

• Book Reviews •

Lee Kam Hing and Chow Mun Seong,
*Biographical Dictionary of the
Chinese in Malaysia.*

Petaling Jaya : Institute of Advanced Studies,
University of Malaya and Pelanduk Publication,
1997. 210 PP.

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A comprehensive biographical dictionary of Malaysian Chinese is a desideratum since a long time. There exist so far some *Who's Who in Malaysia*, but only for limited periods, and a number of biographical reference works in Chinese such as Huang Yao 黄尧, *Xing Ma Huaren Zhi* 星马华人志 (Hong Kong 1967), which have been duly made use of the authors. The more recent work by Ma Lun 马崙, *Xin Ma Wentan Renwu Saomiao* 新马文坛人物扫描 (1991) has not been consulted. The main sources used, however, are government records, newspapers and magazines, monographs and articles in English and Chinese, and, last not least, Chinese grey literature,

① i.e. souvenir magazines by *landmannschaften* (*huiquan* 会馆), lineage, professional and other associations. There is a bibliography at the end, but no index nor a list of keys for the abbreviations used. What does, e.g., HPP, CAH, CCC mean? Relevant literature in Japanese has not been made use of.

There are about eight hundred entries in this volume, some with a few words only, others by a few hundreds, up to one thousand words. The authors modestly admit “that there are major gaps and serious inadequacies in this volume” (Introduction first page. No pagination!). There are, indeed! Only for less than three hundred of the personalities included Chinese character of their current names are added in a list at the end of the volume (pp.207-210), but no characters are given for their additional names, nor for other Chinese names, terms, associations and geographical names in China. The latter are sometimes unidentifiable if they are given in an arbitrary dialectical romanization and not in *Hanyu Pinyin* or in the official postal romanization valid up to the time of the Second World War. Although in the introductory “Note on Spelling” it is stated that “for consistency, the Hanyu Pinyin is used for all association names”, actually this rule is not followed in the main text, and most associations names are given in an arbitrary dialectical romanization only. Moreover there is no Glossary provided, as stated in the “Note.....”. It is true that it is often very difficult or even almost impossible to find out the real names of Chinese from entirely English educated families-in particular if all members have been exclusively educated in the language and culture of the former colonial masters, and thus have developed an inferiority complex toward their own cultural tradition. But in other cases it should be quite easy to find out the Chinese name, such as for the sons of Khaw Soo Cheang (see below), for Lee Yan Lian (p.96), Li Yannian 李延年 or for T.Y.Ibrahim Ma (p. 128) Ma Tianying 马天英 ② and others. The arbitrary romanization of names based on different dialectical pronounciations makes the identification of a person sometimes rather difficult. The authors have, as a rule, used the romanization found in their English sources, and only for those persons found in Chinese sources applied the Hanyu Pinyin romanization. In some cases the family name is given in a dialectical romanization and the personal name in *Hanyu Pinyin*, such as p.113 under Lim Lian Geok the names of his ancestors Lim Yi Ren, Lim Geng Yang, etc. Wu Jiqi is listed as

① On the term “Grey Literature” see W.Moese, G.Reinknecht, E.Schmitz-Seisser, “Introduction,” in *List of Chinese Grey Literature at Hamburg Libraries* (Hamburg, 1978).

② See Ma Lun, loc.cit. No.1672.

Ong At Tye (p.132), probably mistaken for Ng At Tye, the Guangdong pronunciation of Wu 伍. Some persons are not listed under their widely used romanized name. The well known author of many books in western languages, Gu Hongming 辜鸿铭, is listed under Koh Hong Beng (p.72), whereas in most of his books he is romanized Ku Hung Ming. For him as well as for a number of other Malaysian Chinese, well known in China too, the detailed biographies written by competent specialists published in *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China*^③ might have been consulted. These include Aw Boon Haw (Hu Wen-hu, II, 177-180), Chang Pi Shih (I, 90-92), Koh Hong Beng (Ku Hung-ming, II, 250-252), Lim Boon Keng (Lin Wen-ch'ing, II, 386-387), Tan Kah Kee (Chen Jiageng, I, 165-170), Wu Lien Teh (III, 440-442).

The authors have mentioned only some general principles, according to which they have selected the persons to be included in this collection, but not set any fixed rules. Evidently persons still alive have not been taken into consideration. The authors concede "that there might be personalities who ought to be included but who have been inadvertently left out" (Introduction fifth page). As a whole, more attention has been paid to persons engaged in business, politics, or the administration, than to those in various cultural activities, although these have not been completely neglected. Even some Christian preachers are included, such as Liang (A) Fa 梁 (阿) 发, 1789-1855 (p.101) whose writings have influenced the Taiping leader Hong Xiuquan (here mistakenly romanized Hung Hsiu Chun). Liang spent some time in Malacca, but can hardly be considered a Malayan Chinese. Some well known personalities are actually missing, such as Liu Shanbang 刘善邦, from Hepe 河婆, Jieyang county, Guangdong, leader of the Santiaogou Gongsi 三条沟公司, which combined gold mining with agriculture in the Bau area of Sarawak during the middle of the 19th century,^④ or the famous painter and calligrapher of Kuala Lumpur, Lee Kah Yeow, Li Jiayao 李家耀, 1900-1995, from Yongchun,^⑤ elder brother of Lee Yan Lian (p.96). Furthermore such famous scholars as Wu Deyao 吴德耀, 1916-1994,^⑥ grown up and educated at Penang, might have been included. It is true that he later worked outside of Malaysia, mainly at Singapore, but he kept close relations to his home-town and

③ Ed. by Howard L. Boorman, *New York and London 1967-1971*, 4 vols. Abbr. BDRC.

