



Photograph by Tan Teng Teng

Ruth Chia (centre) is the great-granddaughter of Chia Ann Siang. She is a retired physiotherapist and the co-author of *Likon: The Layman's Guide to Acupuncture Without Needles*.

Linda Kow (left) is the great-great-granddaughter of Chia Ann Siang. Prior to retirement, she owned a web development company specialising in e-commerce and web design.

Soh Tiang Keng (right) is the great-great-grandson of Chia Ann Siang. He was a journalist with the *Business Times* and *Straits Times* for nearly 40 years, and is now a media consultant.



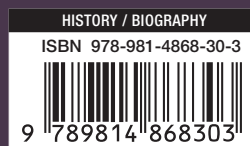
Chia Ann Siang was once one of Singapore's wealthiest men – a landowner, merchant and philanthropist. Born in Malacca in 1834, he came to Singapore and joined Boustead, an English trading company, as a storekeeper. At the tender age of 22, he was made Chief Storekeeper, and was able to buy himself a house on Telok Ayer Street – and another one on Amoy Street for good measure. An astute property investor, Chia continued to acquire much real estate in the course of his life, including a large nutmeg plantation which soon became known as Ann Siang Hill.

Chia Ann Siang died in 1892, leaving a fortune that supported two generations of his family and educated a third. This book looks at the disparate fortunes of his descendants, including a son he disinherited for marrying against his wishes, and a daughter whose marriage brought together two of Singapore's wealthiest families.

Far more than a biography, this is the fascinating story of eight generations of Straits Chinese, from the emigration of Chia's grandfather from Fujian to Malacca in 1774, right up to the present day.

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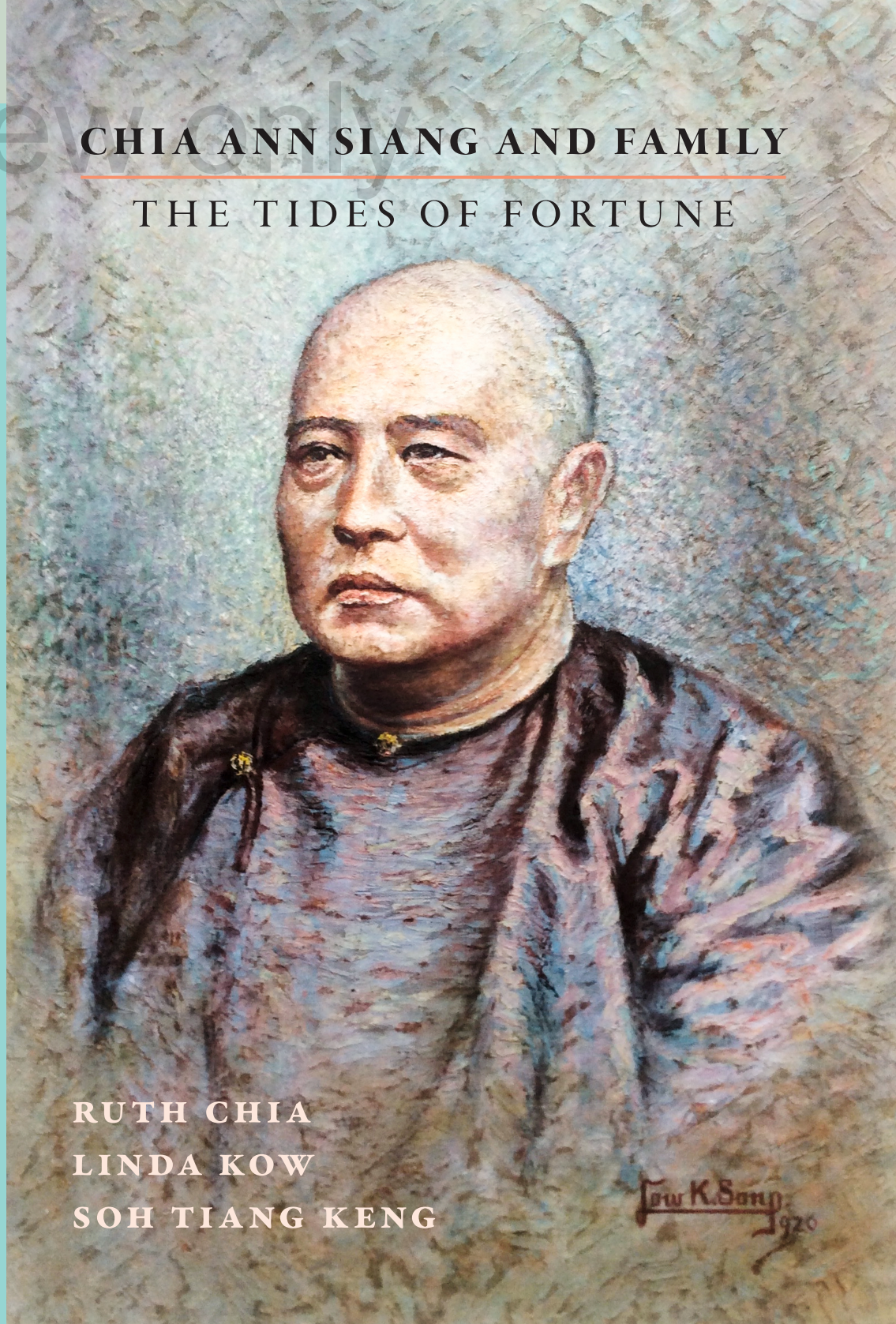
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CHIA ANN SIANG AND FAMILY THE TIDES OF FORTUNE

