

# BUKIT BROWN WAYFINDER

## A SELF-GUIDED WALKING TRAIL

*The spirits among  
the grass welcome us. Their stone  
homes are without doors.*

*- Gwee Li Sui*

## FOREWORD

Welcome to the Bukit Brown Wayfinder, a self-guided trail with directional signage to 25 tombs in Blocks 1 and 3 of Bukit Brown Cemetery. The tombs in the Wayfinder were selected for easy access along well-worn paths, and for the diverse stories they tell of our collective history and heritage.

The signs introduce pioneers of Singapore who helped to build social and community networks such as schools, hospitals, and societies to uplift and protect the vulnerable. These individuals seized opportunities to build businesses from scratch, only to lose both fortunes and family members in the devastation of World War II.

The material culture of the tombs, some bearing ornate carvings of iconic scenes from Chinese classics, hark back to time-honoured values of duty to family and country. Humbler tombs in simple brick and mortar speak of the struggles of ordinary people searching for a better life who made Singapore their home.

The tomb inscriptions bear witness to tumultuous times in our regional history. More fundamentally, they are a tangible record of the origins of communities in Singapore, the lives lived by the people, and the descendants who survived them.

This online downloadable Bukit Brown Wayfinder booklet provides context for the tomb signs by providing references to sources. We are privileged and grateful that descendants have shared with us their precious family photographs and oral histories.

The Wayfinder also introduces major rites and rituals still practiced at Bukit Brown, which are aspects of Singapore intangible cultural heritage; and highlights the flora and fauna of a landscape that has been allowed to flourish.

The Wayfinder represents the first major project under the work group on Bukit Brown chaired by the Ministry of National Development. The work group comprises representatives from the National Heritage Board, the Urban Redevelopment Authority, National Parks Board and the Land Transport Authority in engagement with civil society groups, the Singapore Heritage Society (SHS) and All Things Bukit Brown, a loose community of volunteers who guide and conduct independent research.

Since the Singapore Heritage Society was founded 30 years ago in 1987, its mission has been to research, and to educate people and advocate about, Singapore's history and heritage. The Bukit Brown Wayfinder is an important example of how the SHS defines heritage as the living presence of the past.

There is more to be done to lend greater weight to the stories yet to be told by the tombstones and the landscape they rest on. For that we look to you, the community. Twenty-five stories out of some 100,000 tombs is a humble beginning.

DR JACK TSEN-TA LEE  
President (2017-2019)  
Singapore Heritage Society

## ***BRIEF HISTORY***

The cemetery is named after George Henry Brown, a Briton who came to Singapore in the 1840s. He bought land and built his home on what is today Mount Pleasant. The name Bukit Brown first appeared on a map in 1898 and is the first official hybrid English and Malay place name in Singapore.

Bukit Brown Cemetery opened on 1 January 1922, a municipal cemetery administered by the British and opened to all Chinese, regardless of dialect group and status. This departed from the traditional practice of linking final resting places for Chinese exclusively to ties of kinship and dialect groups.

In 2011, the government announced plans to build an eight-lane highway cutting through Bukit Brown. 4,000 graves were exhumed by 2013. This development changed the landscape of Bukit Brown dramatically. What remains unchanged are the remaining tombs that bear witness to our history, heritage and cultural practices.



## THE BIODIVERSITY AND ECOLOGY OF BUKIT BROWN

Over the decades, wild vegetation has proliferated and colonised Bukit Brown Cemetery, transforming parts of it into woodland interspersed with patches of grassland and scrubland. Wooded areas soak up rainfall and slow down percolation of water into the ground. This prevents rapid run-offs and soil erosion which controls flooding. The canopies of trees filter pollution and also moderate temperatures.



Bukit Brown is very rich in bird life with 94 resident and migratory species recorded. Among them are 15 nationally threatened species, including the White-bellied Woodpecker (*Dryocopus javensis*), Changeable Hawk-eagle (*Nisaetus cirrhatus*), the Thick-billed Green Pigeon (*Treron curvirostra*), the Black-headed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus atriceps*) and the Straw-headed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus zeylanicus*).



The area also serves as an extended foraging ground and habitat for forest birdlife

From top to bottom: Lush woodland in Bukit Brown, photo courtesy of Ho Hua Chew; Changeable Hawk-eagle, photo courtesy of Jimmy Chew; Straw-headed Bulbul, photo courtesy of Jimmy Chew.



From top to bottom: Malayan Colugo, photo courtesy of D.I. Green; Golden Royal, photo courtesy of Anuj.

originating from the MacRitchie Forest, like the Red-crowned Barbet and the Asian Red-eyed Bulbul. 52 of such species have been recorded.

Animals from MacRitchie Forest also use Bukit Brown as an extended foraging ground, such as the Malayan Colugo/Flying Lemur (*Galeopterus variegatus*), and nationally-threatened butterflies like the Golden Royal (*Pseudotajuria donatana donatana*) and the Banded Line Blue (*Prosotas lutea sivoka*).

Protection of forest species is critical in Singapore as their habitat has been drastically reduced by decades of development.

The area is also an important stepping stone for species moving down from MacRitchie to the remaining woodlands of the Southern Ridges. The loss of this connector would isolate wildlife access to Mount Faber, Labrador and Telok Blangah.



## rites and rituals in Bukit Brown Cemetery

### Qing Ming Festival (清明节)



From top to bottom: Descendants pay respects with flowers and food; a lavish offering of huat kueh, meat, fruit and drinks as part of the tomb keepers Qing Ming. Photos courtesy of Raymond Goh.

The biggest festival observed at Bukit Brown Cemetery is “Qing Ming”, commonly known as “tomb sweeping day” – a time for descendants to remember and pay respects to ancestors. It falls on the first day of the Spring Equinox around 4-5 April of the Gregorian calendar but the traditional period of visits to the graves is extended 10 days before and after.

Qing Ming commemorations are unique in Bukit Brown in scale and practice, which has been largely preserved through the generations. It is the only *in situ* Chinese cemetery which can trace its beginnings to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Descendants, some as old as 80, still remember their visits when they were children. It is primarily their practices which guide how present and future generations will continue to honour their ancestors.

Inter-generational families may allocate half a day or more at their ancestors’ tombs, some coming with



Coloured papers on Hokkien tombs.

home-cooked fare that are known to be the deceased's favourite food. Traditional offerings include *huat kueh* ("prosperity cake") and whole poultry. Teochew families also offer cockles to symbolise continuing blood lines.

Hokkiens place coloured papers to show to others that their ancestors are still remembered. Unlike other paper offerings, these will not be burnt. Tea, spirits and soft drinks are the beverages of the day. Joss sticks and candles are lit, paper offerings burnt and prayers offered.

The tomb keepers themselves observe Qing Ming collectively for the tombs of those which have not been visited. They pray for blessings and protection as they



Sweeping in progress by a tomb keeper.



go about their work, year after year, generation after generation, in the care of the tombs.

The tomb keepers and descendants have an informal relationship based on trust which for some families go back a few generations. From as early as January, they start clearing the grass and sprucing up graves under their care, leaving the finer tasks of painting and the touching up of inscriptions nearer to Qing Ming. They are paid only when they meet the descendants at Qing Ming.

**ADVISORY:** Descendants are reminded to ensure the burning of offerings is extinguished to prevent fires, and food offerings removed to discourage animals from foraging, before they leave the premises.

## SEVENTH MONTH FESTIVAL (中元节)

According to traditional Chinese religious beliefs, the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh Lunar month is when the gates of the “lower realm” open and all spirits are released to wander amongst the living.

The Seventh Month Festival is also a time for ancestors to be remembered. Unlike Qing Ming, it is observed at temples where priests preside over salvation rituals, and also privately observed in the housing estates, where paper offerings are burnt. Special



Offerings of fried “bee hoon” (rice noodles) and “kopi-o” (black coffee).  
Photo courtesy of Liew Kai Khiun.

containers for burning have been placed in all high-rise public housing estates.

Some temple groups conduct rituals at Bukit Brown to appease wandering spirits with prayers and burnt offerings. Who these groups are and where at Bukit Brown they decide to conduct these rituals is not public knowledge. Their presence is visible only the morning after from burnt offerings left behind.

### WINTER CLOTHING FESTIVAL, HAN YI JIE (寒衣节)



*Offerings left for departed children.  
Photo courtesy of Victor Yue.*

This festival falls on the first day of the 10<sup>th</sup> Lunar month, which is the start of winter in China. It is less well known, but has been observed annually at Bukit Brown by the Heng Kang Tian temple in Silat Road since 1996.

Rituals start at dusk with devotees of the temple lighting a path with candles to spirits to the place where

offerings are gathered. The ritual ends with the burning of offerings such as paper clothes for the winter months. Children who have died are also remembered with offerings of toys and sweets.

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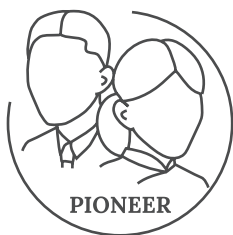
**READY TO START THE TRAIL?**

*Photo courtesy  
of Mr Foo, Times  
of your life.*

*Times of your life*

## WHAT YOU WILL SEE ON THE TRAIL

### FOUR HIGHLIGHTS



Witness the resting places of those who made significant contributions to Singapore's history and development.



Look out for special designs, carvings and inscriptions that reveal the history, beliefs and practices of the people buried here.



Find out about World War Two connections and stories of those buried here.

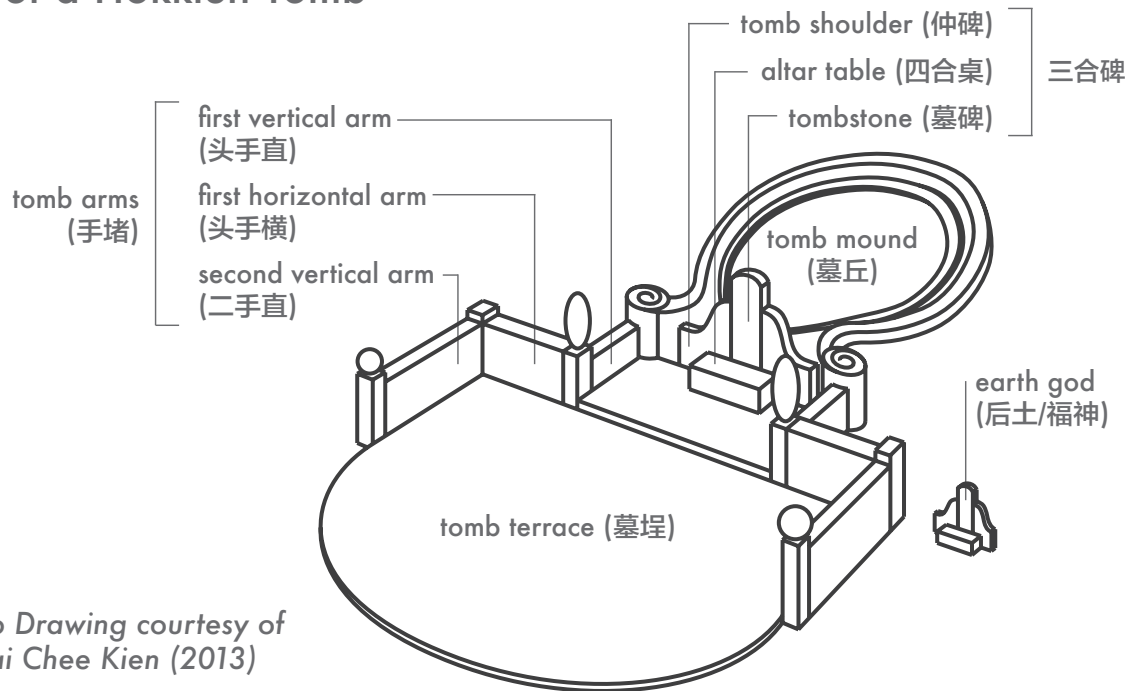


Marvel at how nature has reclaimed and intertwined with these tombs.



## IDENTIFYING HOKKIEN TOMBS

### Parts of a Hokkien Tomb



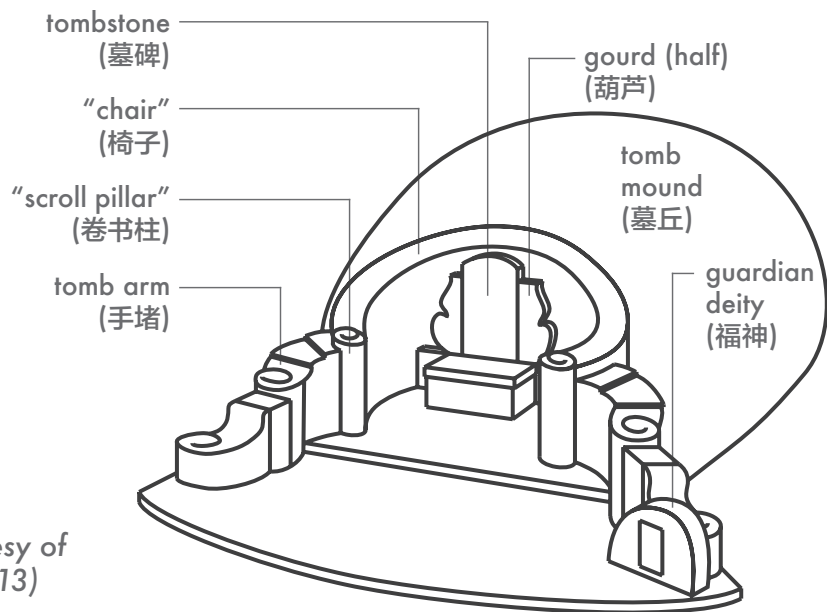
### Reading a Hokkien Tombstone





## IDENTIFYING TEOCHEW TOMBS

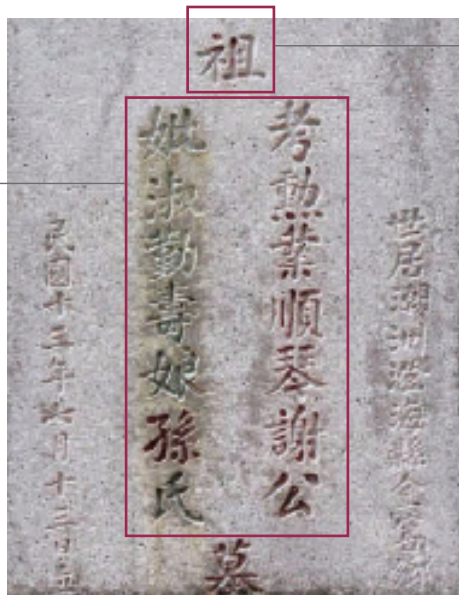
### Parts of a Teochew Tomb



Tomb Drawing courtesy of Dr Lai Chee Kien (2013)

