

## BOOK LAUNCH

### “PATH OF THE RIGHTEOUS CRANE: THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF EU TONG SEN”

**22 JULY 2009, 6.00PM AT NATIONAL LIBRARY BOARD BUILDING**

#### Talking Points

1. Thank Richard (Dick) Eu, members of the Eu family, for inviting me to be the GoH this evening.
2. I am here both as Chairman of the National Heritage Board (NHB) and as a friend of the Eu family. My parents had taught me to address Dick’s parents as “Uncle Richard” and “Auntie Diana”.
3. This is an evening of triple happiness:
  - (a) We celebrate the 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Eu Yan Sang;
  - (b) We launch a biography on Eu Tong Sen, written by an old friend, Ilsa Sharp, and based largely on the 10-year long research by Maria Yang; and
  - (c) We open an exhibition on the life, time and achievements of Eu Tong Sen, which will travel from Singapore to Malaysia and Hong Kong.
4. NHB has co-funded both the book and the exhibition. We have done so because we wish to work with our private sector and the people sector to enrich our history and to conserve our heritage. The history of Singapore must include the stories of our pioneer business leaders such as Eu Tong Sen. Our history should also include stories about our great companies, such as, Eu Yan Sang, which has existed for 130 years and is one of our most trusted brand names. In NHB’s conception, the history of Singapore is not just the “official” history. It is also the people’s history.
5. Why do we celebrate the life, achievements and contributions of Eu Tong Sen? We do so for three reasons.

6. First, we celebrate the life of a man who went from a humble beginning to being one of the wealthiest men of his time. Eu Tong Sen was born in Penang. However, when he was five years old, he was sent back to Foshan, Guangdong Province, to learn the Chinese classics under the mentorship of his grandfather, a feng shui master. At the age of 15, Eu Tong Sen lost his father. His mother sent him back to Penang to live with his step-mother. He was tutored by two English teachers from Penang Free School and completed his secondary education at the Anglo-Chinese School in Ipoh. He became effectively bilingual and was able to straddle the two societies. When Eu Tong Sen turned 21, he took over his father's business. This included a Chinese medicine shop, Eu Yan Sang, which his father had founded in 1879 in Gopeng, Perak, to sell Chinese medicine to the poor workers at the tin mines. Eu Tong Sen was determined to become a tin miner. With great courage, determination and good luck, he discovered more than 10 lucrative tin mines and became enormously wealthy. He subsequently diversified his business into rubber, banking, etc.
7. Second, we celebrate Eu Tong Sen because he was a reformer and although he was pro-British, he was not afraid to stand up to the British colonial government. He joined the other Chinese business leaders in campaigning against the two largest sources of income for the British colonial government, ie, opium and gambling. He was the only Chinese who served on the Malaya Federal Council from 1909 to 1920. On 12 December 1903, the British Federal Secretary, A R Venning, issued a circular that Malay, Indian, Chinese and other Asian men need not be addressed with the prefix, "Mr", Eu Tong Sen and his friends protested against this act of racism.
8. Third, we celebrate Eu Tong Sen for his philanthropy. He supported education throughout his life. He gave money for the founding of the Raffles College. One building on Bukit Timah Campus, which currently houses the Law Faculty of the National University of Singapore, is named after him. Eu Tong Sen gave generously to schools, orphanages, hospitals and universities. He was also a good employer and was kind to his employees, who repaid him with loyalty and dedication.

9. In conclusion, we celebrate the 130<sup>th</sup> birthday of Eu Yan Sang and wish it continued success. We also celebrate the life, achievements and contributions of a remarkable man. Apart from Eu Yan Sang, six other things have survived him: the Eu Tong Sen Street; the Majestic Theatre, which he had built to stage his beloved Cantonese Opera; the beautiful building which houses Yue Hwa Singapore store, which was the home of the Raffles Hotel of Chinatown; “Nam Tin” or The Great Southern Hotel; the 99 year old corporate headquarters of Eu Yan Sang on South Bridge Road; and his legacy of integrity and service to humanity.
10. Thank you very much.

Prof Tommy Koh  
Chairman  
National Heritage Board