

LIM LIAN GEOK

SOUL OF THE MALAYSIAN CHINESE



Edited by
Kua Kia Soong

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PUSTAKA PERDANA



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IG Cultural Development Centre

2010



LLG CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

LLG Cultural Development Centre Berhad was registered as a non-profit company in the year 1995. It started as a fund set up by the fifteen major Malaysian Chinese organisations on 28 December 1985 in memory of Lim Lian Geok, former Chairman of the United Chinese School Teachers' Association of Malaysia, exactly ten days after he was laid to rest.

The Centre's core values are:

Upholding the principles of democracy, human rights and respect for individual and ethnic diversity;

Cherishing solidarity, friendship and cooperation.

The Centre's objectives are:

To commemorate the life and achievements of Lim Lian Geok through the construction of a memorial hall; publication of books, magazines and journals; talks, seminars and exhibitions, etc.;

To conduct or sponsor research on culture and education, to publish and disseminate the research outcomes and reference materials;

To promote and sponsor activities which are conducive to mutual understanding, unity and the development of cultures of the various ethnic communities in Malaysia, as a basis for the progress and development of our society.

Acknowledgements

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Mr Li Yaa. We thank him for his dedication and
commitment to Lim Lian Geok scholarship.
We also thank Mr Yang Pei Keng for translating the bulk of
the documents in this publication and Ms Kua Yu Sim for
proofreading the manuscript*

*“To create, enjoy and promote one’s culture is the sacred and
inviolable right of every ethnic community. Our country expects us to
fulfill our duty to show undivided patriotism. This we will abide by
unquestioningly. However, if the government were to use its political
power to abolish the Chinese schools, we will have no choice but to
resort to legitimate and lawful opposition...”*

- Lim Lian Geok

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Website: www.llgcultural.com

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Kua Kia Soong

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Yap Yoke Phooi

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Glossary

CSTA	Chinese School Teachers' Association 教师公会
Dong Jiao Zong	UCSCA and UCSTA 董教总
Dong Zong	UCSCA 董总
F. M.	Federation of Malaya 马来亚联合邦
Jiao Zong	UCSTA 教总
KLCSTA	Kuala Lumpur Chinese School Teachers' Association 吉隆坡华校教师公会
LLG	Lim Lian Geok 林连玉
MASS	Medical Auxiliary Service Selangor 雪兰莪医药辅助队
MCA	Malayan Chinese Association / Malaysian Chinese Association 马华公会
MCACECC	MCA Chinese Education Central Committee 马华教育中央委员会
PPP	People Progressive Party 人民进步党
SJK(C)	Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (Cina) = National Type (Chinese) School 国民型(华文)学校
Three Major Organisations	UCSCA, UCSTA and MCACECC 三大机构(董总、教总及马华教育中央委员会)
UCSCA	United Chinese School Committees Association 华校董事会总会(董总)
UCSTA	United Chinese School Teachers' Association 华校教师会总会(教总)
UCSCAM	United Chinese School Committees Association Malaysia 马来西亚华校董事会总会(董总)
UCSTAM	United Chinese School Teachers' Association Malaysia 马来西亚华校教师会总会(教总)
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation 巫统

FOREWORD

By Dr Toh Kin Woon

Chairman, LLG Cultural Development Centre

I did not have the honour to know or to meet Mr. Lim Lian Geok in person when he was still alive. But I had the good fortune of seeing and listening to him from afar at a dinner held at the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall in mid-1985. Despite his frail and deteriorating health, Lim Lian Geok still delivered what to me was a very inspiring and motivating speech, in which he urged all to continue the struggle for a just and equitable Malaysia. That was Lim Lian Geok – a fighter to the end. As is widely known, he dedicated his life towards the right of all communities in Malaysia to receive education in their respective mother tongues. This was a cause he felt very passionate about and in the pursuit of which he suffered immense sacrifices. Chastised as a Chinese chauvinist by the mainstream media owned by UMNO, Lim Lian Geok had his citizenship revoked and his teacher's registration withdrawn. Despite these setbacks, Lim Lian Geok stayed on in Malaysia and refused to return to China where he was born. He said, as quoted by Tan Liok Ee in her article, *Descent and Identity: the Different Paths of Tan Cheng Lock, Tan Kah Kee and Lim Lian Geok*:

"I have lived in Malaya for almost 40 years. I think I can say that I

have devoted my whole life to Chinese education here in Malaya. I have developed a deep emotional attachment for Malaya. I love this country dearly. I wish to live here until I die and to have my bones buried here.”