### Reading a Teochew Tombstone

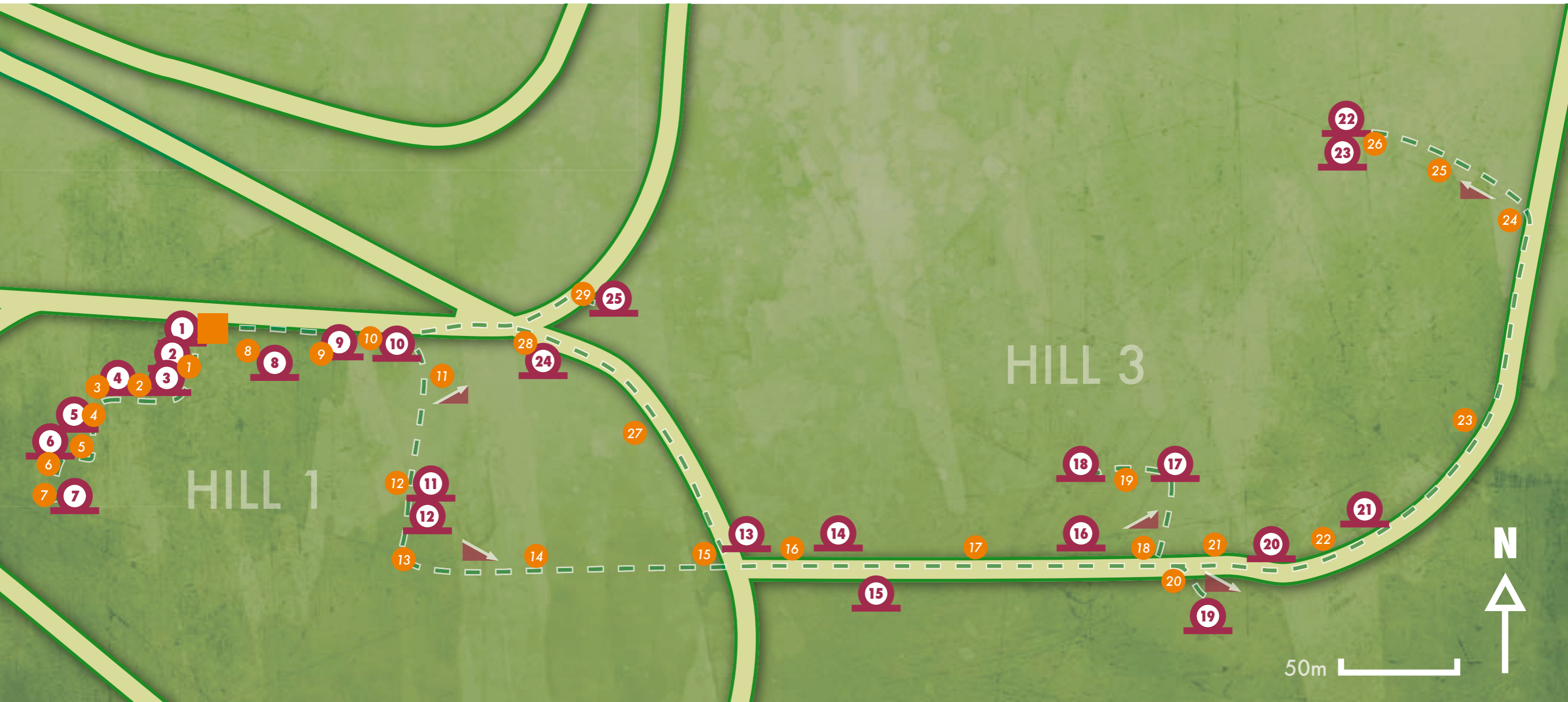
When a tomb is first constructed, the names of the prospective occupants are painted in red. Only after burials take place are the names painted green, while the surname is left in red.



Names of the deceased on Teochew tombstones are often prefixed with the character for ancestor - 祖 (zu).

Unlike Hokkien tombs, names of descendants may not be inscribed on Teochew tombs.

# OVERVIEW OF TOMBS AND TRAIL ROUTES



## LEGEND

- Route
- Tomb
- Route Marker
- Info Board
- Uphill
- Downhill

## TIMINGS (ESTIMATED)

Tomb #1 - #7	30mins	Tomb #13 - #23	75mins
Tomb #8 - #12 - #13	45mins	Tomb #8 - #25 - #13	30mins



# LIST OF TOMBS

**Tomb #1** IN MEMORIAM pg21



**Tomb #6** THE TILED TOMBS pg40



**Tomb #11** LEE HOON LEONG pg58



**Tomb #16** CHEW GEOK LEONG pg75



**Tomb #21** TAN EAN KIAM pg92



**Tomb #2** THE VIRTUE IN THE STONES pg23



**Tomb #7** THE FIG & THE "DOOR GODS" pg45



**Tomb #12** KUNG TIAN SIONG & WIFE pg60



**Tomb #16** THE PANG FAMILY CLUSTER pg78



**Tomb #22** ONG FAMILY COMPLEX pg96



**Tomb #3** KOH HOON TECK & WIFE pg28



**Tomb #8** THE GATED TOMB pg49



**Tomb #13** LU SHANG LIAN pg65



**Tomb #17** TAN BOO LIAT pg81



**Tomb #23** ONG SAM LEONG & FAMILY pg102



**Tomb #4** CHIA HOOD THEAM & WIFE pg33



**Tomb #9** THE WEE FAMILY CLUSTER pg52



**Tomb #14** LIM TECK GHEE & MOTHER pg68



**Tomb #19** CEMENTED TOMB pg85



**Tomb #24** LIM KENG CHIEW pg106



**Tomb #5** DR LEE CHOO NEO pg36



**Tomb #10** THE TEOCHEW CLUSTER pg56



**Tomb #15** THE PAUPERS' SECTION pg72



**Tomb #20** OH SIAN GUAN & WIFE pg87



**Tomb #25** TAN CHOR NAM pg109



## WAYFINDING SYSTEM ELEMENTS

With its distinctive purple-orange colour and ease of maintenance, the now-ubiquitous crotons in Bukit Brown cemetery were originally planted by descendants to help locate tombs of their family. These have lent inspiration to the wayfinder structures, which are in a way, the contemporary iteration of the croton.

The design palette thus takes direction from the primary purplish shade of the croton, which is laid against the grey-brown of the tomb stones. Using the colours of the objects in-situ helps the wayfinder structure balance between the need to stand out and be easily found, yet avoid clashing with and marring the landscape.



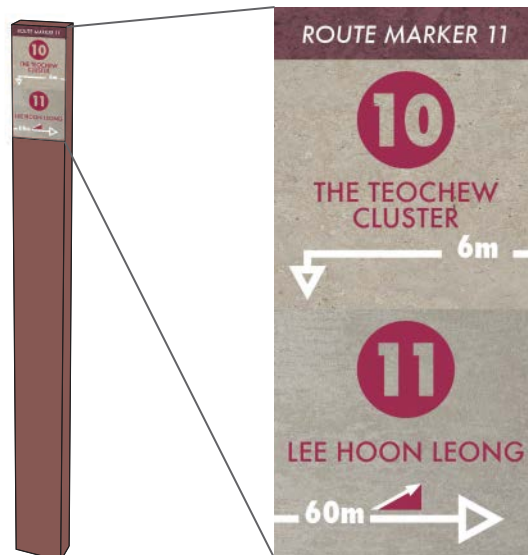
*A croton among the tombs.*

## TOMB SIGNAGE

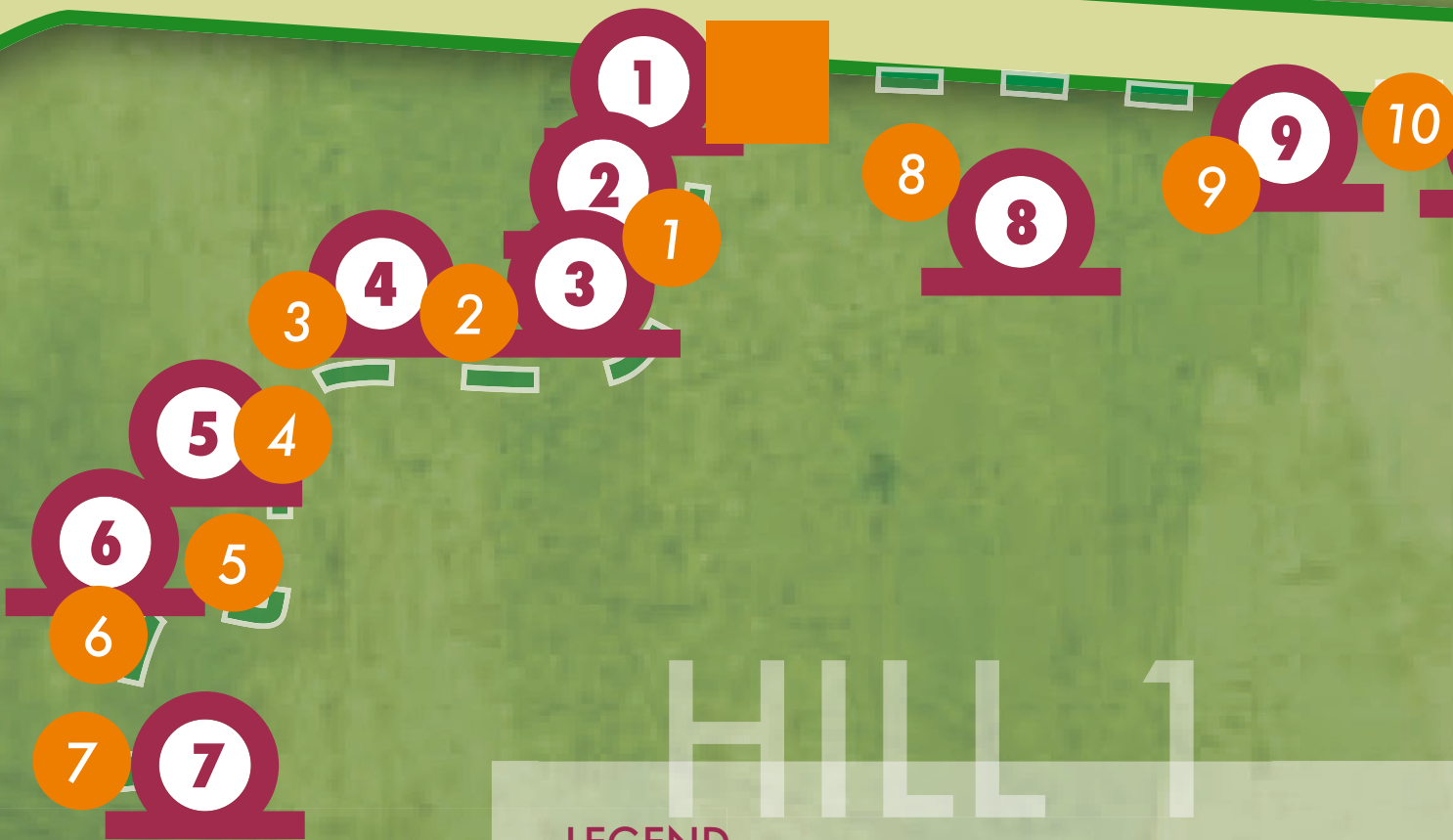
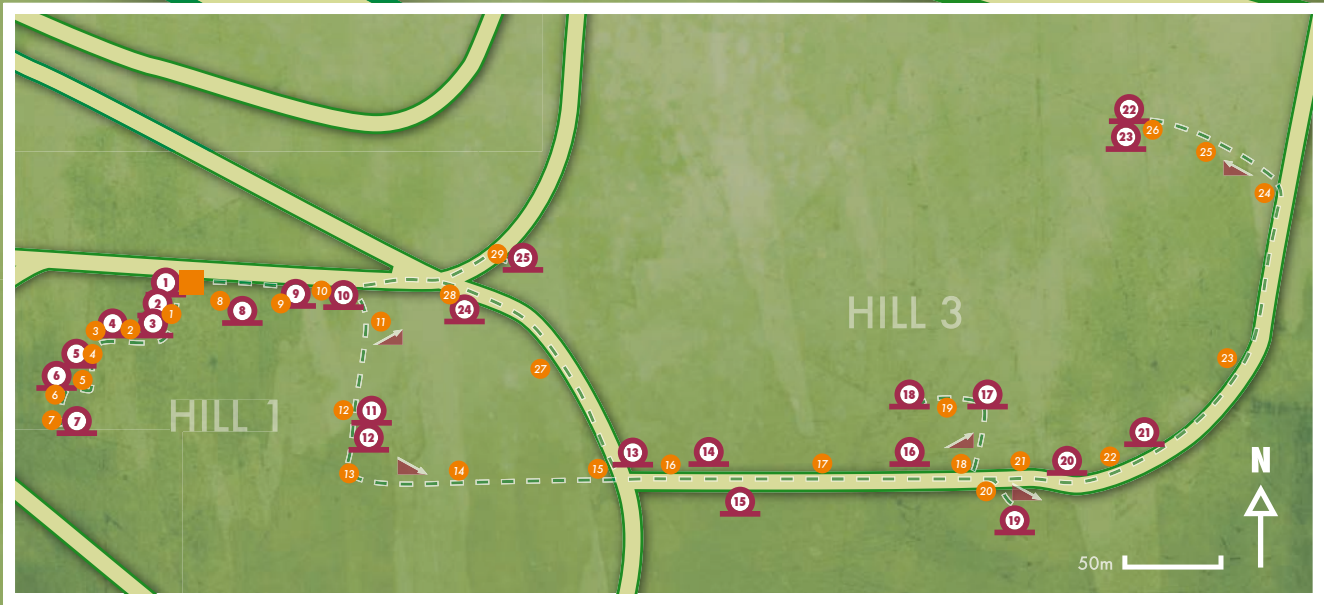


Look out for the tomb signages that are located beside the tombs, which contain basic information about the tomb.

## ROUTE MARKER



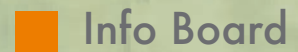
Look out for the route markers to guide you on the trail. They mark the trail by showing you the distances and directions between tombs.



**LEGEND**



Route



Info Board



Tomb



Route Marker

**TIMINGS (ESTIMATED)**

Tomb #1 - #7

30mins



## IN MEMORIAM

TAN PECK LIAN 陳柏連 | 1897-1942

TAN CHA MOH | 1882-1964



### MATERIAL CULTURE: TAN PECK LIAN (陈柏连)

Tan Peck Lian's date of death has been marked on this tomb with the Japanese Showa (昭和) calendar year of 17, on the top right column. This Japanese dating system is identical to the



Chinese imperial system, in which each emperor's reign is marked by a reign title. The Showa reign began in 1925, and as such, we can conclude that Tan passed away during the war in 1942 (1925 + 17). Incidentally, Singapore's name during the Japanese Occupation – Shonan-To (昭南島) – means

the southern island of Showa.

This is a typical example of a Hokkien-style tomb. The simple brick construction is in keeping with the context of Tan's death at age 45 during the Japanese Occupation – the burial must have been carried out in haste given the chaos and uncertainty of war.



MATERIAL  
CULTURE

### MATERIAL CULTURE: TAN CHA MOH

This tiny memorial stone is an unusual find in Bukit Brown.

It does not mark a burial site. Instead this simple marble slab mounted on a granite base has been set up as a mark of remembrance.



Another unusual feature is the English wording. This possibly points to Tan's English-educated descendants having installed the plaque here after his death even though he is buried elsewhere.

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## THE VIRTUE IN THE STONES

CHIA WAN NEO 謝圓娘 | 1864-1932 | Longxi (龍溪)

YAP YAN NEO 葉焉娘 | 1886-1925 | Tong'an (同安)



**MATERIAL  
CULTURE:  
CHIA WAN  
NEO (谢圆娘)**

Chia Wan Neo's tomb shoulders show intricately carved panels representing two of the "Four Loves" - four poets and their favourite flowers. Most tombs would feature two of these pairings. On Chia's tomb, we can see panels depicting the lotus and the plum blossom.

On the left shoulder (as

## 2

## THE VIRTUE IN THE STONES

seen by viewer) we can see the lotus (莲) growing from a container (on the extreme left in the carving). The lotus is associated with Song Dynasty philosopher Zhou Dunyi (周敦颐). He described it as a flower that “stays pure even though it grows in the mud. After being cleansed with water, it does not become bewitching”. This is often taken as an allegory of how a gentleman should abide by his principles while navigating the treacherous world.



On the right shoulder (as seen by viewer) is the plum blossom (梅), favoured by scholars of the Song Dynasty (960–1279) such as Lin Bu (林逋). Excesses and corruption in the previous administration resulted in many advocating the cultivation of inner strength. The plum blossom symbolised this – although delicate and beautiful in appearance, it endures and blooms through the harsh winter. In 1928, the plum blossom was adopted as the national flower of Taiwan (Republic of China).

On the central panel of the altar table is a depiction of Fu Lu Shou (福禄寿). They represent the three values of good fortune, prosperity and longevity, personified by the three bearded characters in this panel. In the Chinese value system, Fu/Fortune is distinct from Lu/Prosperity. Fu/Fortune refers to blessings that include health, heirs, or



# 2

## THE VIRTUE IN THE STONES



virtues. Lu/Prosperity is more than just material wealth, but weightiness in other matters, such as intellect, influence and social status.