④ See Huang Yao 黄尧, loc.cit. pp. 237-8; Barbara Ward, "A Hakka Kongsu in Borneo," *Journal of Oriental Studies*, 1: 2 (1954), pp. 358-70.

⑤ See Ma Lun, loc.cit., No. 1168, and catalogues of exhibitions of Lee's paintings.

⑥ See Ma Lun, loc.cit. No. 2297.

“had interests or involvements in Malaya” (Introduction fifth page), in particular as the co-author of the so-called *Fenn-Wu Report*.^⑦ Others perhaps worth to be included are Liu Guoyin 刘果因, 1904-1991,^⑧ publicist and translator of Japanese literary and scholarly works into Chinese.

The authors have not made use of family and lineage genealogies, *jiapu* 家谱, *zupu* 族谱, nor of epigraphic materials, although the latter are to a large extent made easily accessible by Chen Tieh-fan and the present reviewer.^⑨ Out of the less than three hundred personalities for whom Chinese characters are given, more than one hundred appear in these materials. For more than half of those the epigraphic materials provide some additional information. As to the others documentation is added to the information provided by the authors from other sources. As to the personalities for which no Chinese characters are given, it is very difficult, if not impossible to identify them in the epigraphic materials. It can be expected, however, that a large part of them can be found somewhere. For example, much more reliable information on the Kapitan and on the *Qingyunting Tingzhu* 青云亭亭主 of Malacca could be got from epigraphic evidence, e.g. Zeng Folin 曾佛霖 (p.197 left, erroneously romanized Zhen Fo Lin), in English Chan Olim, and Zeng Shifang 曾世芳 (p.197 right) are one and the same person. He was the last Kapitan of Malacca. According to his tombstone (E 1. 21.1) his posthumous name was Zeng Zhenyao 曾振耀.^⑩

The dates of birth and death, in particular month and day, are sometimes incorrect, since the authors have failed to convert dates given according to the traditional Chinese lunar calendar into the Gregorian calendar, such as in the case of Chen Cheng Yang 陈承阳 (p.21 left) Sept.25, 1703 to June 22, 1779/1784. According to the ancestral tablet Chen Cheng Yang was born on the 25th Day of the 9th moon guiwei 癸未 (Kangxi 42), corresponding to November 4, 1703, and died on the 22nd day of the 6th moon jiachen 甲辰 (Qianlong 乾隆 49), corresponding to August 7, 1784.^⑪

⑦ *Chinese Schools and Education of Chinese Malaysians* (Kuala Lumpur, 1951).

⑧ See Ma Lun, loc.cit. No.1497.

⑨ Wolfgang Franke and Chen Tieh-fan, *Chinese Epigraphic Materials in Malaysia*, 3 vols. (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1982-1987).

⑩ For more details see Zhuang Qinyong 庄钦永, “Jiazheng Zeng Zhenyao Kao 甲政曾振耀考”, in *Sin Chew Jit Poh* 星洲日报, August 9 and 16, 1986, based on epigraphic materials.

⑪ For details see Hibino Takeo 毗野丈夫, “Two Supplements to a Chronology of the Chinese Kapitan of Malacca” (in Japanese), *Tomon Asia Kenkyu*, 9: 1 (1971), pp. 58-9.

The year 1862 given for the death of Sheng Mingli 盛明利 (p.143 right) is doubtful. According to other sources he was killed in 1860. His ancestral tablet, kept in Qiangumiao 千古庙, Seremban, has been set up in 1861, and his tombstone as late as 1869. ⑫

The year 1797 given for the birth of Khaw Soo Cheang, Xu Sizhang 许泗漳 (p. 61 right) is not quite correct. The date given on his tombstone is 25th day, 11th moon Jiaqing Dingsi 嘉庆丁巳, corresponding to January 11, 1798. Khaw Sim Kong, Xu Xinguang 许心广 (p.61 right), was not his eldest son, as erroneously stated in the biography of Sim Kong, but the second one and successor of Khaw Soo Cheang. The eldest son Sim Cheng 心正 and the third son Sim Chua, Xinquan 心泉, both mentioned in the biography of Khaw Soo Cheang (p. 62 right) had died before their father. The other three sons Sim Tek, Xinde 心德, Sim Khim, Xinqin 心钦, and Sim Bee, Xinmei 心美, are dealt with by the present authors in separate biographies (p.61 right and 60 right to 61 left), but no Chinese characters of the names of the former two are given. ⑬

Notwithstanding errors and other shortcomings the authors have with great devotion and with limited funds and not sufficient collaborators achieved an impressive pioneer work. More experience and more funds will be necessary to produce a work of the quality of the above mentioned BDRC (n.2) or the earlier published *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644-1912)* ⑭ or the major Japanese reference works.

⑮ To use a Latin phrase: *Ut desint vires, tamen est laudanda voluntas.*

⑫ See Franke-Chen, loc.cit. (n. 9), F 1.1.1 and E 1.37.3.

⑬ For more details see Wu Yulian 吴翊麟, *Xiannan Bieju* 暹南别录 (Taipei, 1985), pp. 219-25, based on epigraphic evidence. Further forthcoming Wolfgang Franke, *Chinese Epigraphic Materials in Thailand* (Taipei: Shin Wen Feng Co.), Nos. 7.4.1, and 7.4.2.

⑭ Ed.by Arthur W. Hummel, 2 vols. (Washington D.C., 1943-1944).

⑮ Such as *Toyo Rekishi Daijiten*, 9 vols. (Tokyo, 1937-1939), or *Asia Rekishi Jiten*, 10 vols. (Tokyo, 1959-1962).