These are truly words of a great patriot and Malaysian nationalist. He was also a fighter. Again, quoting from Tan Liok Ee, he considered himself a conscientious objector for whom leaving would be a renunciation of his principles. He said on the occasion of his 80th birthday:

“I stand here today as proof, proof that I Lim Lian Geok can withstand the test of crisis and hardship. I never surrender nor renege! I do not give up! I do not escape or leave my country!”

Lim Lian Geok has long left us, but his spirit lives on. To disseminate this spirit, especially among young Malaysians, Chinese educationists have set up the Lim Lian Geok Cultural Development Centre. It is important for us to be clear as to the contents of this spirit before the task of spreading it can be done effectively. For me, the Lim Lian Geok spirit has three key components. One is the spirit of patriotism and love for the nation. The other is the grit and determination to struggle for one's beliefs till the end, even in the face of extreme adversity. Finally, it is the struggle for human rights for all communities, including the right to education in one's mother tongue.

These components of the “Lim Lian Geok Spirit” have important implications for the agenda of the LLG Cultural Development Centre. The Centre must encompass the struggle for greater human and civil rights such as the right to mother tongue education, gender equality, environmental protection, free speech

and assembly in its agenda. It must work with other non-governmental organisations to strengthen civil society. Very importantly, it must in the course of pursuing its struggle cut across racial boundaries, for this was what Lim Lian Geok advocated. Lim Lian Geok did not just speak for the Chinese but he spoke out for the other ethnic groups as well, in the course of advocating for the right to receive mother tongue education.

The LLG Cultural Development Centre will strive to be a broad based organisation that reaches out to all Malaysians. This is in line with the spirit of Lim Lian Geok.

PREFACE

By Yang Pei Keng

Human rights lawyer and writer

LLG Cultural Development Centre Bhd assigned me the task of translating these speeches by Lim Lian Geok and it is my great pleasure to be involved in this translation work which I consider to be of great social value.

Mr. Lim is a well-known Chinese educationist. He commands tremendous respect from among the Chinese community. This is because of his unyielding efforts to protect and preserve the right to mother tongue education, particularly Chinese education which has encountered great difficulties over the years.

In his selfless efforts in defending the mother tongue education, he incurred untold suffering. He was deprived of his Malaysian citizenship and to add insult to injury,

the authorities deprived him of his sole means of livelihood – his teaching career.

He was a teacher by profession, but his teaching licence was revoked by the government. This was simply because he was vehemently opposed to the unfair and unjust treatment meted out to the mother tongue education of the Chinese community under the lopsided education system.

Throughout his teaching career, he strove on behalf of the Chinese community for the basic right to the mother tongue education; the mother tongue he protected and preserved happened to be the Chinese language he had been teaching all his life.

This did not mean that he ignored any other mother tongue of the other communities. He advocated, for instance, the protection and preservation of the popular Tamil language of the Indian community. He suggested in one of his speeches that both the Chinese and the Indian communities ought to support each other and work together in the struggle for developing mother tongue education.

He advised the ethnic Chinese to regard Malaya as their homeland, and to treat any other countries as friendly nations only, no matter how strong and powerful they were. He was therefore never a chauvinist as the colonial masters or other authorities concerned would want us to believe. He was without doubt a patriot, spending his entire life fighting for one of the basic human rights – the right to mother tongue education in this country.

As a result of his invaluable contributions to the preservation of the mother tongue education, he was held in high esteem, and was aptly described as “the soul of the Chinese community” (族魂 “zu hun”).

On 12 August 1961, Mr. Lim was deprived of his Malayan citizenship. A few days later, his registration as teacher was revoked on 19 August 1961.

His lawyers fought very hard to nullify the government decision to take away Mr. Lim’s citizenship, even appealing to the apex of our Court system at the time – the Privy Council. Among others, Mr. D R Seenivasagam and Mr. Ramani were his lawyers.

Though he was fighting a losing battle against the powers that

be, the suit brought to the fore the issue of the meaning of “loyalty” referred to in Article 25 of the Constitution. Mr. Lim was deprived of his citizenship under the Article.

It was reported in the Times of Malaya and Straits Echo on 5 October 1961, that when the case was heard in the High Court at Kuala Lumpur, one of Mr. Lim’s Counsel, Mr. Ramani argued ably on the interpretation of Article 25 of the Constitution.

Under Article 25(1), “the Federal Government may by order deprive of the citizenship of any person who is a citizen by registration... if satisfied that he has shown himself by act or speech to be disloyal or disaffected towards the Federation.”

Mr. Ramani highlighted the relevant issue of “loyalty”, and presented a convincing interpretation of what “loyalty” meant in the Article. He submitted as follows:

“... The Article only referred to disloyalty to the “Federation”, and not the Yang di Pertuan Agong or the government.”