### NATURE

This tomb is covered with orange-coloured lichen that gives it a distinctive "rusty" look. This colour is a result of special pigments that mask the green colour of the chlorophyll. You will see many tombs in Bukit Brown are similarly covered in orange lichen.



# 2

## THE VIRTUE IN THE STONES



### MATERIAL CULTURE: YAP YAN NEO (叶焉娘)

Yap Yan Neo is the wife of Tan Ean Kiam (Tomb #21), one of the founders of the Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation. Tan’s tribute to his wife of over 20 years can be seen on the inscription on the altar table. This inscription shows his actual calligraphy, and it pays loving tribute to Yeo’s virtue and devotion.



Another interesting inscription is the couplet under the statues of the Golden Boy and Jade Girl. They read “Born in Tong’an, buried in Selat Por”. The latter is an old name of Singapore used by the local Chinese, derived from the Malay word “selat” which means straits, referencing the Straits of Singapore.

On the terrace floor are well-preserved examples of patterned cement tiles. Unlike other tiles which get their colouring from their glazes, these tiles are created by inlaying different-coloured clays and drying them in the sun for six hours. That way, the tile patterns are preserved even as the tiles get worn down. This method dates back to the medieval times. Encaustic (flooring) tiles were produced in Singapore around 1910s in the area now known as Tampines.

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# 3

## KOH HOON TECK & WIFE

LIM GUAN NEO 林源娘 | 1882-1933 | Haicheng (海澄)

KOH HOON TECK 許允德 | 1878-1956 | Haicheng (海澄)



Photo courtesy of the Peranakan Museum. Gift of Mr John Koh, in memory of his grandfather Mr Koh Hoon Teck.

### BIOGRAPHY

Koh Hoon Teck (许允德) is credited for significant contributions to the Peranakan performing arts, especially *dondang sayang* and *pantun* singing. He also owned a book publishing company, Koh and Co., that printed Baba Malay titles.

The simple tombs here belie Koh's complex funeral rites. He requested to be sent off with the recitation of *dondang sayang* poems, as well as to

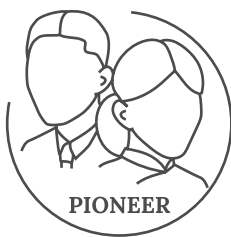


Koh's funeral rites, featuring chanting monks and pantun singers. Photo reproduced from *Rojak Librarian*.

be interred according to Chinese Ming customs. Dressed in silk Ming robes, Koh's eldest son consumed a bowl of vermicelli, after which he dressed his father in the same robes. This ritual goes back to the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), considered to be last great Han Chinese dynasty before the Manchu-led Qing Dynasty (1644–1912).

In 1908, Koh had donned Chinese robes

and had his queue cut off in a ceremony with like minded Babas, as the queue symbolised servitude to the Qing. He emerged after, dressed in a European-style suit.



### PIONEER IN PERANAKAN PERFORMING ARTS AND PUBLISHING

Koh was one of the founding members of the famous Cornwall Minstrels, a singing group which included several young Babas. He was also one of the founders of the Gunong Sayang Association, and served as its honorary secretary.

The Gunong Sayang Association and Koh are credited for making *pantun* singing (meaning “repartees” in Malay) and *dondang sayang* (“love ballads”) popular

in Singapore. Pantun became a regular feature in Malay and Straits Chinese weddings.

Koh regularly opened his home at 105 Chin Swee Road to host musical activities including visits by the Cornwell Minstrels. In his later years, Koh mentored the next generation of *dondang sayang* singers.

The Peranakan community continues to be remembered for keeping the art and tradition of *dondang sayang* alive.

Koh also established Koh and Co., a publishing company and bookshop at 90 Bras Basah, Raffles Hotel. It sold books, postcards, stationary, rare perfumes like essence of *stangee* (scented wood) and *bunga rampay* (sweet scented flower).

The bookshop published and sold popular Baba Malay stories like *Cherita Abu Nawas* (Tale of Abu Nawas) and *Cherita Abu Nawas dan Rampay Rampay* (Tale of Abu Nawas and Miscellaneous Tales). Koh also published a monthly journal for postcard aficionados. Koh himself wrote and self-published *Pantun Dondang Sayang Baba* *Baba Pranakan*, a collection of *dondang sayang* songs and poems. The collection was popular – its five volumes were reprinted several times. His company, however, was not always prosperous and fell on hard times.



## NATURE

Next to Koh's tomb is a banyan tree with its distinctive aerial root systems. The banyan is a Fig species of *Hemiepiphyte* that attaches itself to a host tree and competes with it for nutrients, thus

eventually “strangling” it to death. Planted in crevices of the host tree by animals who eat the fig flowers or fruits, the banyan anchors itself to the canopy of its host before branching out around it with aerial roots. These roots create distinctive weaving formations that are unique to each tree.

The banyan is also known to be a keystone species, because it is essential to the biodiversity in Singapore. Birds, bats and other mammals depend on its fruit for survival. It is rare to encounter banyans outside nature reserves or forested areas, such as Bukit Brown. Banyans are not planted in urban areas for fear that the unpredictable growth of their roots would cause cracks in pavements or buildings.

Banyans also feature in Malay folklore, which describe these trees are the preferred homes of *pontianaks* (vampiric spirits) who like to swing on their large roots.

### ELSEWHERE ON THIS TRAIL

Koh’s parents, Koh Lian Gee and Wan Chin Neo, are buried to the immediate right of Chia Hood Theam & Wife (Tomb #4).

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4

## CHIA HOOD THEAM & WIFE

YEO LAN NEO 楊鱗娘 | 1865–1949 | Qianzhai (前宅)

CHIA HOOD THEAM 謝佛添 | 1863–1938 | Qianzhai (前宅)

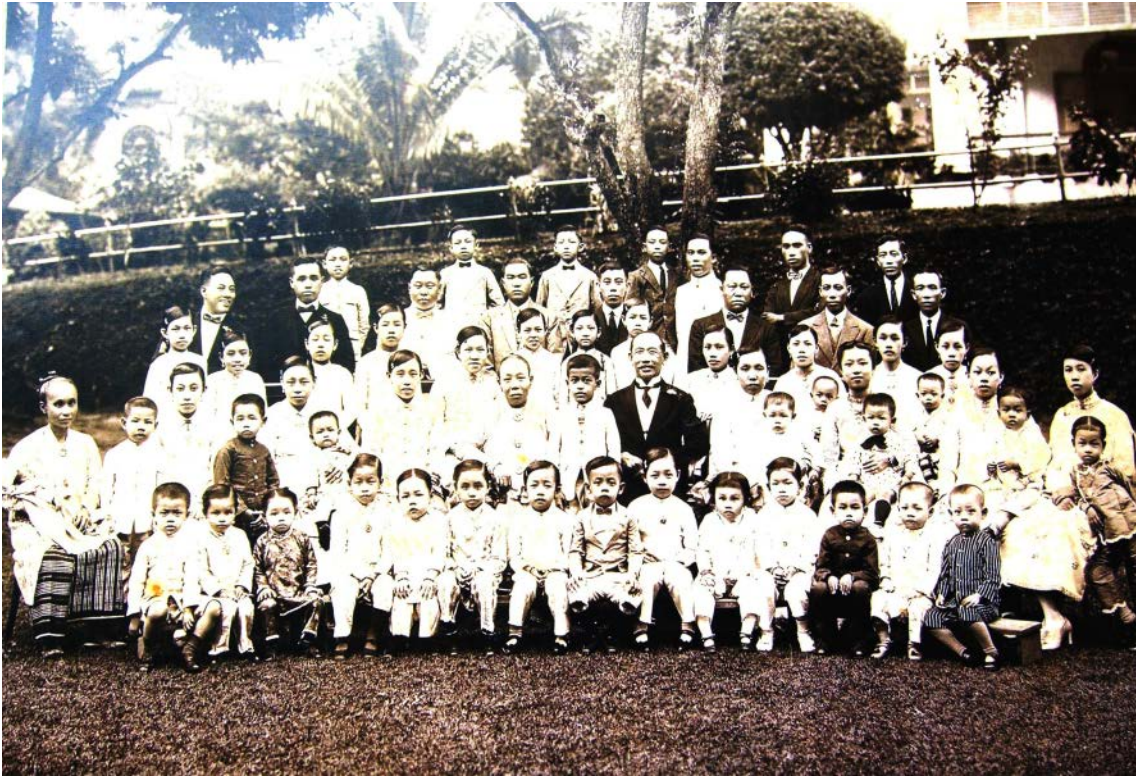
### BIOGRAPHY

Chia Hood Theam (谢佛添) was a prominent Peranakan banker and early supporter of education for women. He studied at Raffles Institution and later followed in his father's footsteps to work at the Mercantile Bank of India, where he eventually rose to the position of Head Shroff ("shroff" was an Anglo-Indian word for "banker").



*Photo courtesy of Chia Family Archives*

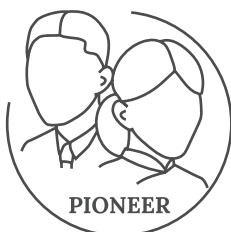
Chia had seven daughters and four sons. Two of his sons – Chia Keng Tye and Chia Keng Chin – also served in the



*Chia and Yeo at their wedding anniversary, surrounded by their descendants. Photo courtesy of Chia Family Archives.*

Mercantile Bank as *compradores*, or agents in trade. He resided at Rosedale, on the corner of Killiney Road and Devonshire Road, from about 1961 until his death. Chia Keng Tye and his family lived with him as well. The Chias were a prominent Peranakan family. At the time, Peranakans were known also as “the King’s Chinese”, because they became British subjects after the Straits Settlements became a Crown colony in 1867.

Peranakans often played important roles as intermediaries between the British and the local community in commercial and social matters.



### PIONEER IN WOMEN’S EDUCATION

Chia was ahead of his time in being an active supporter of education for women. He

was a founding member of the Singapore Chinese Girls' School, and also served as honorary treasurer on the school board for many years.



### MATERIAL CULTURE

An interesting inscription is found next to Yeo Lan Neo's (杨鳞娘) name: "Nonya Tawee". This is a reference to her Indonesian Peranakan heritage as well as her place of origin – "Tawee" comes from "Batawi", the old name for Jakarta.

The blue art decor tiles found on these tombs feature peacocks, which is an auspicious motif popular with Southeast Asian Peranakan communities.

Some other Peranakan features are the English inscriptions found on the tombs – Peranakans were fluent in English, Chinese dialects and Baba Malay, a patois which includes various dialects.

Both of the tombs are constructed of marble as opposed to granite, a "modern" material that is reminiscent of British gravestones.

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## DR LEE CHOO NEO

1895–1947

Place of Ancestry: Tong'an (同安)

### BIOGRAPHY

Dr Lee Choo Neo (李珠娘) was Singapore's first practising female doctor. She was the daughter of Lee Hoon Leong (Tomb #11), the late Lee Kuan Yew's grandfather.

At a time when education for girls was frowned upon, she excelled in her studies first at the Singapore Chinese Girls' School, set up by a community of Chinese leaders including Chia Hood Theam (Tomb #4). At Raffles Girls' School, she became the first Chinese girl to obtain the Senior Cambridge Certificate in 1911.



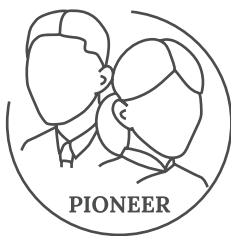
*Photo courtesy of Teo/Lee Family Archives*

Three years later at the age of 18, she wrote an article in the British magazine *Queen* titled "The Chinese Girl in Singapore", reflecting on how her life compared to those of her peers in China and Britain. She shared that the life of a Straits-born Chinese girl groomed for marriage was "a quiet and uneventful one, devoid of all amusements and recreations".

She married Teo Koon Lim on 21 September 1922. They had one son (Teo Cheng Ann) and two daughters (Teo Cheng Sim and Teo Cheng Kim).

Dr Lee was an avid photographer and her photos captured both her extended family and her circle of like-minded women friends who were part of the Chinese Ladies' Association which still exists today.

Dr Lee died on her 53<sup>rd</sup> birthday, on 7 September 1947, after a short illness. She was buried on the same day in Bukit Brown. In the traditional Hokkien practice of married women following their husbands' ancestry, her ancestry was listed on her tomb as Tong'an, even though she was born in Singapore.



### PIONEER IN HEALTH AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Dr Lee Choo Neo was the first locally-born female doctor to practise medicine. After graduating from the King Edward VII Medical School in 1919, she was appointed Lady Assistant Surgeon at the General Hospital. In 1930, she opened her own clinic at 74-3 Bras Basah Road, specialising in maternity care. Dr Lee was a founding member of the Chinese Ladies'

Association of Malaya. The Association promoted the physical and social education of Chinese women. It also ran a rescue home for girls and women at risk.

Dr Lee was one of three women appointed to the Chinese Marriage Committee to investigate the need for laws to govern Chinese marriage and divorce in the Straits Settlements. The committee's findings eventually led to the passing of the Women's Charter outlawing polygamy.

In recognition for her contributions, Dr Lee was inducted into the Women's Hall of Fame in 2014 by the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations.



### WORLD WAR II CONNECTION

The Chinese Ladies' Association helped raise funds for China in the Sino-Japanese war. Dr Lee would therefore have been targeted for reprisal during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore, if not for her friendship with the Tsutada family, who ran a dental clinic next to her clinic at Bras Basah. The Lee children often played with the Tsutada children.

Although the Tsutadas left Singapore before the Japanese Occupation, one of their sons returned to Singapore as a lieutenant and sought out Dr Lee. The Lees were therefore spared from the brutal reprisals that others experienced. During the war, Dr Lee was able to continue to run her clinic and treat war casualties.

### ELSEWHERE ON THIS TRAIL

Walk around Dr Lee's tomb to find a mysterious heart-

shaped symbol at the back of the tomb.

Buried near Route Marker 5 is Dr Lee's mother, Mak Hup Sin (1871 – 1939). Her tomb is in the same style.

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## 6 THE TILED TOMBS



### MATERIAL CULTURE

Tiles like the ones you see here were typically embraced by the Peranakans who used them to decorate the exteriors of their homes, as well as their kitchens. When it came to their tombs – their final homes as such – these tiles were also incorporated into the tomb designs. Although we associate these tiles with the Peranakans today, they were actually also adopted by other dialect groups. Here, from left to right, are five well-preserved examples of such tiled tombs:



# 6

## THE TILED TOMBS



#1 – Transfer Printing. H & R Johnson Tiles in Staffordshire, England, circa 1910–1915

H & R Johnson Tiles was founded in 1901 by the Johnson family, and eventually merged with Henry Richards Tiles (4<sup>th</sup> tomb) to form Johnson Tiles, which is still a major global tile

manufacturer today. The bilingual (English and Chinese) inscriptions you see on the tomb is typical of Peranakan tombs, though not exclusively so.



#2 – Dust-Pressed Tiles. Gilliot & Cie in Hemiksem, Belgium, circa 1890–1910

Gilliot & Cie was founded by George Gilliot in Hemiksem, near Antwerp, in 1897. Before WWI, it was a major manufacturer of a wide range of dust-pressed tiles and tile

panels. These tiles are in typical Art Nouveau Majolica style, which feature naturalistic, geometric designs. Like other European tiles, these were probably imported to Singapore before World War I (WWI).

# 6

## THE TILED TOMBS



### #3 – Dust-Pressed tiles. Danto Kaisha Tileworks in Hyogoken Kitaamamura, Japan, circa 1910–1930

Dust pressing was a method that consisted of compressing nearly dry clay between metal moulds. It originated in Europe during the 1840s and enabled

mass manufacturing of tiles. These tiles were made by Danto Kaisha, one of only two Japanese tile works still in operation today in Hyogoken, Japan.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was high demand by the British in India and Southeast Asia for decoration that reminded them of home. However, tiles from Europe were too expensive to ship. The know-how to produce such tiles was shared with the Japanese, who started to produce them and expanded into designs capturing auspicious motifs favoured by the Chinese. Many local wealthy Peranakan families used the tiles for furniture and grave marker decorations.

