THE PROMINENT SINGAPORE TRIO: EARLY CHINESE PIONEERS AND THE 1911 REVOLUTION

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Historiography: a missing gap in the study of 1911 Chinese Revolution

Who are the Prominent Singapore Trio?

How did they meet up with Dr Sun Yat Sen?

What did they do?

The significance: The trio and the 1911 Revolution
Historiography:

The 1911 Chinese Revolution study:
Mainland China-centric:
The role of overseas Chinese??? (Prof Wang Gung Wu and Yen Ching-hwan)
Singapore context: The Trio

Teo Eng Hock
Tan Chor Lam
Lim Nee Soon
TEO ENG HOCK (张永福, 1872 – 1959)

- Born in Singapore and was of Peranakan descent, with ancestry from Rouping, Guangdong (广东饶平)。
- Father: Teo Lee set up Chop Sin Tiang Bee (新长美号布庄) at 105 Beach Road。
- Mother: Tan Poh Neo。
- 1904, co-founded the Thoe Lam Jit Poh《图南日报》 with TCL, first revolutionary newspaper。
- Late 1905 TMH Singapore Branch was formed: Vice President → President。
- July 1907: Chong Shing Yit Pao《中兴日报》
- 1910 set up reading club: United Chinese Library (同德书报社)。
- After 1912: served the government in China
TAN CHOR LAM (陈楚楠, 1884-1971)

- Born in Singapore, with ancestry from Xiamen, Hokkien (祖籍福建厦门)。

- Father: Tan Tye (陈泰), set up Hup Choon “合春号” at 327 Beach Road: timber, pineapple factory。

- Pseudonym “Simingzhou Zhi Shaonian” (思明州之少年)

- 1903 Shanghai revolutionary newspaper: “Su Bao incident”, Qing court wanted to arrest Zhang Bing Lin and Zou Rong who criticized Qing dynasty. TCL and THE sent a cable to the British Consulate in Shanghai in the name of “Little Paradise Club”. The cited the principle of non-extradition of political offenders and urged the British not to hand the two men over the Qing court.

- After 1912: served the government in China
LIM NEE SOON (林义顺, 1879 – 1936)

- Born in Singapore, Peranakan descent, with ancestry from Chenghai District, Shantou in Guangdong. (祖籍广东澄海)。
- Mother (sister of TEH) passed away he was 4, father died when he was 8 year olds, raised by Tan Poh Neo。
- was educated in English at the St. Joseph’s Institution (SAM). Worked under TEH & TCL.
- A successful business man: Pineapple and Rubble king。
- the President of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce for two periods, from 1921-1922, and 1925-1926.
- 1928: Teochew Poit Ip Huay Kuan
- 1936 passed away in Shanghai。
What are some commonalities/differences of the Prominent Trio?

- Birth place:
- Dialect group:
- Occupation:
- Official positions:
Serendipity 1:
Serendipity 1:

Teo Eng Hock’s memoir, Nanyang and the Founding of the Republic, 1933

Tan Chor Lam’s public speech, Wan Qing Yuan and the Chinese Revolution, 1940
Serendipity 2:

Lim Nee Soon’s manuscript, A Record of Singapore’s Tong Meng Hui, 1928
How did they meet up with Dr Sun Yat Sen? 1905 Almanac
What did they do?

- The founding of Tong Meng Hui (Chinese Revolutionary Alliance) at Wanqingyuan in late 1905:

- Revolutionary propaganda activities:

- Newspapers (革命机关报):

- Reading clubs (书报社):

- Public talks and mass rallies:

- Drama Troupes:
The significance: The trio and the 1911 Revolution

- What was Singapore to Dr Sun Yat Sen?

- What did Dr Sun Yat Sen mean to the Chinese in Singapore and Nanyang?

~ Professor Wong Gungwu ~
WHAT WAS SINGAPORE TO DR SUN YAT SEN?

- A revolutionary base to organise, propagate its cause in Singapore and Nanyang.
- It was a source of money; a refuge and a sanctuary
- It contributed a significant small part in the Chinese Revolution.
Why Singapore?

- Geographical factor: international entrepot
- Modern technology: transport and telecommunication facilities
- Linguistic ground: predominantly Chinese population
- Overseas Chinese – a major financial source: Reformists VS Revolutionaries
WHAT DID DR SUN YAT SEN MEAN TO THE CHINESE IN SINGAPORE AND NANYANG?

- A divided force or social cohesion in Chinese communities?

- Politicisation → Chinese Nationalism/patriotism:

- Modernisation: The Emergence of New Ideas and the spread of Modern Chinese Education

- Part of Singapore national history:
Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall is also commonly known as Wan Qing Yuan.

12 Tai Gin Road, Balestier

Land area of 3120 sq m

A two storey Palladian style villa completed in 1902.
Bringing Dr. Sun Yat Sen back: Narrative, History and Museum


Private museum (SCCCI) to Public institute (SCCCI+NHB)

- How much had the building been renovated?
- How Dr. Sun was represented in the exhibition?
- In what ways were the 1911 Revolution and local history connected?
- What are the key messages for visitors?
5.6-million renovation

Critics have accused the museum of Sino-centrism and pandering to a rising China.

Others criticised the museum for giving prominence to China's 1911 revolution and even questioned, “Should Singapore be celebrating its supporting role in a revolution that took place in another country?”
Two fundamental questions which had in fact haunted Singapore since her independence.

Firstly, whether Singaporeans should delve into the parts of the Singapore’s history regarding the places of origins of her people from different lands.

Secondly, when one identifies with one's ethnic heritage, does it make one more or less Singaporean.

Hence, what kind of museum do Singaporeans want and what type of national history do they feel comfortable with?
2011 curatorial work:

With the support from the NHB (National Collection, funding, NMS curatorial team), the new memorial hall showcases many rare artefacts which are on display for the first time.

It features a total of four permanent exhibition galleries (1900-1950) with the following themes:

- "First Encounter with Three Outstanding Revolutionaries of Xingzhou (Singapore)"
- “Xingzhou Tong Meng Hui and Nanyang Headquarters”
- "The 1911 Revolution and the Establishment of the Republican Government of China"
- "The Establishment of the Republican Government of China and Its Impact on Nanyang"
It seeks to present to visitors a more in-depth view of history and offer unique yet comprehensive insights into the 1911 Revolution from the perspectives of both Singapore and Nanyang.

To a large extent, it focuses more on Singapore’s contributions towards the 1911 Revolution in order to distinguish itself from its counterparts from other parts of the world.
Thank you!