“The ‘Federation’ meant the State and not the constituted government of the King. Under a democratic system of government, every citizen had the freedom of speech to criticize the policies of the government, and the government was not made of the Alliance only, but of every political party in the country”.

He emphasised:

“This is a democratic country, where the question of policy is debated not merely in the Legislative chambers but also in public forums, and this freedom of speech is guaranteed to every citizen under the Constitution ...”

“... To merely attack the policy of the government, which is not the

State, is no ground for revoking the citizenship of anyone. After all, the policy of the government might not be the policy of the Federation. Another government might come into power and scrap the particular policy.”

Lim Lian Geok appealed to the Privy Council. The Privy Council decision was not in his favour, but in favour of the government. However, the important case brought to the public attention the extremely important issues of loyalty and government policies.

Sir Justice Thompson, the then High Court Judge, expressed a similar view on the issue of government policies, though his decision was not in Lim's favour. The judge opined that if the people of a country were dissatisfied with any policy of the government, they had the right to change the government by constitutional means, since no government was immortal.

Unfortunately, the Privy Council handed down a decision against Lim Lian Geok. His attempts to retain his citizenship came to naught. In view of the counsel's clear opinions enunciated above, it may not be surprising if someone were to have the impression that the judicial decision had taken on political overtones.

Though Mr. Lim Lian Geok lost his legal battle, and suffered the ensuing loss of citizenship and revocation of his teaching permit, he has gained the overwhelming respect of the whole Chinese community, even to the present day.

It is little wonder that the majority of the Chinese community have readily bestowed upon him the title of “Soul of the Malaysian Chinese” for his untiring efforts in protecting and preserving mother tongue education.



INTRODUCTION

RECLAIM LIM LIAN GEOK'S CITIZENSHIP & TEACHING LICENCE

By Dr. Kua Kia Soong, editor
Director of Suara Rakyat Malaysia

This is the first book in the English-language on a man beatified in the Malaysian Chinese community as the “Soul of the Malaysian Chinese” after his passing in 1985. No other Malaysian Chinese has been accorded that highest honour. And no other Malaysian Chinese has been so highly respected to be given the privilege of lying-in-state at the Chinese Assembly Hall in Kuala Lumpur before the biggest funeral procession the capital had ever seen for a Malaysian Chinese. The anniversary of his passing has been institutionalised as an Education Festival – an annual celebration of mother tongue education, patriotism and the spirit of struggle he embodied.

His name is Lim Lian Geok and every year during the Education Festival in December, political parties, associations and school children go to pay their respects at this great man’s mausoleum at the Hokkien Cemetery in Kuala Lumpur. He was such an important figure in the Malayan Chinese community that the Tunku had to include him in the “Malacca Talks” over the Constitutional issues in 1955.

And yet this great man suffered the biggest pain any patriot and educator could possibly endure - being stripped of his Malayan citizenship and his teaching licence after all his contributions toward mother tongue education, civil rights and the Independence struggle in 1961.

But this great man was not your stereotype Malaysian Chinese leader in a suit driving a limousine yearning for power, wealth or honorific titles. I first met Lim Lian Geok when I was interviewing him for my book *The Chinese Schools in Malaysia: a Protean Saga*. I had read so much about him and heard from my colleagues in Dong Jiao Zong, about his courage and commitment and about how his citizenship and teaching licence had been revoked for all his efforts on behalf of mother tongue education and civil rights.

When I met him in 1984, I was impressed more by the fact that this giant of Malayan history lived in such humble lodgings and had such an unassuming character. He hardly received any media attention. Indeed, as Dr Yen Ching-hwang says,

“Throughout his life, he sought neither power nor wealth for himself. In fact, he despised the rich but stingy Chinese businessmen and the unprincipled Chinese politicians and high-ranking officials and felt ashamed to be associated with them as community leaders.”

The documents in this collection will be an eye-opener to many, especially the English-educated. This man who has been revered since his departure in 1985 as the “Soul of the Malaysian Chinese” is largely unknown or misrepresented outside the Chinese-educated community. Some of these documents pre-date Independence and it is interesting to see the issues as they were presented then, especially those of language and citizenship. If it

had not been for the political machinations by the British colonial power at the time, the status of Chinese and Tamil language education in this country might have been quite different.

For many, Lim Lian Geok is well-known as a champion of Chinese mother tongue education in Malaysia. But from these documents, it is clear that his stand was certainly not chauvinistic but was based on basic human rights, i.e. the right to mother tongue education. Thus, compared to many of his contemporaries and even present leaders, he was way ahead of his time. Another point of note is that at the time of the Malacca Talks in 1955, the common language was considered to be English and Malay schools were still treated as vernacular schools. Lim Lian Geok's stand on the language question was as follows:

“If Malaya needs a common language, it has to be determined by the size of the population using that particular language. Based on such a criterion, Malay will certainly be the first common language, and Chinese the second. But a common language should not jeopardize the existence nor hinder the development of mother tongues and their written forms.