### #4 – Transfer Printing, Henry Richards Tile Co in Staffordshire, England, circa 1902–1904

Mass-produced transfer printed tiles trace their history back to 18<sup>th</sup>-century England. Transfer printing enabled a wide variety of patterns and designs to be produced quickly and cheaply. Henry Richards Tile, manufacturer

# 6

## THE TILED TOMBS

of these tiles, was established in 1903 and was a major manufacturer of Art Nouveau tiles. These tiles were probably imported to Singapore before World War I.



**#5 – Dust-Pressed tiles. Danto Kaisha Tileworks in Hyogoken Kitaamamura, Japan, circa 1910–1930**

This tomb is similar in style and provenance to the 3<sup>rd</sup> tomb above.

Its key difference is the carving at the top of its tombstone. The carving depicts the Queen Mother of the West riding on a crane. She is one of the highest deities in the Taoist pantheon and is often associated with longevity.



# 6

## THE TILED TOMBS

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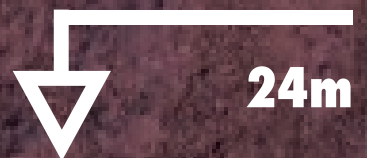
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# 7

## THE FIG & THE "DOOR GODS"



24m



## THE FIG & THE “DOOR GODS”

KANG BOON FOO 江文傳

Year of Death: 1941 | Xiamen (廈門)

The other name on the tomb cannot be verified.



### NATURE

Enveloping this tomb is a Red Stem Fig (*Ficus variegata*). If you are lucky when you visit, you will see the tree “figging” – sprouting clumps of figs all the way up its trunk and along the main branches. Unlike other figs (and most other plants), figging occurs only on the Red Stem Fig and its close cousin, the Yellow Stem Fig. You can tell this is a Red Stem Fig because of its buttress roots which grow out from the side of the tree, something the Yellow Stem Fig lacks.

Figs are a key forest species. It is known in Chinese as “the fruit without a flower” (无花果). But that is not true – in fact, the fig “fruit” is a flower turned inside-out. The flowers are found inside the “fruit”, facing towards the hollow centre of the fig. The fig tree is also a nursery

to minute wasp grubs. Because the figs are dependent on these wasps to pollinate them, they do not have a specific fruiting season. That means there is always a tree figging in the forest somewhere. When the wasps hatch, they leave their fig home to find another figging tree somewhere else in the forest to lay their eggs. Because the figging happens all year round, birds and animals have a year-round food supply in our forests.



### MATERIAL CULTURE

The tomb guardians found here bear startling similarities to the door gods or “men shen” (门神) found on the main doors of temples, clan associations and traditional Chinese architecture. They are considered very powerful protectors in Chinese mythology, hence their presence in important institutions such as temples.

The tomb guardians here are dressed as military generals inspired by martial characters in traditional Chinese opera. On the back of each guardian, at either side, are flags representing the armies commanded by the general. In the centre of the flags, there is a tiger-like emblem.

# 7

## THE FIG & THE "DOOR GODS"



Photo courtesy of Claire Leow

### ELSEWHERE ON THIS TRAIL

Door gods such as these are very rare in Bukit Brown. Not more than four pairs have been found. A similar pair can be found in the tombs above the Wee Family Cluster (Tomb #9).

### CREDIT

Timothy Pwee, "Red Stem Fig (*Ficus variegata*)", 7 July 2017.

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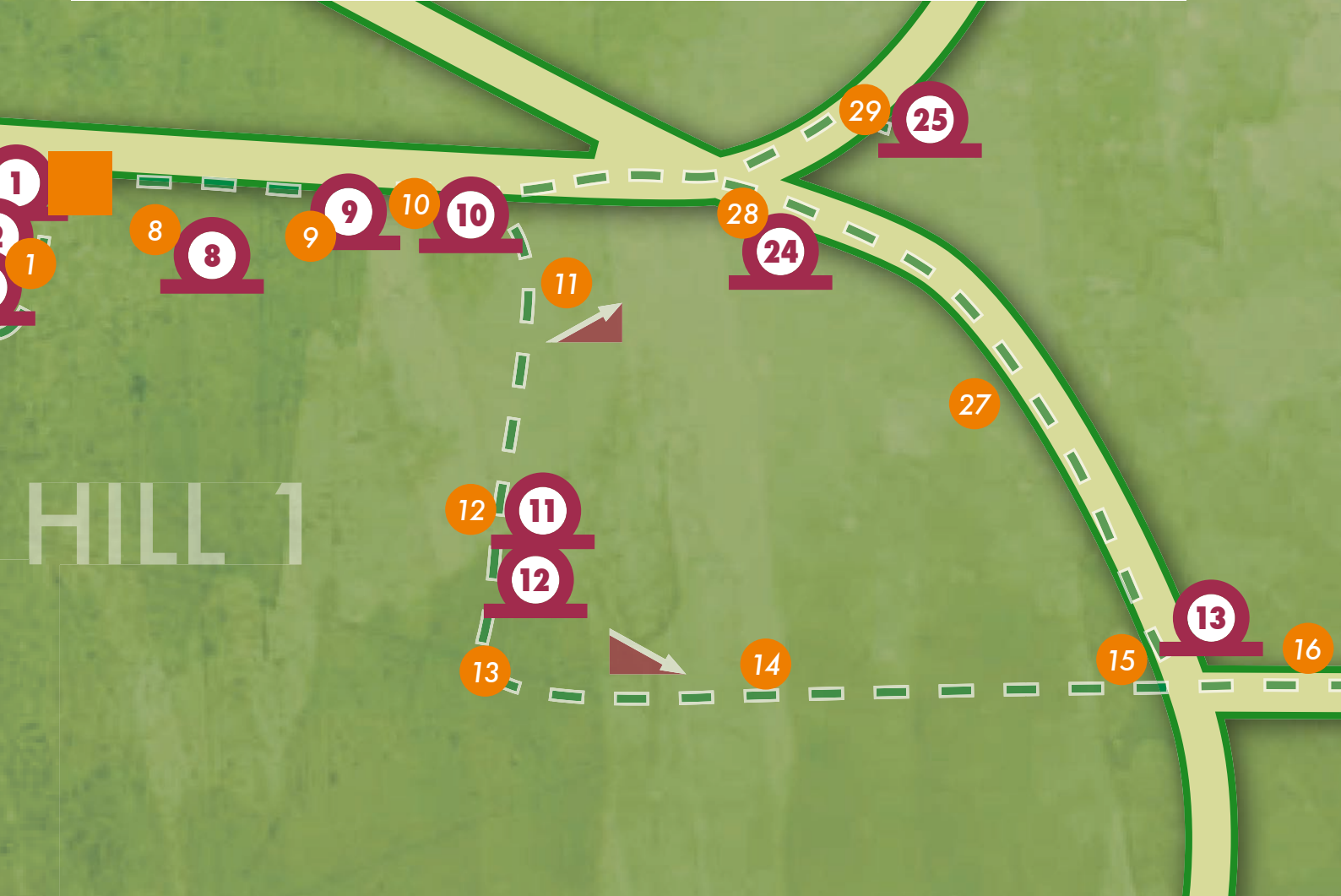
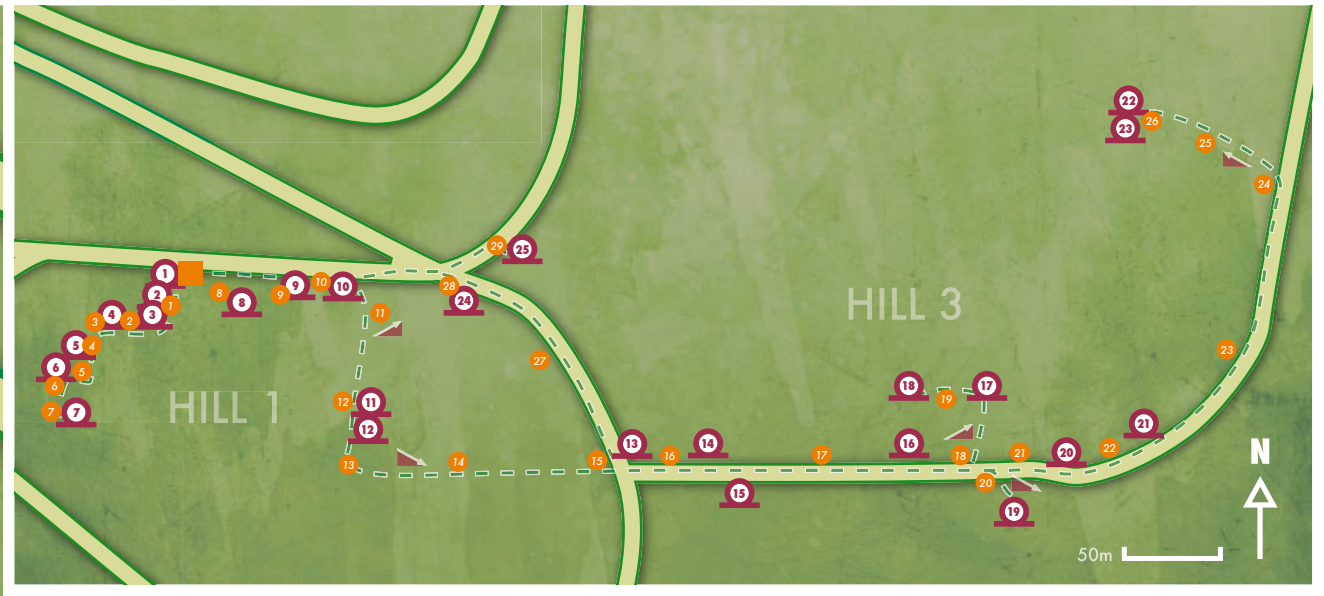
# 8

## THE GATED TOMB









**106m**

Return to Info Board and locate **Route Marker 8** for further directions to **Tomb #8**.



**LEGEND**

-  Route
-  Tomb
-  Uphill

-  Info Board
-  Route Marker
-  Downhill

**TIMINGS (ESTIMATED)**

Tomb #1 - #7	30mins
Tomb #8 - #12 - #13	30mins



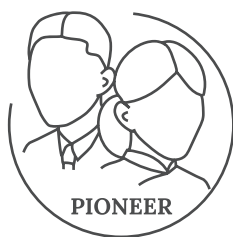


## THE GATED TOMB

TAY CHOON NEO 鄭春娘  
1879-1942 | Heshan (禾山)

### BIOGRAPHY

Tay Choon Neo (郑春娘) was the wife of Koh Siao Seng, who was prominent in the lighter craft industry (also known as “bumboats” or *twakow* in Teochew and Hokkien). He came to Singapore from Heshan and worked in the industry, eventually becoming the director of the Chinese Twakow Owner’s Association. He died in the early 1920s, leaving Tay to bring up their four children on her own. Their son, Koh Swee Gin, took on his father’s mantle as director of the Twakow Owner’s Association in the 1940s.



### PIONEER IN TWAKOW INDUSTRY

For more than 150 years, lighters or *twakows* were vital to the commercial activity along the Singapore River.

*Twakows* are a Singapore product with a unique hull, developed and run by the local Hokkiens and Teochews. They ferried goods between the large ships anchored out at sea, and the many warehouses along the river. This role allowed them to dominate the river traffic in the early days of Singapore trade.

Hokkien *twakows* were distinctive, with red, green and white boat-heads; whereas Teochew ones were usually plain red.



### MATERIAL CULTURE: EPITAPH

The inscription on Tay's tomb states that it was erected on 5 May 1942. This is one of the few known gated tombs in Bukit

Brown. But there are remnants of gates and fences of other such tombs in Lao Sua and Kopi Sua cemeteries in Greater Bukit Brown which were not under municipal administration.

It is unusual for a tomb of this size and grandeur to be put up during the Japanese Occupation, as people tended to opt for simple and quick burials during chaotic times.

Two epitaphs on her tomb speak of Tay and her family. Epitaphs are typically penned by family members, but sometimes well-



Epitaph by Chinese Twakow Owners' Association



Epitaph by Lee Tiong Sek

known writers or business associates are invited to do so as well. Here, the two epitaphs were written by the Chinese Twakow Owners' Association and Lee Tiong Sek, a family friend and writer. Lee was also the first President of the Singapore Buddhist Lodge.

The epitaph by the Chinese Twakow Owners' Association describes the life of her husband Koh and his contributions to the *twakow* industry. It also pays tribute to Tay's devotion to her family in bringing up four children after Koh passed away 20 years ago. It notes that the tomb is placed in an auspicious location and will bless all descendants. Lee's epitaph also praises Tay's virtues and good qualities.

### MATERIAL CULTURE: EARTH DEITY

Interestingly, there are two tigers guarding the Earth Deity instead of the usual lions. This could be because tigers are believed to be the mounts of the Earth Deity.

### CREDIT

Raymond Goh, "The 1942 Tomb of Tay Choon Neo", 3 June 2017.

### REFERENCES

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## THE WEE FAMILY CLUSTER

THNG PEAH NEO 湯丙娘 | 1865-1926 | Nan'an (南安)

KOH CHIN NEO 高振娘 | 1891-1938 | Nan'an (南安)

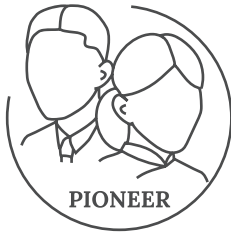
WEE TIAM GHEE 阮添字 | 1888-1934 | Nan'an (南安)

### BIOGRAPHY

The Wee Family Cluster consists of family matriarch Thng Peah Neo (汤丙娘), her daughter-in-law Koh Chin Neo (高振娘) and her son Wee Tiam Ghee (阮添字).

Wee Tiam Ghee was a builder and contractor who established Sin Choon Kee Brickworks. This later become Jurong Brickworks, one of the most established brickworks in Singapore.

Wee passed away at the age of 47 on 21 January 1934. After his death, Jurong Brickworks was bought over by Chan Wah Chip and Koh Eng Poh. One of the Wee sons, Wee Choon Guan, married Chan's sister. Wee Choon Guan also worked as managing director at Jurong Brickworks.



## PIONEER IN BRICKWORKS

The Jurong Brickworks was located near the 13<sup>th</sup> mile along Jurong Road.

Early brick production was labour-intensive and rudimentary – cows or buffaloes stepped on the earth to turn it into a paste which was then hand-shaped by workers, and finally baked in kilns. Factories typically produced between 10,000 and 20,000 bricks each month.

Just before the war, brickworks in Jurong started to use machinery, which greatly boosted production. During this time, Jurong Brickworks produced around 750,000 bricks per month. By the 1980s, it had become the largest private brick maker in Singapore with a capacity of five million bricks per month.



## MATERIAL CULTURE

The Wee family cluster is distinctive, with scalloped edges around each tomb mound, intricate carvings on each shoulder and decorative tiles in Majolica style paving the forecourt in front of the altars.

The carvings on Wee's left tomb shoulder (as seen by viewer) tells the story of Dong Yong (董永), one of the 24 filial exemplars which can be seen in full at Tomb #23. When Dong Yong's father died, the family was too poor to pay for a proper funeral. A filial son, Dong Yong sold himself into servitude to afford a proper funeral for his father. The seventh daughter of the Jade Emperor observed this, and was moved by his plight. She

## 9

## THE WEE FAMILY CLUSTER



descended to the mortal world to help him. They fell in love, got married and had a son.

However, tragedy befell them when the Jade Emperor, incensed that his daughter married a mortal, ordered her back to the celestial world. After she left, Dong Yong applied himself diligently to his studies after his debt was repaid and came in first in the imperial examinations.

