman of Eastern Realty Company Limited (June).

Appointed Concurrent Chairman and Managing Director of OCBC (24 June).

1967 Appointed Director of Wearne Brothers Limited (21 April).

1969 Appointed Director of Killinghall Tin (21 February) and Hongkong Tin (21 February).

Appointed Director of United Malacca Rubber Estates Berhad (1 March).

Appointed Director of Development Bank of Singapore Limited (17 March).

Appointed Chairman of Great Eastern Life Assurance Company Limited (1 June).

Appointed Chairman of Overseas Assurance Corporation Limited (12 August).

Conferred the order of the *Panglima Setia Mahkota* which carries the title of "Tan Sri" by the Yang di Pertuan Agong of Malaysia. This honour was accepted with the approval of the Singapore government (31 August).

Retired as Chairman of Raffles Hotel Limited (1 September) but remained as Director till 27 July 1978.

1970 Appointed Director of Leong Hin San Sendirian Berhad in Malaysia (18 April 1970), retiring on 21 June 1976.

Resigned as Director of Development Bank of Singapore Limited (21 August).

Resigned as Director of Killinghall Tin (29 September) and Hongkong Tin (29 September).