“Such an issue can be settled amicably with the consensus of all the communities when Malaya achieves independence. On the other hand, if a common language is determined merely by a decree not supported by the people, it amounts to disregard for the traditional culture of the communities. It is also against the UN Charter, thereby antagonizing all the communities.”

Lim Lian Geok was passionate about being a Malayan and deeply concerned about the unity of the people in the independence struggle. He did not agree with the colonial

argument that integration of the people meant the acceptance of one common language system:

“We are of the view that the unity of the nation in spirit is the most important factor for the establishment of an independent Malaya. We do not have to resort to the integration of all the communities...The theory about integrated education and common language is but another form of subjugation. The advocacy of such a theory is solely for the purpose of seeking an extension of their rule on the pretext that the nation is yet to be unified and that there are obstacles to nation building.”

He stressed sincerity and truthfulness in dealing with unity among the various ethnic communities and opportunities for interaction among the students of various communities. This brings to mind the proposal by the Chinese education movement in the mid-Eighties for interactive activities between students of different language schools while opposing the “Integrated Schools” proposal by the BN government.

Already in those pre-Independence days, Lim Lian Geok had a Malayan perspective and advocated the Malayising of text books in the local Chinese schools:

“We have appointed representatives from UCSTAM to be involved in the re-editing of Chinese school text books. Currently, these text books have Malayan context and content. This goes to prove that our younger generation is being imbued with a sense of loyalty to Malaya.”

A true Malayan, Lim Lian Geok was consistent in his championing of mother tongue education for all Malayan ethnic communities, including Malay-language education:

“Finally, we hope that an attempt will be made to expedite the elevation of Malay education to a higher level. For now, as many Malay secondary schools as possible should be set up.”

In the struggle for Malayan citizenship just before Independence, Lim Lian Geok played a key role in urging the diverse ethnic communities to unite as can be seen in the 1956 Declaration by the National Congress of Chinese Societies:

“We have become brethren as a result of our co-operation in the course of nation building. Our future generations will work and play together on this beloved land for a long, long time to come.”

These are words from the heart when the Congress called for efforts to improve the living standards of the Malays on the eve of Independence:

“We have to admit that the Malays with their sincerity have long commanded the respect of all the communities. Extreme imbalance exists in the economic conditions of the various communities in Malaya; particularly the standard of living of the Malay community is way behind the others. This is a fact. Our heartfelt sympathies lie with them. We sincerely hope the government will address such imbalance, and render them assistance so that they are able to catch up with the other communities within the shortest time possible.”

It is unimaginable today for a Malay-language press to invite any leader of Dong Jiao Zong to write an address to its readers on the occasion of Hari Raya Puasa. It is a tribute to the stature of Lim Lian Geok, at the time a Chinese community leader and a supporter of Malay mother tongue education, that he was invited to

This is the first book in the English-language on a man who has been beatified as the "Soul of the Malaysian Chinese" since his passing in 1985. No other Malaysian Chinese has been accorded that honour. No other Malaysian Chinese has been given the privilege of lying-in-state at the Chinese Assembly Hall in Kuala Lumpur. At his funeral, the procession was the largest the capital had ever witnessed for any Malaysian Chinese.

His name is Lim Lian Geok and every year during the anniversary of his passing in December, leaders of political parties, associations and school children go to pay their respects at this great man's mausoleum at the Hokkien Cemetery in Kuala Lumpur.

He was spokesperson for the Malayan Chinese community throughout the Independence struggle and he took part in the "Malacca Talks" with the Tunku over the Constitutional issues in 1955. He was even asked to write Hari Raya messages in the Jawi scripted Utusan Melayu in the Fifties.

And yet this patriot and educator was stripped of his Malayan citizenship and his teaching licence in 1961 despite his contributions toward mother tongue education, civil rights and nation building.

Lim Lian Geok was not your stereotype Malaysian Chinese leader in a suit, driving a limousine and yearning for power, wealth or honorific titles. Until the end of his life, he lived simply and in humble lodgings. He was first and foremost a teachers' union leader who lived his mission of a civil rights leader of the Malaysian Chinese community.

This book is an attempt to inform Malaysians that it is time to right an injustice done to this exemplary patriot and civil rights leader by reclaiming his Malaysian citizenship and teaching licence and to say to all the world, 'This was a man!'



LLG Cultural Development Centre 2010.