The scene depicted in the carving shows him as an official and finally relenting, the Jade Emperor allowed his daughter to meet Dong Yong one last time, to hand over their son to him.

Other than being a popular folk tale, this story of reunion and fortune is also a ritual performance in traditional Chinese opera performances for the deities.



# THE WEE FAMILY CLUSTER

## CREDIT

Ang Yik Han, "The Story of Dong Yong", 2 May 2017

## REFERENCES

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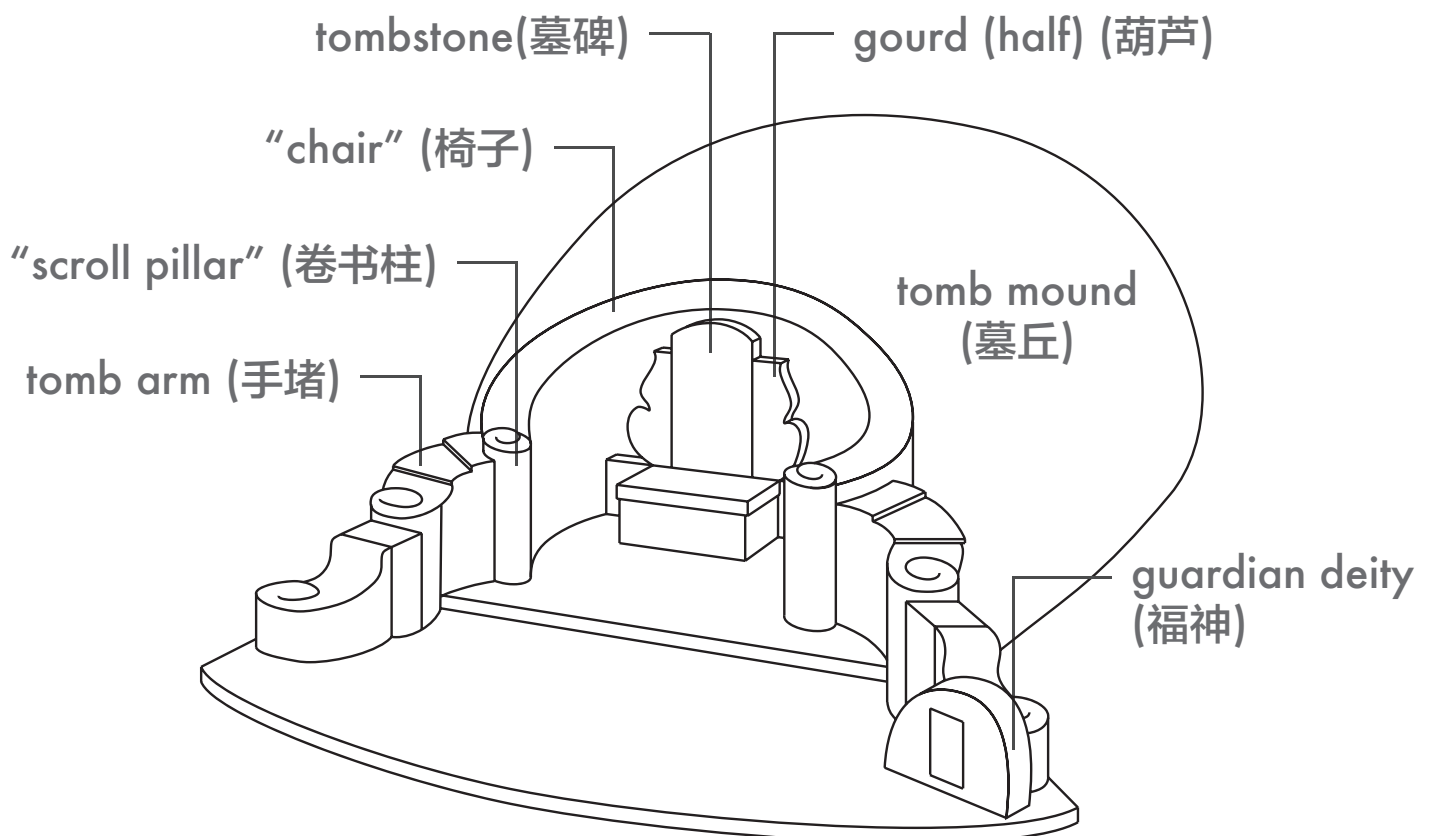
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# 10

## THE TEOCHEW CLUSTER



*Drawing of a typical Teochew tomb. Courtesy of Dr Lai Chee Kien (2013).*





## MATERIAL CULTURE: TYPICAL TEOCHEW TOMB

Typical Teochew tombs, unlike the more prevalent Hokkien tombs, have no ring constructed behind the tombstone. An earth mound is shaped over the interred area to correspond with a horse-shoe shaped armchair in front. The tomb arm extensions from the ends of the horse-shoe shape are mostly curvilinear. For larger forecourt, angular tomb arms are used to define the perimeters of the tomb.

Guardian deities (福神) are constructed in the vicinity of each tomb. During the annual tomb sweeping festivals at Qing Ming, these are attended to before the main tombs themselves.

Carved figurines of lions, birds and other creatures are often found atop the tomb arm intersections or endings. Other decorative elements are also found on tomb arm junctions, including lotus blooms and pumpkins. These could be carved from stone and attached to the tomb arms. They are also commonly shaped from brick fragments and then finished with Shanghai plaster.

### CREDIT

Dr Lai Chee Kien, Drawing of Teochew Tomb, *Our Roots, Our Heritage Exhibition* (2013)

### REFERENCES

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## LEE HOON LEONG 李雲龍

1871 – 1942

Place of Ancestry: Da'pu (大埔)

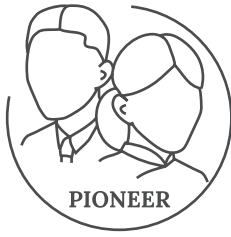


*Photo reproduced from Rojak Librarian.*

### BIOGRAPHY

Lee Hoon Leong (李云龙) was the father of Dr Lee Choo Neo (Tomb #5), and the grandfather of Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew. He was born in Singapore and educated at Raffles Institution. According to Lee Kuan Yew, his grandfather was very Westernised and gave him his English name "Harry" because of his great admiration for the British.

Lee had two wives – Ko Lin Neo, and Mak Hup Sin (mother of Dr Lee), who died in 1939. Lee passed away three years later on Saturday, 22 August 1942 at his residence, 74-3 Bras Basah Road. He left behind his wife, Ko; three sons (including Lee Chin Koon, father of Lee Kuan Yew); five daughters (including Dr Lee) and 28 grandchildren.



## PIONEER IN SHIPPING AND EDUCATION

Lee Kuan Yew recounted in his memoirs that his grandfather started his career as a “dispenser” (an unqualified pharmacist).

Later, Lee got a job as a purser on board a ship belonging to the Heap Eng Moh Shipping Line, owned by the Chinese millionaire and “Sugar King” of Java, Oei Tiong Ham. He gained the trust and goodwill of Oei and was eventually promoted to managing director of the company. Throughout his lifetime, he donated generously to schools such as Raffles Institution, Anglo-Chinese School and St Joseph’s Institution. But he lost much of his wealth during the Great Depression.



## MATERIAL CULTURE

An interesting inscription on Lee’s tomb is the year of his passing, carved onto the altar as 2602. This refers to the Japanese Koki

Year, starting 660 BC when the first Japanese Emperor Jimmu ascended the throne. It is common to find dates based on the Koki calendar on tombs constructed during the Japanese Occupation.

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12

## KUNG TIAN SIONG & WIFE

LIE SIO NIO 李惜娘 | 1878-1926 | Place of Birth: Java

KUNG TIAN SIONG 孔天相 | 1876-1958 | Place of Birth: Malacca



Photo reproduced from  
Rojak Librarian.

### BIOGRAPHY

Kung Tian Siong (known as T.S. Kung) (孔天相) was one of Singapore's first cinema magnates. He was born in 1876 in Malacca. He later came to Singapore and studied at the Anglo-Chinese School.

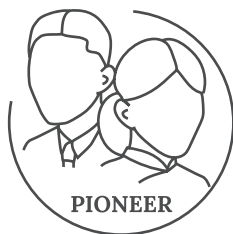
Kung was actively involved in the Straits Chinese Recreational Club and the Chinese Swimming Club. He was also a staunch Christian and a preacher in Geylang and Bedok Methodist Church.

Kung had two marriages. His first wife was Siau Mah Li (Seow Mah Lee) (m. 1898-1911) whom he met in



Funeral hearse of Lie Sio Nio. Photo reproduced from Rojak Librarian.

Singapore while she was under the tutelage of Sophia Blackmore, founder of the Methodist Girls' School. Siau was one of the first Chinese girls to be educated at the school. They had three daughters, but divorced in 1911. His second wife, Lie Sio Nio (m. 1912–1926) was a wealthy widow from Java. She died of illness in 1926. The couple had no children. Kung ended his days as a preacher, and passed away in Singapore, in May 1958.



## PIONEER IN CINEMA

Kung was noted as a pioneer who set up some of the city's first cinemas, such as the Empire Cinema which opened in 1916. It was located at the junction of South Bridge Road, Tanjong Pagar Road and Neil Road (opposite Kreta Ayer Police station). T.S. Kung sold it to the Shaw Brothers on 19 March 1928. He also bought the popular movie theatre Harima Hall (at North Bridge Road) from Mr. K. Harima in 1918, and managed Liberty Hall as well.



Empire Cinema. Photo reproduced from Rojak Librarian.



## MATERIAL CULTURE

Kung's tomb is empty, as he was buried in the Bidadari Christian Cemetery. Inscribed on both tombs is his lineage as the 72<sup>th</sup> generation lineal descendant of Confucius.

Lie Sio Nio's tomb also carries inscriptions of children from Kung's earlier marriage to Siau Mah Li.

These tombs have the complete set of stories of the "Four Flowers" carved on the shoulders. From viewer's left to right, these are: lotus, peony, plum blossom, chrysanthemum.



*Clockwise from top left: lotus, peony, chrysanthemum and plum blossom.*

The lotus (莲) is often associated with Song philosopher Zhou Dunyi (周敦颐). His *Ode to the Lotus* admires the flower for staying pure even though it grows in mud.

The peony (牡丹), known as the “king of flowers”, was loved by Emperor Xuanzong (唐玄宗) of the Tang Dynasty, who reigned over a period of opulence and lavishness. Till today, the flower is associated with wealth and prosperity.

The plum blossom (梅) represents an indomitable spirit as it blooms through harsh winter months.

Finally, the chrysanthemum (菊) symbolises the simple, carefree life and transcendence over worries and intrigues.

### POINT OF INTEREST

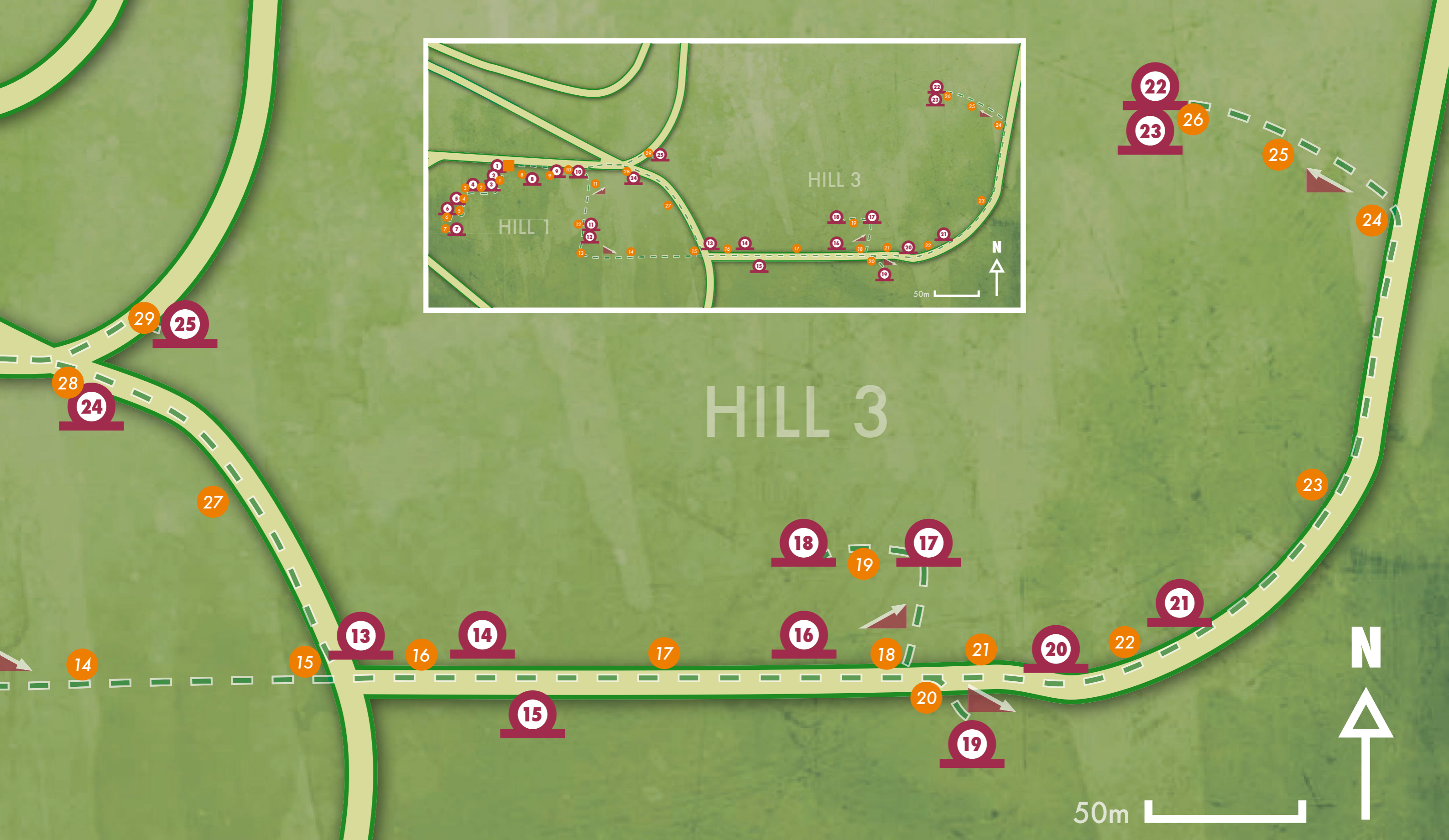
Kung’s tomb is an example of a “live” tomb, which means that the deceased prepared for his tomb while still alive. A “live” tomb is usually undertaken on the recommendation of a Chinese *fengshui* master for the purpose of ensuring the well-being of future generations.

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**LEGEND**

Route

Tomb

Uphill

Route Marker

Downhill

**TIMINGS (ESTIMATED)**

Tomb #8 - #12 - #13 30mins

Tomb #8 - #25 - #13 45 mins

Tomb #13 - #23 75mins



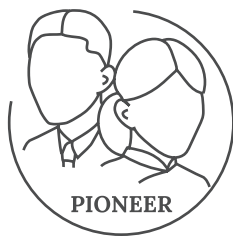


## LU SHANG LIAN 吕上憐

YEAR OF DEATH: 1856

### BIOGRAPHY

This re-interred tomb belongs to Lu Shang Lian (吕上怜), who was the mother of Tan Kim Chen (陈庆真). Tan formed and led the Amoy chapter of the Little Dagger Society (小刀会) in 1849, a secret society dedicated to overthrowing the Qing dynasty in the name of the Ming dynasty – the last Han (Chinese) dynasty overran by the Qing in 1644. He was a colonial subject of Singapore and a clerk in a British trading company.



### PIONEER

The Little Dagger Society was formed in the midst of many regional rebellions. China was teetering on the brink of collapse from the Taiping Rebellion (1850), which successfully occupied half of China.

