

= Lee Choon Seng =

Lee Choon Seng (Chinese : 李振殿 ; pinyin : Lǐ Zhùn Chéng ; Pe̍h-ōe-jī : Lí Tsùn @-@ sîng ; 1888 ? 5 June 1966) was a businessman and philanthropist in pre @-@ independence Singapore . He founded several companies , cultivated rubber plantations in Malaya and started Chinese banks in the region . Lee held leadership roles in several Chinese community organisations in Singapore , notably the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCC) , and supported Sun Yat @-@ Sen 's revolutionary cause in China . In addition , he promoted the growth of Buddhism in Singapore by setting up several Buddhist institutions , including the Singapore Buddhist Lodge , Singapore Buddhist Federation and Poh Ern Shih Temple . In 2008 , his life and contributions to society were commemorated in a memorial hall at the Ee Hoe Hean Club .

= = Early years and personal life = =

In 1888 , Lee was born in Yongchun County , Fujian , China ; he had an elder stepbrother and a younger sister . To seek better fortunes , his father , Lee Lip Chai , emigrated to Negri Sembilan , Malaysia , where he started a horse @-@ drawn transport service and a provision shop , then initiated a series of charitable projects , including setting up a clan association and schools . Lee later joined his father in Negri Sembilan to help him run the family business and participate in his charitable projects . Lee grew up as a Taoist , but converted to Buddhism in adulthood , with Venerable Hong Choon , the abbot of Kong Meng San Temple , acting as his spiritual mentor . He married twice and had at least fifteen children .

= = Business = =

Lee moved to Singapore to set up another branch of his family business , called Thye Hin Limited . In Singapore , he founded Eng Hin Company , the Thye Hong Biscuit Factory and Thye Ann Investment , a property firm . He also cultivated large rubber plantations across Malaya . Realising that many newly arrived businessmen had difficulty obtaining loans from established Western banks , Lee and his business associates started several local Chinese banks , including Ho Hong Bank . In 1931 , Lee became the managing director of Ho Hong Bank and after it merged with two other banks to form the Oversea @-@ Chinese Banking Corporation (OCBC) , he became a director of OCBC and eventually its chairman .

= = Contributions to the Chinese community = =

= = = Support of Sun Yat Sen = = =

An ardent supporter of the Kuomintang , Lee was involved in secret meetings with Sun Yat @-@ Sen at the Wan Qing Yuan , a two @-@ storey villa at Tai Gin Road . He also helped the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia raise funds to support the Kuomintang in their struggles against the Empire of Japan and Communist Party of China . In 1937 , Lee and five other Chinese community leaders bought the Wan Qing Yuan to preserve it as a historical site ; it was later handed over to the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCC) , which renovated it and turned it into a national monument , the Sun Yat Sen Villa (now Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall) .

= = = Chinese community organisations = = =

From 1927 , Lee was actively involved with the SCCC , initially as General @-@ Secretary , then as President . Under his leadership , the SCCC supported the establishment of Nanyang University and convinced the British to grant citizenship to Chinese immigrants who had lived in Singapore for eight years . Lee was Chairman of the Ee Hoe Hean Club from 1933 ? 1935 and 1941 ? 1945 . Lee

was also one of six Hokkien representatives in the Overseas Chinese Association (OCA) , which acted as a bridge between the Chinese community and Japanese military administration during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore . During an OCA assignment to the Endau Settlement in Malaysia , his convoy was ambushed by the Malayan People 's Anti @-@ Japanese Army and everyone in the convoy was shot . Only Lee survived , as a bullet hit a Buddhist medallion on his chest ; this inspired him to spread Buddhism in Singapore .

= = Contributions to Buddhism in Singapore = =

= = = Poh Ern Shih Temple = = =

During World War II , many Japanese soldiers , British soldiers and civilians died in the crossfire and bombings of the Battle of Pasir Panjang at Chwee Chian Hill . On advice from Venerable Hong Choon , Lee purchased the hill from the British colonial government , with the aim of building a Buddhist temple dedicated to the bodhisattva Ksitigarbha , to liberate the spirits of the people who were sacrificed during the Japanese invasion . In 1950 , Lee incorporated the 46 @, @ 938 square feet (4 @, @ 360 @. @ 7 m2) Poh Ern Shih Temple (Hokkien for " temple of thanksgiving ") as a limited company without shares , and in April 1954 , he officiated its opening .

= = = Singapore Buddhist Lodge = = =

In 1943 , the Singapore Buddhist Lodge (?????????) was set up with about 100 members , mostly from the Chinese social elite . Its fixed address , a double @-@ storey house at 26 Blair Road , was donated by Lee , who also contributed S \$ 1 @, @ 000 for furniture and other expenses , a considerable sum at that time . The Lodge grew to over 2000 members by 1946 , so Zhang Jiamei and Zhong Tianshui decided to rent bigger premises at 17 Kim Yam Road . In 1950 , Zhang and Lee donated S \$ 10 @, @ 000 and started a drive to raise funds to purchase the rented premises .

= = = Singapore Buddhist Federation = = =

The rate of growth of Buddhist temples and Buddhists doubled after the war , but without an umbrella organisation , each temple , headed by a chief monk or management committee , had its own way of conducting its affairs and relied on itself for financial support . Lee invited representatives from all Chinese temples to the Singapore Buddhist Lodge to discuss the formation of an umbrella organisation , and on 30 October 1949 , the Singapore Buddhist Federation was registered , with Lee elected as its chairman and Venerable Hong Choon as its vice @-@ chairman . In its first decade , its notable achievements included having Vesak Day gazetted as a public holiday in 1955 , getting government approval to set up a Buddhist cemetery of about 110 acres (0 @. @ 45 km2) at Choa Chu Kang Road and managing two schools , Maha Bodhi School and Mee Toh School .

= = = The Chinese Temple in Sarnath = = =

In the early 1930s , Lee learned that Venerable Tao Chiai wanted to restore a dilapidated Chinese temple in Sarnath (the deer park where the Buddha gave his first sermon after his enlightenment) that a Chinese emperor of the Tang Dynasty built in the 8th century AD . Venerable Tao Chiai died before he could accomplish this task ; however , his chief disciple , Venerable Teh Yue , continued the restoration project , which Lee personally funded . Lee went on a pilgrimage to India with Venerable Teh Yue and brought along an English engineer , A. H. King , to assess and assist the restoration works . This temple still stands today in Sarnath and is called simply The Chinese Temple in Sarnath .

= = Death and commemoration = =

On 5 June 1966 , Lee was found dead in his home at Pasir Panjang Road . On 9 November 2008 , his life and contributions to society were commemorated in a gallery , called The Pioneers ' Memorial Hall , on the ground floor of the Ee Hoe Hean Club at Bukit Pasoh Road .