

Famous Malaccans

TUN TAN CHENG LOCK (1883 to 1960)



Tun Tan Cheng Lock (1883 to 1960)

Tun Tan Cheng Lock was a public leader who contributed a lot to the struggles of the Chinese community in Malaya especially in the fields of politics, education and social welfare.

He was born on 5th. April 1883 at Heeren Street, Melaka and was the third son in a family of seven sisters and brothers. He received his early education at Malacca High School in 1899 and at Raffles Institution, Singapore. In 1902, he was a teacher at Raffles Institution, Singapore. In 1908, after 6 years of service as a teacher, he resigned.

He continued his work in the rubber industry as an Assistant Manager in a rubber estate owned by his cousin i.e. Bukit Kajang Rubber Estates Ltd. and was nominated as a visiting agent to Nyalas Rubber Estate, Melaka. In 1909, he started his own company by the name of Melaka Pindah Rubber Estates Ltd., United Malacca Rubber Estates and Ayer Molek Estates Ltd.

In 1913, Tun Tan Cheng Lock married Mdm.Yeo Yeok Neo, daughter to Mr. Yeo Tin Thye, who was then President of the Melaka Hokkien Association. His marriage was rewarded with a son, Tun Tan Siew Sin (future Finance Minister of Malaysia) and four daughters viz. Kim Tin, Wee Geok Kim, Alice Kim Yoke and Agnes Kim Lwi.

He was nominated by the British government as a Melaka Council commissioner in 1912 and was also nominated as the Justice of Peace Melaka. After a few months, he was also nominated as the Commissioner of the Town Council for towns and Melaka Port.

In 1914, Tun Tan Cheng Lock revived the Malacca Chinese Volunteer and became an ordinary member until 1919. He was also responsible for reviving the Straits Chinese British Association (SCBA) in 1915 and was elected as President. In 1923, he was elected as an unofficial member of the Straits Settlement Council.

With the formation of the Malayan Union on 1st. April 1946 by the British, he was given the opportunity to offer a permanent political settlement to the Chinese who came to Malaya then.

This matter was raised in 1946 when he was in India. He started the “Overseas Chinese Association of India” (OCAI) which sent a memorandum to the Colonial Office to introduce citizenship for those who were not born in Malaya. This issue was one of the principal in the setting up of Malayan Union.

The opposition of the Malayan Union by the Malays caused Tun Tan Cheng Lock and the Communist Party of Malaya to work with the Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (PKMM) to oppose UMNO under the leadership of Dato’ Onn Jaafar. Tun Tan Cheng Lock and his friends started the All Malayan Council of Joint Action (AMCJA) and co-operated with PUTERA (Pusat Tindakan Rakyat) under the leadership of PKMM.

UMNO received their support from the Conference of Malay Rulers and the British abolished the Malayan Union and formed the Federation of Malaya in 1948. With the formation of the Federation, the Malay states, their rulers and the political system of the Malays before 1941, was recognised back by the British. Citizenship must be given to the Malays and the rules for registration of citizenship were tightened up again.

This policy received objection from the business community. The Communist Party of Malaya started an armed revolution and a State of Emergency was declared. All leftist political parties and their leaders were arrested. Tun Tan Cheng Lock, who was not considered leftist, was saved from such action. He carried out a policy of co-operation with the British and the Malays within the party sanctioned by the British.

On 27th. February 1949, Tun Tan Cheng Lock together with other Chinese leaders such as Tun Leong Yew Koh and Colonel H.S.Lee founded the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA). The reasons for forming MCA was to unite the Chinese in Malaya, protect the rights and importance of the Chinese, to work with the government to oppose communism and to work together with other races to achieve independence for Malaya. As the President of MCA, he headed the campaigns across Malaya. These campaigns attracted about 200,000 members and branches of MCA were set up.

The number of members and branches of MCA grew with time. The task of MCA was challenging as MCA needed to prove to the British Government that a vast majority of Chinese were loyal citizens and they did not sympathise with the Communist struggle. MCA was a movement to represent the Chinese and co-operated with the British. MCA worked closely with the British government to weaken the Communist struggle who were using force to achieve independence.

One of MCA contribution in this effort was to carry out the relocation of Chinese into new villages, away from the forest fringes. People was moved into new villages which were safer and orderly. This effort received support from members and MCA branches contributed money. A social welfare organisation was set up at the headquarters of MCA so that MCA can provide aid and assistance to the new villages.

The effort by the MCA fostered racial co-operation between races. This step encouraged the British Government to ensure that in the future, the foundation of the Federation of Malaya must be based on the co-operation of various races.

This co-operation of races became an agenda for the Federation of Malaya. Tun Tan Cheng Lock, as leader of MCA supported the idea of Dato’ Onn to form “Independence Malaya Party (IMP). IMP was formed on 26th. September 1951 in Kuala Lumpur with the co-operation of various races

as her theme of struggle. However, within three years of her formation, the co-operation of Tun Tan Cheng Lock and MCA was choppy. This was due to the fact that Dato' Onn was not co-operative on the question of citizenship.

In 1952, the State Nationality was passed which imposed restrictions to the non-Malays. Dato' Onn introduced the Immigration Act 1952, 1953 and the Business Act 1953 which affected the Chinese members of IMP. The differences between Tun Tan Cheng Lock and Dato' Onn in IMP started when with Tan's support of H.S.Lee actions by co-operating with UMNO in the elections of the Kuala Lumpur Council in February 1952. Dato' Onn openly criticised the political actions of the Chinese and this brought about the support of Tun Tan Cheng Lock and MCA with UMNO which was led by Tunku Abdul Rahman.

Tun Tan Cheng Lock brought MCA into the National Convention sponsored by UMNO on 23rd. August 1953. Co-operation was sealed between UMNO and MCA with the understanding of achieving independence through peaceful means. The formation of Alliance with MCA, UMNO and MIC quickened the process of independence when Alliance won 51 of the 52 seats in the Federal elections in 1955. The ambition of Tun Tan Cheng Lock of achieving citizenship status was realised when UMNO accepted this principal. This principal was included in the memorandum of Alliance and was submitted to the Reid Commission which was tasked in writing the Constitution of the Federation.

In a period of about 40 years, Tun Tan Cheng Lock provided the leadership and fought for the politics, education and welfare of the Chinese in Malaya. In his struggles, he used the political and economic arenas. He put forward ideas brought up by the community he represented. Besides using debate, speeches, criticism and commentary, he used memorandum and petition in raising the issues.

These methods were used when he was in the Straits Settlement Councils. When he was the leader of MCA, he encouraged the spirit of co-operation between the Malays and Indians. Alliance was the platform for achieving independence and a stable political arena. This foundation of co-operation was fostered in Alliance and was followed by future generations such as the formation of Barisan Nasional.

To honour his service rendered to the nation, he was installed the British government, Federation and State. He was conferred the title "Tun" by DYMM Seri Baginda Yang dipertuan Agong in 1958., D.P.M.J in 1949 by Sultan Ibrahim of Johor, "Commander of the British Empire (CBE) in 1949 and "The Knight Commander of the British Empire (KBE)" by King George VI which carried the "Sir" title in 1952.

Tun Tan Cheng Lock passed away on 13th. december 1960 at the age of 77 years old.

www.tourism-melaka.com

Copyright : 2004