Commanding a few thousand men, Tan's initial military successes in the Amoy region caused alarm in Imperial Beijing. He was captured in 1851, and created a diplomatic stir by pronouncing his status as a British subject. This attracted the attention of the British Consul who tried to intervene on his behalf. However, Tan died at the hands of his interrogators after one day of "intensive" questioning. He was 22 years old. His death resulted in a Sino-British diplomatic row.

In 1853, Tan's successor Ng Wei led another few thousand men, captained by mostly Singapore-based military commanders, and succeeded in occupying Amoy for several months. After being besieged by the Imperial army, the lack of provisions and food forced them to slip away and escape south to Singapore and Semarang, Indonesia.



### MATERIAL CULTURE

As Lu was a mother of four sons (out of eight) who were involved in varying degrees with the Society's uprisings, it is mysterious why her tombstone was inscribed with the prefix for "Imperial/Royal" (皇), which commonly indicates a subject of the Qing Dynasty. Also carved for posterity was her personal status as the 38<sup>th</sup> generation of the Tan family ancestry (三十八世皇妣祖母諡上憐陳門呂氏) – a rare stone record in Bukit Brown Cemetery. We know that this must be a re-interred tomb, as her year of death is recorded on the stone as 1856.

13

LU SHANG LIAN 吕上憐

**CREDIT**

Fabian Tee, "Little Dagger Society", 2 May 2017.

14

LIM TECK GHEE & MOTHER



25m



14

## LIM TECK GHEE & MOTHER

LIM TECK GHEE 林德義 | 1830s–1891 | Jinli (錦裡)

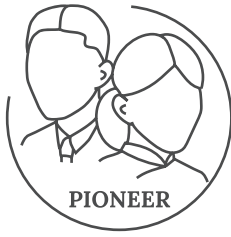
YEO IM NEO 楊淑懿 | 1810s–1887 | Jinli (錦裡)

### BIOGRAPHY

Buried here are Lim Teck Ghee (林德義) and his mother, Yeo Im Neo (楊淑懿). Lim Teck Ghee was the eldest son of Lim Liak and Yeo, a local *nyonya*. The Lim family were influential and wealthy business-owners.

Lim Liak (1804–1875) came to Singapore in 1825 and built a successful trading company, called Leack, Chin Seng & Co. He also opened a branch, Tek Hee Keng Hoon & Co, in Malacca in the 1850s. This company was named after Lim Teck Ghee and Choa Keng Hoon, a prominent Malacca businessman. The other partners were the eldest sons of businessmen, Tan Chin Seng and Chee Yam Chuan.

Lim married Tan Poh Neo, the daughter of Tan Chin Seng.



## PIONEER IN TIN MINING AND MALAYAN POLITICS

The Lim company's tin mining interests in Klang Valley expanded rapidly from 1860s. In 1867, the Selangor Civil War, which began as a war of succession of Klang, was started by the deposed heir-apparent, Tengku Madhi. The civil war soon escalated with Chinese secret societies, Ghee Hin and Hai Sun, taking sides and vying for control of tin-rich districts in Selangor.

Lim Teck Ghee was close to the Selangor Royal Family and he played a major role in the civil war. The Selangor Royal Family relied on him for financial support during the seven-year war. The war ended in 1874 with British intervention. This led to the formation of the Federated Malay States. By the end of the war Lim Teck Ghee was the largest individual holder of the Selangor State Debt Bonds. Frank Swettenham, Advisor to the Sultan, appointed Lim as Financial Administrator of Selangor in 1874.

Lim participated in the 1881 Melbourne International Exhibition in several categories, notably rice and tin.



## MATERIAL CULTURE

At the top of Lim's tombstone is a carving that shows two dragons chasing (and protecting) a pearl. This is a popular motif in both tombs and traditional buildings.

The tomb inscriptions reveal that Lim had different names at different stages of his life:

皇清誥贈奉政大夫諡儉讓字德義號士芳諱蘭苑林府君之墳

In simplified Chinese:

皇清诰赠奉政大夫谥俭让字德义号士芳讳兰苑林府君之坟

“皇清诰赠奉政大夫” refers to his conferment as “*Fengzhen Daifu* (奉政大夫), fifth ranking Qing official”, for his fundraising contributions to China.

“谥” indicates Lim’s posthumous name Jian Rang (俭让).

“字” indicates his given name, Teck Ghee (德义).

“号” indicates his alias, Shi Fang (士芳).

Lim and his mother had originally been buried on his plantation in Toa Payoh district. According to the municipal minutes of 10 November 1886, the colonial government agreed to the interment of Yeo Im Neo on Lim’s plantation as there were no other suitable grounds for the “higher status” Chinese. Although no other interment was allowed according to the minutes, Lim was also buried on his land.

In the 1930s, Lim’s and his mother’s graves were exhumed and their tombstones were re-interred at Bukit Brown.

## CREDIT

Lim Soon Hoe, "Lim Teck Ghee", 3 April 2017.

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# 15

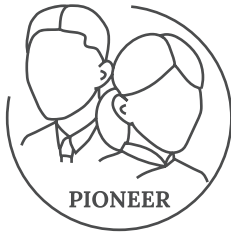
## THE PAUPERS' SECTION

### BACKGROUND

As a public cemetery, Bukit Brown was open to all Chinese, rich or poor. Municipal by-laws (1913) divided the cemetery into two sections: "general" and "pauper". These were sub-divided into numbered plots of specific sizes.

No fees were charged for burial plots in this section unlike in the general section, where there was a plot fee of \$50 and burial fee of \$15. No reservations could also be made. It is estimated that tens of thousands of "ordinary" migrants are buried in the paupers' section. Unclaimed bodies and babies were also buried in this section. These sites are less desirable in terms of *fengshui* considerations as they are located in low-lying areas, where the land is more prone to water retention, thus leading to the corpse being inundated in water.





## PIONEER

These sites are a poignant reminder of those who sojourned to a new land to seek better lives and futures but did not succeed. They worked hard to eke out a living but died penniless oftentimes with families left behind in China.



## WORLD WAR II CONNECTION

The Paupers' Section, being low-lying and close to paths, facilitated quick burials under conditions of extreme hardship and uncertainty during the Japanese Occupation. Many "non-paupers" were buried here during this period.

Besides the cost of the burial plot, there were also funeral expenses such as grave diggers and the costs of erecting a simple tombstone. For such expenses, guilds and clan associations would step in and provide the expenses needed.

## ELSEWHERE ON THIS TRAIL

In one documented case, a rickshaw puller Low Nong Nong died in a violent confrontation between striking rickshaw pullers and security forces in 1938. His funeral cortege was probably the longest accorded to a pauper with 3000 of his compatriots accompanying the cortege. He is buried in the Paupers' Section on Hill 3.

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16

## CHEW GEOK LEONG 周玉龍

1870–1940

Place of Ancestry: Anxi (安溪)

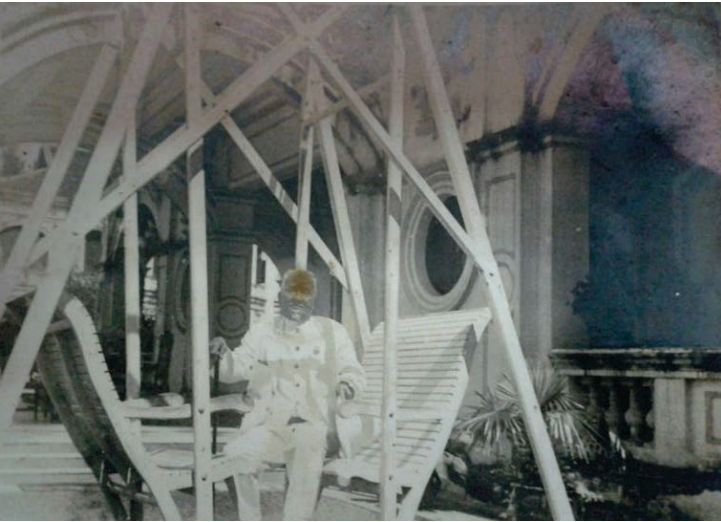
### BIOGRAPHY



Photo courtesy of Chew Family Archives.

Chew Geok Leong's (周玉龍) tomb is one of the most iconic and recognisable in Bukit Brown.

Chew was a former Qing official born in Anxi, who had fled China at the turn of the century, as the warlord Yuan Shih Kai was consolidating his power to overthrow the Emperor. He came to Singapore together with his family, and established a Chinese medical practice and medicine shop at 925 Geylang



Chew relaxing at his residence in China.  
Photo courtesy of Chew Family Archives.

Road. His youngest daughter, Chew Chwee Eng recounted that her father came from a family with four generations of Chinese physicians.

Chew and his family lived in a bungalow elevated on stilts behind Chew's shop. He died on 11 Feb 1940 and was buried at Bukit Brown on 13 Feb 1940.



## MATERIAL CULTURE

Chew's tomb is guarded by a pair of distinctive and vibrantly coloured Sikh guards. They have a rank of 'Naik' (equivalent to Corporal) as seen by the two chevron arrows. The statues have been assigned names denoting their duties - Home Guard (守府) - "patrolling the home" and City Guard (巡城) - "patrolling the city".

This is another example of a "live" tomb, prepared by the deceased while he was alive. All parts of the tomb, including the coffin and the Sikh statues were made in China and shipped over. The tomb is reinforced with locally made bricks. The Sikh guards are the only painted pair in the cemetery.

Chew Chwee Eng recalled that her father had conceptualised the design and bought the coffin and the two Sikh guards when he was alive. The coffin was stored in the servant quarters.

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The tomb signage has been removed at the request of the descendants, and Wayfinder duly respects their decision.





## THE PANG FAMILY CLUSTER

**17** KANG CHEONG NEO 江昌娘 | 1863 - 1941 | Zhao'an (詔安)  
CHOO PECK LIAN 朱白蓮 | 1890-1967 | Yujiang (玉江)  
PANG CHEANG YEAN 馮清緣 | 1889-1951 | Longxi (龍溪)  
KOH TOH NEO 許陶娘 | 1854-1964 | Longxi (龍溪)

### BIOGRAPHY

Pang Cheang Yeon (馮清緣) was a director of the United Chinese and Batu Pahat banks, and oversaw other business interests under the patronage of the Sultans of Kelantan, Trengganu and Pahang.

Pang and his wife Choo Peck Lian (朱白蓮) are in the double tomb in the middle. Also buried with him in this family plot are his mother, Koh Toh Neo (許陶娘) and his mother-in-law, Kang Cheong Neo (江昌娘). Kang's listed ancestry on her tomb, Zhaoyi (詔邑), means "person who traces ancestry to Zhao'an county".

Koh was the third wife of Pang's father, Pang Tek Teng. Betrothed as a child bride from China, she was a devout Taoist and avowed to be a vegetarian if all members of

the family survived the war, which they did.

When she died in 1964, Koh had a specially adapted coffin because her body had been prepared in a sitting position by the nuns in a temple she worshipped at. She was also clothed in a nun's blue robes.



### WORLD WAR II CONNECTION

As the Japanese were at the doorstep of Singapore and Malaya, the Pang family was in great fear, as the Japanese were killing Chinese who had supported China in the Sino-Japanese war. Pang was known to have donated generously to such fundraising efforts. The Pangs were also worried that their wealth would be confiscated.

The Pangs therefore approached their in-laws for help to hide a large sum of money. Their in-laws was the family of Tan Kheam Hock, Municipal Commissioner and prominent Peranakan community leader. Pang's eldest son had married the granddaughter of Tan Kheam Hock. The Tans decided to help out of familial obligation, despite the huge risk to their lives if discovered, especially since the money was in British pounds. Their eventual hiding place was a large flower pot in the courtyard of the family home in Devonshire Road – a daring and ingenious move!

The money was so substantial that the Pangs were able to rebuild their family business after the Japanese surrender.

## POINT OF INTEREST

Tan Kheam Hock, together with fellow Municipal Commissioner See Tiong Wah, made the final push for the realisation of a municipal Chinese cemetery 20 years after it was mooted – a cemetery that was open to all Chinese regardless of status and dialect groups.

## REFERENCES

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18

## TAN BOO LIAT 陳武烈

1881 – 1934

Place of Ancestry: Haicheng, Zhangzhou (漳州海澄)



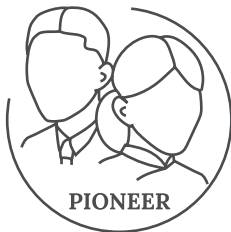
The former Golden Bell Mansion on Mount Faber, now occupied by the Danish Seamen's Church. Photo reproduced from User:Sengkang - Own work, Copyrighted free use, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1339800>

### BIOGRAPHY

Tan Boo Liat (陈武烈) was a leading light in colonial Singapore and an influential member of the rich and powerful Hokkien clan. He was a long-time director of the Thian Hock Keng Temple (1897–1916) and also the founder of the Singapore Straits Chinese British Association (which later became the Peranakan Association) in 1900.

Like his great grandfather Tan Tock Seng and grandfather Tan Kim Ching, Tan was a philanthropist. Over the decades, the Tan family made Tan Tock Seng Paupers' Hospital (later Tan Tock Seng Hospital) accessible to the city's poor with generous donations towards its upkeep and expansion.

Tan shared such a deep bond with his grandfather Kim Ching that he named his villa on Mt Faber after him, "Golden Bell Mansion" (金钟). This bond extended to Siam (present-day Thailand), where he continued the commercial ties and royal patronage established by his grandfather. He received the title of *Phra Anukul Sayamkich* from the Thai King. Tan died in Shanghai at the age 60 in 1934. His body was later shipped back to Singapore.



### PIONEER IN EDUCATION AND THE CHINESE REVOLUTION

Tan contributed to education as a founder and the first treasurer of the Singapore Chinese Girls' School in 1899 when girls' education was regarded as irrelevant or suspect. He was a trustee of the Anglo-Chinese Boarding School, and also helped to establish the Tao Nan School at Armenian Street which is now the Peranakan Museum. The exhibits there include the Viceroy's Cup won in Kolkata by Tan's horse, Vanitas.

Despite his identification with the Peranakans (once dubbed the "King's Chinese"), he was an early supporter of Dr Sun Yat Sen's 1911 Republican Revolution and a secret member of the Tong Meng Hui (同盟会), which later became the Kuomintang (国民党). In 1911, Tan sheltered Sun from would-be Qing assassins at the Golden

Bell Mansion. Sun was then enroute to China to assume the presidency of the new republic. In 1913, Tan was appointed the Deputy Minister of the Kuomintang Branch in Singapore alongside his friends Dr Lim Boon Keng and Lim Nee Soon. The Republican cause led Tan to call for the severing of men's pigtails (a symbol of submission to Qing), an end to bound feet for women and an appeal to the British authority to abolish the highly profitable opium trade. When the call for an opium embargo failed, he and others set up a private drug rehabilitation centre.



### MATERIAL CULTURE

Tan's tomb design is in the Art Deco style, with engravings of bells on both flanks – a reference to his grandfather Kim Ching.

The six radiating rays at the front were likely inspired by the Kuomintang's insignia, as was the rising sun at the back. The "Phya" in the stone inscription of *Phya Anakul Sayamkitch* is the third highest title from eight titles that can be conferred by the Thai King. It also comes with land entitlements. "Anakul Sayamkitch" is Tan's name in Thai, and the name literally means "helpful to Siam's affairs of state".

### ELSEWHERE ON THIS TRAIL

Next to Tan's tomb are the re-interred remains of his uncle Tan Swee Lim and his wife. He is listed here by his posthumous name, 陳剛直. Swee Lim also has a Thai title. The tomb of Tan's beloved grandfather Kim Ching, who was Siam's Honorary Consul General in Singapore, has also been re-interred in Bukit Brown, on Hill 4.

## CREDIT

Fabian Tee, "Tan Boo Liat", 29 May 2017.

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Sirilaksana Khoman. May 2017. Interview on Siamese Royal Titles.





19

## CEMENTED TOMB

TENG KING CHUAN 林金璋

Year of Death: 1937 | Xinghua (興化)

### BACKGROUND

Tombs with cemented-over mounds have been spotted in the Paupers' Section.

