

TONG MENG HUI IN SINGAPORE AND NANYANG

In the early 20th century, Dr. Sun Yat Sen chose Singapore as his overseas revolutionary base as he was attracted by its strategic location at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula, advanced infrastructure, large Chinese population and the intermingling of Eastern and Western influences here. Wan Qing Yuan thus became an important command post for his revolutionary activities. This villa was where the Tong Meng Hui (Chinese Revolutionary Alliance) Singapore Branch was established. It was also the place where several influential Chinese figures and Southeast Asian revolutionaries planned, raised funds for and directed uprisings in China.

Dr. Sun Yat Sen started a newspaper to serve as the mouthpiece of the revolutionary movement, advocated the setting up of reading clubs, and organised public lectures and opera performances to generate publicity for the revolution, as well as to garner support overseas. After several branches of the Tong Meng Hui had been established in the region, he made Wan Qing Yuan the Southeast Asian headquarters of the organisation to better coordinate the planning of revolutionary activities. The Nanyang revolutionaries actively supported the revolution from behind the lines, with some even heading to China to fight in the frontlines.



Group photograph of Dr. Sun Yat Sen and members of the Tong Meng Hui Singapore Branch at Wan Qing Yuan (late 1905)

Dr. Sun Yat Sen and members of the Tong Meng Hui Singapore Branch took this group photograph at Wan Qing Yuan several days after its establishment.

Front row, from left: Lin Gan Ting, Teo Eng Hock, Tan Chor Lam, Dr. Sun Yat Sen, Yau Lit, Lau Kam Seng and Lim Nee Soon

Back row, from left: Goh Ngo Sow, Teo Bah Tan, Zhang Ji, Chan Lui Ho, Deng Zi Yu, Wong Yew Ting and Teo Peng Kay

Sun Yat Sen's Living Quarters in Wan Qing Yuan

Dr. Sun Yat Sen travelled to Singapore for a total of nine times from 1900 to 1911. Out of these nine visits, he stayed in Wan Qing Yuan on four occasions. Have you ever wondered how Dr. Sun spent his time when he was staying at Wan Qing Yuan?

Teo Eng Hock penned his recollections about Dr. Sun's stays in Wan Qing Yuan in his 1933 publication *Nanyang and the Founding of the Republic*. Look around this room, which used to be Dr. Sun's bedroom, to find out more about his daily life at Wan Qing Yuan.



Political Inclinations of the Local Chinese Community

Singapore's development as a free port in the 19th century led to the increased flow of goods and people, as well as information and ideas. The Chinese population in Singapore grew in size and economic strength. There were also many in the middle and upper classes (including the English-educated Straits Chinese and new immigrants) who were concerned about social issues and worked actively to effect change. Different political forces such as the British colonial government, the Qing government, reformist groups and revolutionary organisations all hoped to win the support of the local Chinese community.

Chinese Newspapers and the Dissemination of Ideas

Newspapers were an important publicity channel for both the revolutionaries and reformists. They published newspapers such as *Chong Shing Yit Pao* and *The Union Times*, to serve as their propaganda mouthpieces and to garner the support of the local Chinese.

Dr. Sun Yat Sen and His Revolutionary Comrades

Following the establishment of the Tong Meng Hui Singapore Branch, other branches were also formed successively in the region. Revolutionaries from Southeast Asia, China, Hong Kong, and Japan worked with Dr. Sun Yat Sen at Wan Qing Yuan to plot uprisings against the Qing government. The Chaozhou Huanggang Uprising of 1907 (May 1907), Zhennanguan Uprising in Guangxi (December 1907) and the Hekou Uprising in Yunnan (April 1908) were planned and directed from Wan Qing Yuan.

Embroidery with images of flags designed by Dr. Sun Yat Sen (circa 1906)

During Dr. Sun Yat Sen's sojourn at Wan Qing Yuan in 1906, he held discussions with local Tong Meng Hui members regarding a representative flag design for their party. He created four designs based on the "White Sun in Blue Sky" emblem of the Xing Zhong Hui. One of them was to become the "Blue Sky, White Sun, and Red Earth" design that would be adopted by the Nationalist government as its national flag after 1928. Tan Sok Jee, the wife of Teo Eng Hock, embroidered the four flags and the Liberty Bell with the Chinese words which mean "Long Live the People" at the base. Dr. Sun frequently took the time to admire this embroidery hung in Wan Qing Yuan. The original embroidery was destroyed during World War II and this replica was reproduced based on the image published in Teo Eng Hock's memoir.

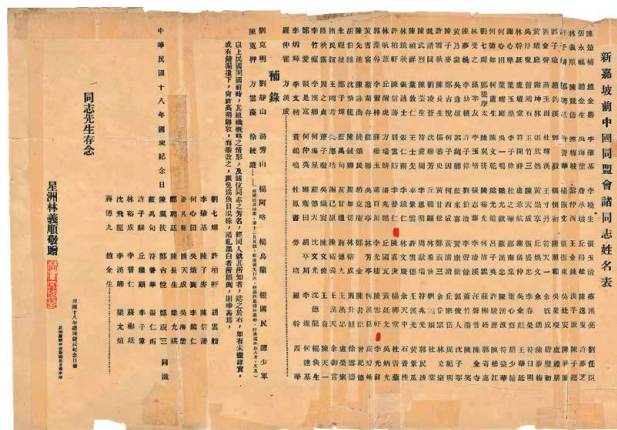


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Record on Tong Meng Hui Singapore Branch by Lim Nee Soon (1928)

This book, which recorded the activities of the revolutionaries in Singapore, was compiled by Lim Nee Soon in 1928.

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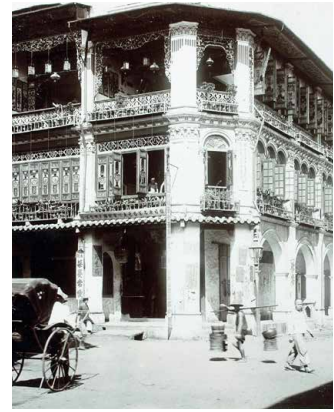
Enlightening the Masses and Advocating Revolutionary Ideals

One important role played by the Tong Meng Hui Singapore Branch (later the Southeast Asian headquarters of the Tong Meng Hui) was to advocate revolutionary ideals through various means and garner support from the overseas Chinese. These activities included publishing newspapers and books, establishing reading clubs, staging opera performances and organising public lectures.

Facade of Lai Chun Yuen (date unknown)

At the beginning of the 20th century, illiteracy rates were fairly high among the Nanyang Chinese. Public speeches and dramas were therefore more effective in communicating revolutionary ideologies to them. Hence, several local Tong Meng Hui members formed drama troupes and performed in Malaya and the Dutch East Indies to spread their revolutionary ideals through operas. The troupes were very popular with the local audiences. Lai Chun Yuen in Chinatown was one of the performance venues.

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THE MARTYRS AS THEY BADE THEIR FINAL FAREWELL

In this space, you will find a small collection of poignant letters written by members of the Tong Meng Hui and revolutionaries who had participated in the Guangzhou Huanghuagang Uprising of 1911 and other uprisings. They include Lin Jue Min's *Letter to My Wife*, Fang Sheng Dong's *Letter to Father*, and also the final words of Nanyang revolutionaries such as Lao Pei, Li Bing Hui and Wen Sheng Cai. These men had joined the frontlines of the revolution knowing that they would pay the ultimate price— their own lives. Like moths drawn to a flame, they set off on a mission of no return, sacrificing their lives for a cause that they believed in.