

LOOKING BACK ON WAN QING YUAN A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall is a heritage institution under the National Heritage Board. At the beginning of the 20th century, it served as an important revolutionary base for Dr. Sun Yat Sen when he was in Southeast Asia. After the Tong Meng Hui (Chinese Revolutionary Alliance) Singapore Branch was established, Dr. Sun, Hu Han Min (1879 - 1936), Wang Jing Wei (1883 - 1944), Huang Xing (1874 - 1916), Ju Zheng (1876 - 1951), as well as their Southeast Asian revolutionary comrades used to gather here. Dr. Sun plotted three uprisings at this base and made Singapore the Southeast Asian headquarters of the Tong Meng Hui.

The four permanent galleries of this Memorial Hall are: "In the Beginning - The Prominent Trio"; "Tong Meng Hui in Singapore and Nanyang"; "Overthrowing the Monarchy, Establishing a Republic" and "The Nanyang Response to the Establishment of the Republic". The exhibits in these galleries re-examine the role played by Singapore's Chinese community in Dr. Sun's revolutionary activities and their responses to socio-political changes in China. They also show the lasting impact of the 1911 Revolution on the Chinese in Southeast Asia.

GALLERY 1

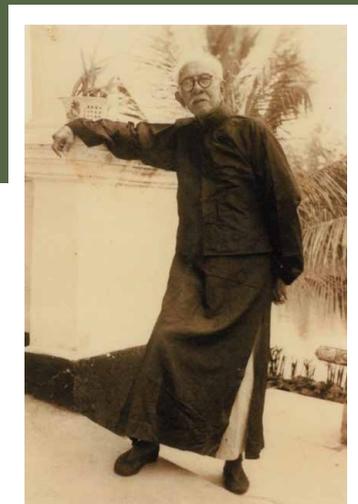
IN THE BEGINNING – THE PROMINENT TRIO

Wan Qing Yuan was originally a privately owned villa. In 1905, local businessman Teo Eng Hock and his brother Teo Bah Tan bought the property for their mother as a place where she could spend her golden years. The name “Wan Qing Yuan” (Serene Sunset Garden) originated from a poem by Tang Dynasty (618 - 907) poet Li Shang Yin.

Towards the end of the Qing Dynasty (1644 - 1912), China was confronted with both internal turmoil and external threats. The Chinese in Southeast Asia were deeply concerned about developments in China and hoped that she would be strong and prosperous. Wan Qing Yuan witnessed what Teo Eng Hock, Tan Chor Lam (1884 - 1971), Lim Nee Soon (1879 - 1936), and other local pioneers went through from the Hundred Days' Reform (1898) to the 1911 Revolution, and how they met Dr. Sun Yat Sen through Yau Lit (1865 - 1936) and joined Dr. Sun's revolutionary movement that led to the birth of modern China.

Teo Eng Hock (1872 - 1959)

The owner of Wan Qing Yuan, Teo Eng Hock, was greatly respected in his family. While he was a firm believer in traditional values like filial piety and Confucian ethics, he was also liberal and progressive in his thinking. He was a strong advocate of education for girls and sent his daughter, Teo Soon Kim (1904 - 1978), to study law in England. She became the first woman in Singapore to be admitted to the bar of the Straits Settlements. Teo asserted, “My children can lose any money I give them but they must never give up on their studies”.



**Photograph of
Teo Eng Hock
in his Punggol Villa
(1957)**

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Madam Teo Moh Tet

Lim Nee Soon (1879 - 1936)

Lim Nee Soon, one of the founding members of the Tong Meng Hui Singapore Branch, was Teo Eng Hock's nephew. Although Lim was English-educated, he was influenced by his uncle and became a fervent supporter of the revolution. In 1903, Lim printed thousands of copies of *The Revolutionary Army*, written by Zou Rong, and distributed them in Shantou and other places in Chaozhou, Guangdong Province. He also helped with the setting up of two revolutionary papers, *Thoe Lam Jit Poh* and *Chong Shing Yit Pao*. Lim was also in charge of managing external communications for Dr. Sun Yat Sen during the latter's stay in Singapore. After the establishment of the Chinese Republic, Lim continued to be concerned about developments in China and had planned to write a book about his 30 years of revolutionary work. Unfortunately, he died of illness before he could do so.

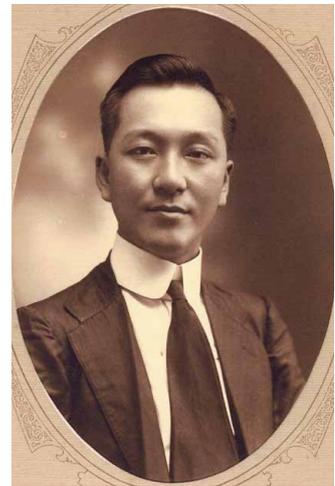


**Portrait of
Lim Nee Soon
(date unknown)**

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Tan Chor Lam (1884 - 1971)

Tan Chor Lam (Tan Lian Chye), the inaugural chairman of the Tong Meng Hui Singapore Branch, knew his neighbour Teo Eng Hock since childhood. He adopted the alias Tan Chor Lam for his revolutionary activities. Tan had displayed signs of greatness as a young man by writing newspaper commentaries condemning the corrupt Qing imperial authority at the age of 20. After the establishment of the Tong Meng Hui Singapore Branch, Tan helped Dr. Sun Yat Sen set up more branches and organisations such as reading clubs all over the Nanyang region to spread revolutionary ideals. He and Teo not only shouldered Dr. Sun's expenses during his stopovers in Singapore, but also helped displaced revolutionaries from China settle down in Singapore. Tan was guided throughout his life by Dr. Sun's Three Principles of the People—Nationalism, Democracy, and the People's Livelihood. He applied these principles to help the Chinese community in Singapore through the development of education and the economy.



**Portrait of
Tan Chor Lam
(date unknown)**

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Mr. Low Kai Siong

MEETING DR. SUN YAT SEN

Calendar of the *Thoe Lam Jit Poh* (1905)

This calendar, printed in 1905, was instrumental in linking Dr. Sun Yat Sen up with the Singapore revolutionaries. In 1904, Teo Eng Hock, Tan Chor Lam and Lim Nee Soon founded the newspaper *Thoe Lam Jit Poh* to spread revolutionary ideals. Teo personally designed the calendar which was distributed free with the newspaper. The calendar features the Liberty Bell and the Flag of Independence in the centre. There is a revolutionary slogan at the top that reads: “How can we bear to let others trample on the glorious culture of our country? I call on our heroes to take back our land!”

Dr. Sun Yat Sen, who was then in Honolulu, was overjoyed when he chanced upon this calendar, which called for revolution against the Qing Dynasty. Dr. Sun subsequently contacted Yau Lit, who was then in Singapore, to request for a meeting with Teo and Tan.

Reproduced from *Nanyang and the Founding of the Republic* (1933)



Calligraphy with the Chinese characters “Bo Ai” (Universal Love), presented by Dr. Sun Yat Sen to Teo Beng Wan

Dr. Sun Yat Sen presented this Chinese calligraphy to Teo Beng Wan, the eldest son of Teo Bah Tan. This gesture demonstrated Dr. Sun’s close ties with the Teo family. In his description of the concept of nationalism, Dr. Sun emphasised that to him, “Bo Ai” (Universal Love) was a desire to “save the world, the people, and the country.”

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