While such cemented-over mounds are unusual in Bukit Brown, similar mounds have been observed by travellers in Amoy (present-day Xiamen) in the late 19<sup>th</sup>–early 20<sup>th</sup> century.



### MATERIAL CULTURE

According to traditional *fengshui* beliefs, burial mounds should be kept well-maintained so that water would not pool on top, as that was considered bad luck. Documented *fengshui* principles date as far back as the Jin Dynasty

(265–420), in the *Book of Burial* (葬书) by Guo Pu (郭璞). He wrote about *fengshui* as the practice of proper burial rituals that ensure a good future for the deceased's descendants.

In more recent times, family or friends of the deceased sometimes opted for cemented burial mounds for various reasons.

Some believe that if someone is born on an inauspicious date, misfortune will befall throughout his or her life. When such a person died, his or her tomb had to be readied within a short period of time and sealed up to prevent contact. Others believed that cemented mounds should be used for people who died of infectious diseases. Finally, there may be those who used such mounds for other specific geomancy reasons.

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## OH SIAN GUAN & WIFE

YAP SUAN NEO 葉璇娘 | 1876–1950 | Xiamen (廈門)

OH SIAN GUAN 胡先愿 | 1874–1943 | Tong'an (同安)

### BIOGRAPHY

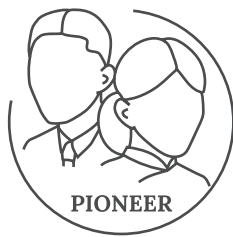
Oh Sian Guan (胡先愿) was a prominent Hokkien banker. He came to Singapore in 1907 at the age of 33. In partnership with one Tan Tiong Sing, he ran a general merchant business called Chin Kiat (振吉) at 52 Telok Ayer Street dealing in goods such as betel nut, coffee, pepper and bird's nest, which were imported from Sarawak and Batavia, Dutch East Indies (now Jakarta, Indonesia). Oh eventually bought over



Left: A studio portrait of Oh Sian Guan printed on to a paper postcard. A handwritten caption on the back of the portrait in Chinese states that the photograph was taken on 9 July in the 22nd year of the Republic of China (1933) in Singapore. Right: an undated photograph of Yap Suan Neo. Photos courtesy of Oh's daughter Egan Hu (胡怡颜) and granddaughter Mary Kwan Tse-Chwong (关志庄).

the business from Tan. He was a founding member of the Singapore Tong'an District Guild when it was established on 31 May 1931.

Buried with Oh is his wife Yap Suan Neo (叶璇娘). She was born in 1876 in Xiamen City (厦门市) and passed away in 1950 in Singapore.



### PIONEER IN BANKING

Oh later became a director of the Oversea-Chinese Bank. When it merged with two other Chinese-owned banks in 1932 to form the Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation (OCBC), he also became one of the first directors of that bank. He held that position until the Japanese Occupation in 1942. At the time of his death, he was president of the Goh Loo Club (吾卢俱乐部), known informally as the "Bankers' Institute" as all the directors of Chinese-owned banks were members.



### MATERIAL CULTURE

The spectacular carvings on the panels of the extreme left and right tomb arms tell legendary stories.



(1) Madam White Snake Rescues Xu Xian

(2) Nezha Fights the Dragon Prince



### Madam White Snake Rescues Xu Xian

The legend of Madam White Snake is a timeless classic of forbidden love. The popular version of the story originated during the Ming Dynasty. It has been adapted many times for screen and stage.

The White Snake is a snake spirit that has achieved human form after five hundred years of self-cultivation. She then fell in love with a mortal man, the scholar Xu Xian. Their romance was thwarted by the self-righteous monk Fa Hai, determined to end what he perceived as an aberration of nature – the union of man and demon.

Bent on protecting Xu Xian from his lover, Fa Hai imprisoned him in Jinshan Temple. In response, Madam White Snake and her attendant the faithful Green Snake raised an army of sea and riverine creatures and tried to flood the temple. However, they failed and had to retreat to recoup their strength.



The left side of the panel shows the White Snake armed with two swords and the Green Snake - her constant companion - behind her with a flag, on a boat sailing for the temple. On the right, Fa Hai sits

calmly in the temple while Xu Xian flails his arms while scanning the sea in anticipation.

A tortoise spirit stands ready in the angry waters in front of the temple, completing the tableau. Jinshan Temple is located in the city of Zhenjiang by the Yangtze River. The much-maligned Fa Hai was a real monk in history. He was supposed to have done much good for the common folk when he was alive.

### Nezha Fights the Dragon Prince

Nezha was the third son of Li Jing, a military commander. Born after a prolonged pregnancy, the precocious youngster with magical powers was a constant headache to his father.



One day, Nezha had a bath in the sea. While bathing, he played with his magical sash which set off reverberations rocking the Dragon King's palace. The Dragon King sent a scout to

investigate, whom Nezha promptly dispatched. Alarmed, the Dragon King sent his next champion, his son, the Third Dragon Prince. Nezha defeated the prince and tore his tendons from his lifeless body.

This panel shows Nezha (left) casting his magical weapon, the universal ring, at the Dragon Prince who is astride a mystical beast and armed with a halberd. Surrounding the Dragon Prince are his underlings from the deep seas. The old man behind Nezha looks like a harried old attendant wrangling his hands over the trouble his young master is getting into.

After many more adventures, Nezha was to enjoy an illustrious career as recorded in the novel *Investiture of the Deities*. Today, Nezha is a popular deity in the Taoist pantheon. In his incarnation as the Third Prince, he is often positioned as the vanguard of patron deities of temples. He also holds the appointment of the Marshal of the Central Camp, the most important of the five camps of spiritual armies which guard the confines of a temple or a ritualistic space.

## CREDITS

Ang Yik Han, "Nezha Fights the Dragon Prince" and "Madam White Snake Rescues Xu Xian", 6 April 2017.

Dr Jack Tsen-Ta Lee, "Oh Sian Guan and Yap Suan Neo", 6 April 2017.



## TAN EAN KIAM 陳延謙

1881 – 1943

Place of Ancestry: Tong'an (同安)

### BIOGRAPHY

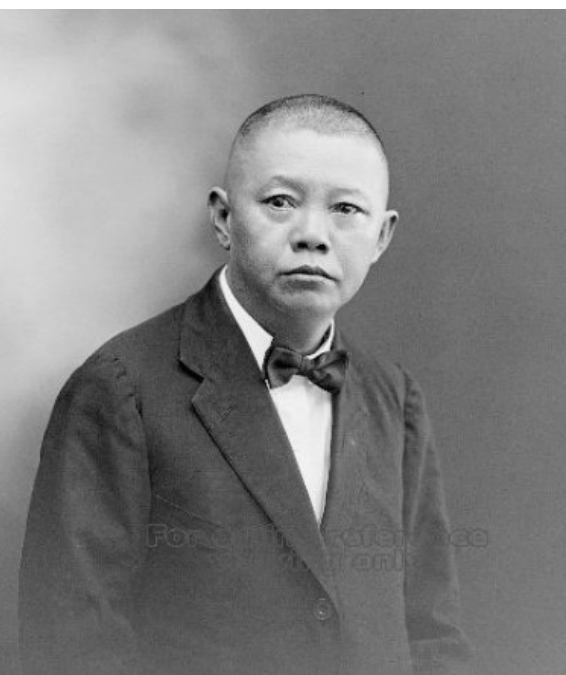


Photo reproduced from  
Rojak Librarian.

Tan Ean Kiam (陈延谦) was a rubber magnate and banker. He was one of the founders of the Oversea Chinese Bank, which later became the Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation. In addition to being the managing director of both banks, Tan made many contributions to the Chinese communities in Singapore and China.

A foundation providing welfare services was subsequently established in his name. To this day, the Tan Ean Kiam Foundation continues to fund

scholarships and other charitable causes.

Although the name of Tan's wife is inscribed on the tombstone, she is not actually buried here as indicated by the absence of her date of death on the tomb, and as confirmed by descendants.



### WORLD WAR II CONNECTION

Tan was a staunch patriot who remained actively involved in China's political developments. He was a member of the Tong Meng Hui (同盟会), the revolutionary movement founded by Dr Sun Yat Sen which later became Kuomintang (国民党). In 1936, he also bought the Sun Yat Sen Villa in Balestier together with five other businessmen. It was donated to China's Kuomintang government, to keep the memory of Sun and his Singapore's comrades' contributions to the 1911 founding of the Republic of China alive.

When the Sino-Japanese War broke out, he became the head of Hokkien division of the China Relief Fund between 1937-1942, and helped it raise funds. He was also one of the wealthy Chinese who chose to stay in Singapore during the Japanese Occupation. When the Japanese set up the Overseas Chinese Association, Tan was forced to take up an appointment in this organisation. The association was forced to raise a \$50 million "donation" from the Chinese community to the Japanese military authorities.

Tan suffered a heart attack and passed away during the Occupation in 1943. He bequeathed 10% of his wealth to charitable organisations.



## MATERIAL CULTURE

Tan penned the couplets inscribed on his tomb, which speak of his yearning for his country of birth and the acceptance that he will be laid to rest in a foreign land.



(1) 同裘成一夢 (同裘成一梦)

(2) 安土好長眠 (安土好长眠)

*Under the same quilt we have the same dream*

*Just bury me and let me have a deep sleep*

(3) 埋骨何須故里 (埋骨何须故里)

(4) 蓋棺便是吾廬 (盖棺便是吾庐)

*No need to bury me in my hometown for when you close  
the coffin lid, that will be my abode*

(Translated by Raymond Goh)

The inscription is a reproduction of his actual calligraphy. Another example of Tan's calligraphy can be found in the tribute to his wife, Yap Yan Neo, carved on her tomb at Tomb #2.



Another interesting feature here is the small stone plaque in front of the tomb – a stone “business card” left by the Kian Seng Huat company that erected the tomb. The four numbers refer to the plot numbers of the tomb.

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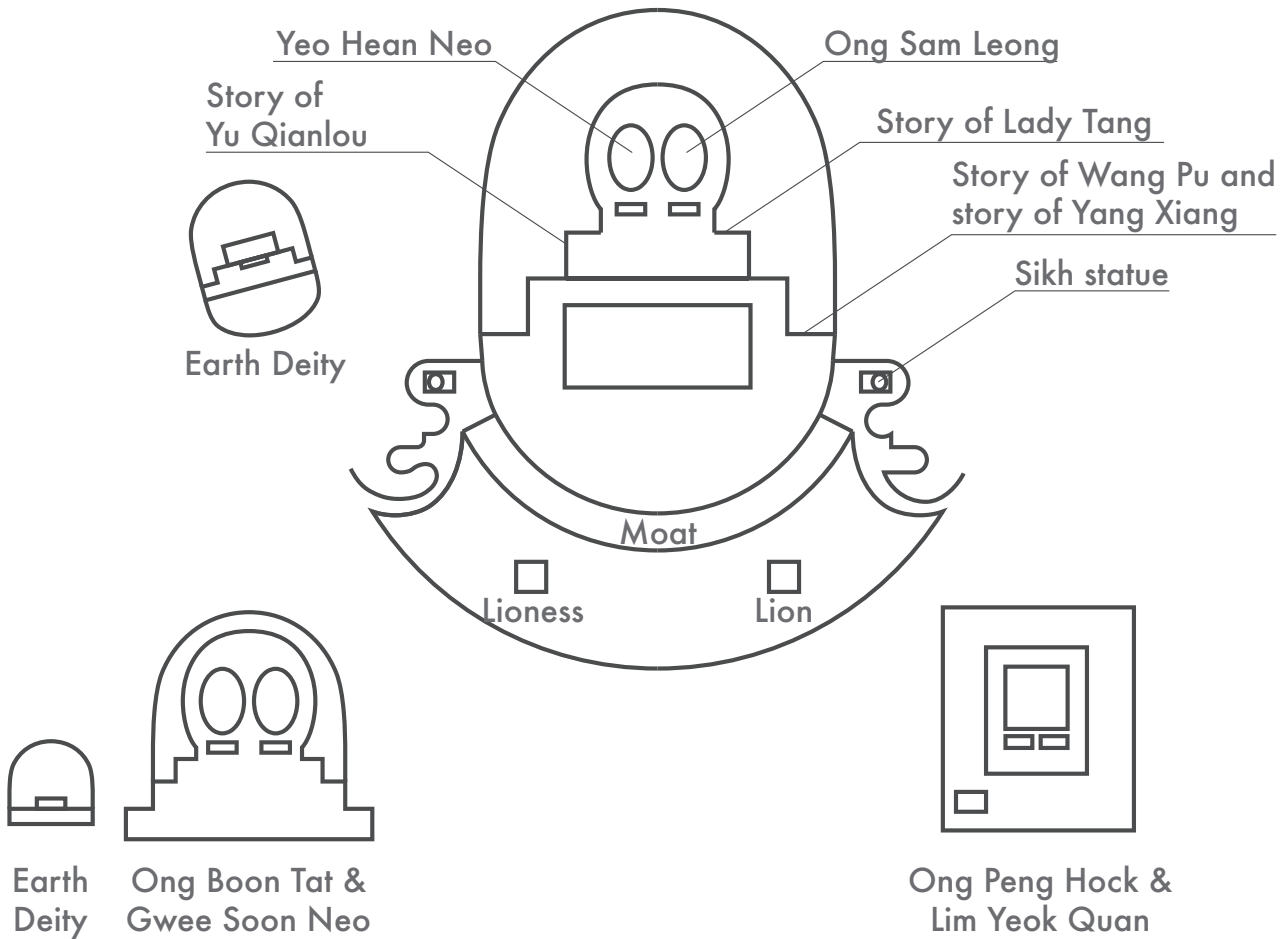
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22

ONG FAMILY COMPLEX



Map of Ong Sam Leong Family Complex



## ONG FAMILY COMPLEX

The Ong Sam Leong family complex is the largest in Bukit Brown, spanning 600 sq metres, the size of 10 three-room HDB flats. It is also situated on the highest point of the Greater Bukit Brown area, a mark of Ong Sam Leong's wealth and influence in the Ong clan. The burial grounds of the Ong family are designed on *fengshui* principles to bring forth an abundance of wealth and many children for the future generations.



MATERIAL  
CULTURE

### MATERIAL CULTURE

#### Courtyard

The big half-moon-shaped granite courtyard is known as the Bright Hall (明堂). According to *fengshui* principles, auspicious energy or "qi" (气) gathers here.



#### Lions

The tomb is guarded by two lions poised above separate pedestals at the outer front edge.

#### Sikh Statues

The pair of Sikh statues standing guard appear "old", as seen from slouching shoulders, protruding bellies and non-militaristic uniforms. This

symbolises their loyalty and years of experience.

The Sikhs brought over by the British were known for their warrior qualities and fierce loyalty. They were employed by the Chinese as personal and property guardians, a tradition that followed them to the graves.

### Moat

A moat borders the tombs of Ong and his wife in a half-moon structure. According to one tomb keeper, it was used by the local village children and cemetery workers as their “wading pool”.

### Earth Deity

The huge Earth Deity of this tomb is as big as a standard tomb. The carved panel on the front of the earth deity’s altar tells the legend of “*Zhao Yan Pleading For Longevity*” (赵颜求寿). Zhao Yan (赵颜) was a poor boy who lived during the era of the Three Kingdoms. One day, he was tending to his fields with his buffalo when he met Guan Lu (管辂), a man skilled in divination. Guan could



tell that Zhao had only three more days to live.

Guan decided to help him. He asked Zhao to bring wine and meat to the

South Hills (南山) where two old gentlemen were playing chess. Zhao was to serve them as they played. The old men were the star deities, North Dipper (北斗) and South Dipper (南斗). At the end of their game, they were obliged to repay Zhao for his food and drink.

The North Dipper added a “nine” (九) in front of the two characters “ten” (十) and “nine” (九) next to Zhao’s name in his register, extending Zhao’s life to ninety-nine years (folklore had it that the South Dipper was in charge of birth while the North Dipper was in charge of death). Zhao therefore lived to a ripe old age.

In the carving, Zhao Yan is on the right with his buffalo. The Star Deities are seated at the table, absorbed in their game. The boy on the left is an attendant of the deities.

### Filial Piety Stories

There are 24 stories of filial piety (二十四孝), carved on the walls of this tomb complex. These lessons date from the Yuan Dynasty and were compiled by the scholar Guo Jujing (郭居敬). Here are four interesting stories:



*“Yu Qianlou tastes his father’s stool out of grave concern for his health” (尝粪忧心)*

Yu lived during the Period of the Northern and Southern Dynasties, in the state of Qi. His

father was suddenly struck with a strange illness that the doctors could not diagnose. Lacking any sophisticated testing procedure, they advised Yu to taste the old man's excrement to determine whether he could quickly recover from the disease. Yu did so without hesitation.

*“Lady Tang feeds her mother-in-law with breast milk”*  
(乳姑不怠)

During the Tang Dynasty, an official named Cui Nanshan, had an elderly great-grandmother who had lost all her teeth, and was unable to chew.

Cui's grandmother, Lady Tang, realised the difficulty her mother-in-law had with eating. Each morning, she would enter her mother-in-law's chambers and feed her breast milk from her own body. The elderly matron thus stayed strong and healthy.



*“Wang Pu protects his mother's grave from thunder”*  
(闻雷泣墓)

Wang Pu lived during the Three Kingdoms Period. His mother feared the sound of thunder-claps, and he would comfort her

during storms. Even after she died, Wang would run to his mother's grave during a storm and kneel by it to call out words of comfort.



*“Yang Xiang wrestles with a tiger to save his father” (扼虎救父)*

In the Jin Dynasty, Yang Xiang, a boy of 14, followed his father to work in the fields each day. One morning, a large tiger appeared before them. The tiger grabbed

Yang's father in its mouth and headed back to the forest. Yang ran after the tiger and leapt up on its back to throttle him. The tiger released Yang's father, and Yang carried his father home to recover.

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Ang Yik Han, “Zhao Yan Pleading For Longevity”, 2 May 2017

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## ONG SAM LEONG & FAMILY

23 ONG SAM LEONG 王三龍 | 1857-1918 | Jinmen (金門)

YEO HEAN\* NEO 楊賢娘 | 1852-1935 | Jinmen (金門)

GWEE SOON NEO 魏順娘 | 1894-1952 | Jinmen (金門)

ONG BOON TAT 王文達 | 1888-1941 | Jinmen (金門)

LIM YEOK QUAN 林育環 | 1888-1959 | Jinmen (金門)

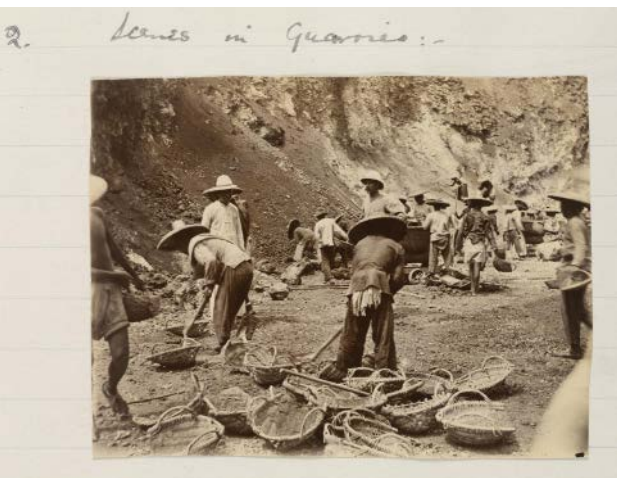
ONG PENG HOCK 王平福 | 1889-1968 | Jinmen (金門)



Photo reproduced, courtesy of John Hunt.

### BIOGRAPHY

Ong Sam Leong (王三龙) was a prominent Straits-born Peranakan business owner. Already successful in rubber plantations, sawmills and a brickworks in Batam, Ong decided to expand his fortunes further by accepting a contract to supply labourers to mine phosphate on Christmas Island. As an influential member of the Straits Chinese community, he was at one time head of the

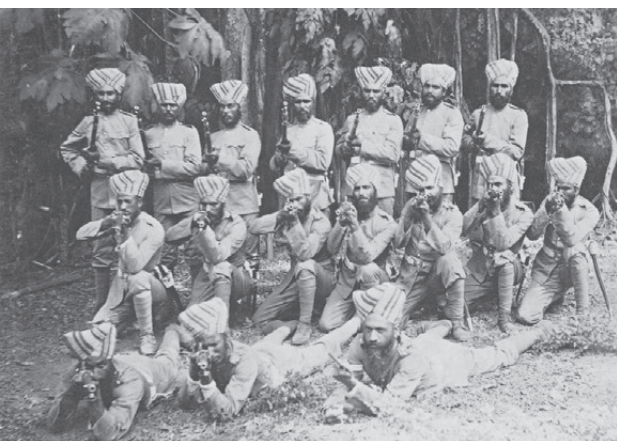


Ban Chye Hoe Club, a social club that rich Chinese merchants used for networking.

He died at 60 years old in his residence at Bukit Rose which was located on Bukit Timah Road. Sam Leong Road off Serangoon Road is named after him.

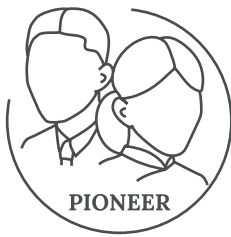
### ONG FAMILY

Ong left behind his wife Yeo Hean Neo (杨贤娘) and his two sons, Boon Tat and Peng Hock. Yeo is buried with her husband in the large central double-tomb. She was one of the first pupils of Sophia Blackmore, who set up the Methodist Girls' School in 1887. She would therefore have been contemporaries with Siau Mah Li, first wife of Kung Tian Siong (Tomb #12). The Ongs' influence was so strong that the Johore State Band played at Yeo's funeral, courtesy of the Sultan.



From top to bottom: Quarrying for phosphate; coolies after a day's work; Sikh Guards on the island. Photos reproduced, courtesy of John Hunt.

The Ong sons, Boon Tat (1888–1941) and Peng Hock (1899–1968), are buried with their wives in two tombs flanking their parents on lower ground.

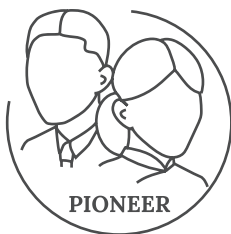


### PIONEER IN BUSINESS

Ong was the owner of Sam Leong and Company. In 1899, he secured a monopolistic contract with the Christmas Island Phosphate Company Limited to supply labourers to mine the phosphate-rich Christmas Island, situated 400 km south of Java. Phosphate was important for the making of fertilisers for the global agricultural market.

A settlement was set up on Christmas Island to run the mine and the island's community. Ong obtained hundreds of mostly unskilled labourers from Guangdong Province to work in the mine under very harsh conditions. Administrative services were provided by British District Officers, Chinese interpreters of the Straits Settlements Civil Service and Sikh guards recruited from Singapore. Singapore Peranakans formed the Island's Chinese managerial class.

Ong also made profits by supplying provisions and "recreational" activities to the labourers on Christmas Island.



### PIONEERS OF ENTERTAINMENT

Ong Peng Hock (王平福) and Ong Boon Tat (王文达) opened the New World Amusement Park in 1923. It was the first large-scale, mass-appeal entertainment facility that welcomed all walks of life. It hosted a multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic audience with fairground rides, games, theatres, restaurants, and more in the amusement park that spread over 45,000 sq m in Jalan Besar. During its heyday, the park attracted thousands of visitors at night and was advertised as one of



Singapore's must-see attractions.

Ultimately, New World failed to keep up with the development of new media and new sources of mass entertainment, and it had to close for business in 1987. Today, the City Square Mall has been built on the park's former site. Boon Tat Street in Telok Ayer was also named after Ong Boon Tat.

\* Yeo Hean Neo (杨贤娘) the middle character “贤” was translated from the Dictionary of the Minnan Topolect/Dialect (闽南方言大词典, 2006) as “Hean”. Official papers from the Ong family records however has her name translated as Yeo Yean Neo. Wayfinder uses the traditional Chinese characters for names and places as inscribed on the tombs.

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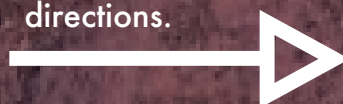
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24

## LIM KENG CHIEW 林鏡秋

1891 – 1942

Place of Ancestry: Heshan (禾山)

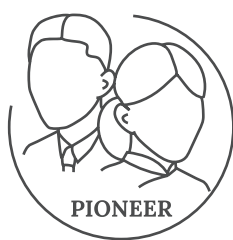
### BIOGRAPHY

Lim Keng Chiew (林鏡秋) was the owner of a shoe business who donated generously to Sun Yat Sen's Republican cause. Along with his comrades from Tong Meng Hui (forerunner to Kuomintang), he took part in the preparations, financing and transport of materials in three armed uprisings that were planned in the Wan Qing Yuan (now known as the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall).

On one such aborted uprising, Lim and his fellow Tong Meng Hui brethren raised a \$200 bail bond (a coolie earned about \$7/day), and accommodated, fed, and found employment for 800 disbanded rebel militia from China who escaped with little more than the shirts on their backs to Singapore.

As a result of the commitment and resources he devoted to this cause, his shoe business was said to have taken a significant economic hit.

Lim died in poverty shortly after Singapore's surrender to the invading Japanese on 29 February 1942. Had he lived any longer, he might have been targeted by the Japanese during the notorious Sook Ching (肃清) operations during which no fewer than 50,000 suspected Kuomintang nationalists, fund-raisers for the China Relief Fund and organisers of anti-Japanese resistance were systematically exterminated.



### PIONEER IN THE CHINESE REVOLUTION

Lim was one of the founder members and appointed secretary of the underground Singapore branch of the pre-cursor to the Kuomintang Nationalist Party – Tong Meng Hui founded by Dr Sun Yat Sen. Its members included many establishment figures like Dr Lim Boon Keng, Tan Kah Kee, Tan Ean Kiam (Tomb #21) and Tay Koh Yat.

The party HQ still stands today as the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall on Ah Hood Road.

Lim and his friends shared Sun's ambitious goal of transforming China into the first-ever republic in Asia, a modern democratic state helmed by a President based on a written constitution. They saw the overthrow of the decrepit Qing dynasty and its imperial system as a necessity to thrust China into the modern world.

As Sun was a native Cantonese, Lim became his Hokkien

speech writer. He was said to have personally delivered speeches to the Singapore Hokkien community to solicit for funds and support.

After the Qing dynasty was finally overthrown, in recognition of his contributions, Sun's government conferred him a commendation award (旌义旗) in 1912.



### MATERIAL CULTURE

It is noteworthy that, unlike his contemporaries, Lim's tombstone uses the Gregorian calendar instead of the more common *Minguo* (民国) calendar of those who wanted to express their personal solidarity and ethnic affiliation with the *Minguo* government.

More significantly, although he passed on within two weeks of the Singapore's capitulation in February 1942, he did not use the Japanese Syonan calendar as was the case with the tomb on his immediate right (from viewer), whose occupant also died during the Japanese Occupation.

Was the Gregorian calendar a suitable compromise to distance himself with the *Minguo* government that he had devoted his life to, or a clever way to avoid any bitterness he must have felt towards the Japanese occupiers, or both? These circumstances remain mysterious.

### CREDIT

Fabian Lee, "Lim Keng Chiew", 2 May 2017.





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## TAN CHOR NAM 陳楚楠

1884–1971

Place of Ancestry: Xiamen (廈門)

### BIOGRAPHY

Tan Chor Nam (陈楚楠) was one of three key founders of the Singapore branch of Tong Meng Hui (同盟会), the underground resistance founded by Dr Sun Yat Sen. At age 22, Tan was chosen as the first President of Tong Meng Hui. He was nicknamed the “First Man of the Nanyang (i.e. Southeast Asia) Chinese Revolution”.

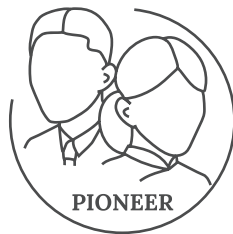
Tan’s given name is actually Lian Chye. He was said to have adopted the alias so that his involvement with Tong Meng Hui would not affect his business. He was the Straits-born son of Tan Tye, a Hokkien merchant known as Singapore’s “Pineapple King”. Tan managed the family’s popular Istana brand of canned pineapples with his father and brothers. The family business operated out of 327 Beach Road. Besides pineapple canning, they



*Tan is on the extreme right.  
Photo reproduced, courtesy of National  
Library Board.*

also had pineapple and rubber plantations and owned many businesses and properties.

In 1917, Tan and his friends founded the Nanyang Girls' High School and he was appointed the second Chairman of the school's board.



## PIONEER IN THE CHINESE REVOLUTION

Although Tan's father was conferred a fourth-ranking Qing official title for his donations to Qing causes, Tan himself was a revolutionary who supported Dr Sun Yat Sen's movement to overthrow the Qing dynasty. With his contemporaries, he set up the Xiao Tao Yuan Club ("Little Peach Garden Club") as a platform to discuss anti-Qing politics. Tan and his friend Teo Eng Hock (a Teochew rubber magnate) once wrote an appeal to the British Consul in Shanghai to stop two anti-Qing detainees from being extradited to the Qing court for execution. They also ran and financed two local newspapers to spread the revolutionary word in the Straits Settlements.

These efforts impressed Dr Sun Yat Sen, who met them in Singapore in 1905 to establish the Singapore chapter of the Tong Meng Hui – the second in Asia after Tokyo where Sun's headquarters was based. For three years, Singapore was Southeast Asia's headquarters for anti-Qing resistance where three out of ten uprisings in China

were plotted and executed.

Tan contributed extensively to the fundraising and support of the revolution. Other notables who joined him were Lim Nee Soon, Lim Boon Keng and Tan Boo Liat (Tomb #19).

In 1910, Tan and others founded the Tong De Reading Club to rally support from the working masses who had little or no education, for the anti-Qing cause.



### MATERIAL CULTURE

According to Tan's grandson, he was a forward-thinking man of his time and thus preferred to have a simple and modern-looking tomb. There is also an English inscription on his tomb, a nod to his bilingual education. Tan's tomb contrasts with his wife's, which is next to his. Hers is a traditional Hokkien-style tomb characterised by the tomb "shoulders" and mound. On both sides of the mound you can also see twin carvings of the top of a scroll and the tip of a Chinese brush. These are used to signify the attainment of educational achievements.

### POINT OF INTEREST

Tan Chor Nam's brother, Tan Lian Boh, was also buried in Bukit Brown until recently exhumed.

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1

IN MEMORIAM

160m

24

LIM KENG CHIEW

60m



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The Wayfinder is a community driven project that has built on a body of work from the larger community of independent researchers and academics. All errors and omissions are ours.

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# GUIDED WALKS

Explore Bukit Brown with Brownies.

Peatix event page by Brownies:  
<http://peatix.com/group/16067#>



# PANTUN BUKIT BROWN WAYFINDER

Kopek kacang buang kulit,  
Baru boleh makan biji,  
Hidopan dunia mata kelek,  
Beranak mati nasib janji!  
*Peel the peanut discard the shell,  
Then we are able to eat the nut,  
Twinkling of an eye life ends,  
Fate decides our births & deaths!*

Empat penjuru suma manusia,  
Putus jiwa tak balik dunia,  
Perkara ini bukan rusia,  
Di-sini Bukit Brown akibat-nya!  
*Living beings of four corners,  
We depart never to return,  
This Eternal Law is no secret,  
Here in Bukit Brown, we find it!*

Pantun by Chan Eng Thai,  
performed on 18th November 2017  
for the launch of the Bukit Brown Wayfinder

*Supported by*



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