RUTH CHIA
LINDA KOW
SOH TIANG KENG



"I commend this book to anyone with a love of the past, with an interest in the history of Singapore, Malacca, Peranakan culture and China. Indeed, I recommend it to anyone who enjoys a good story told by a colourful and extremely knowledgeable character."

— **Dr Charlie Teo**
Neurosurgeon, and Founder of the
Charlie Teo Foundation for brain cancer research

"Compelling in its human interest and academic content... I highly recommend reading this book, both to understand the past and to derive a glimpse of our strength and fortunes ahead."

— **Gerald Seet, PhD**
Associate Professor,
Nanyang Technological University

Above
The Boustead warehouse on the Singapore River, detail
of watercolour sketch by Charles Dyce, 1847
(National University of Singapore Museum Collection)

Front cover
Portrait of Chia Ann Siang by Low Kway Song, 1920
(Collection of Ruth Chia; photograph by Khoo Ee Hoon)

Back cover
Ann Siang Hill and Club Street, c. 1920
(Tan Kok Kheng Collection, courtesy of National
Archives of Singapore)

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CHIA ANN SIANG AND FAMILY

THE TIDES OF FORTUNE

RUTH CHIA

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SOH TIANG KENG

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CONTENTS

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Foreword by Dr Charlie Teo	5
Foreword by Freddy Lam	7
Acknowledgements	11
Introduction	13

PART I: CHIA ANN SIANG

by Ruth Chia

The Story of the Portraits	20
Where in China Did the Family Come From?	27
Chia Poh Eng's Business Acumen – A Fortune Is Made	36
The Will of Chia Ann Siang	45
Discovery of the Tomb	48
“Wealth Will Not Last Three Generations”	52
A Short History of Ann Siang Hill	57
The Other Ann Siang Hill	73
The Watershed of the 20th Century	75

PART II: THE THIRD SON

by Linda Kow

Chia Ann Siang's Third Son, Chia Keng Chiang	84
Death of Chia Keng Chiang	94

For Review only

Keng Chiang's Career	97
A Loveless First Marriage	103
The Forbidden Wedding	109
The Curse	111
The Children from the Forbidden Union	113
Where There Is a Will, There Is a Way – Or a War?	117
The Untangled Knots	121

PART III: A UNION OF TWO WEALTHY FAMILIES

by Soh Tiang Keng

The Families of Chia Ann Siang and See Ewe Lay	124
Family Traditions	132
Singapore in the 1950s	138
Soh Chye Hin, Centenarian	142
An Illustrious Family Tree	144
Appendix: Low Kway Song, Artist	149
Genealogy of the Chia Family in Nanyang	159
Genealogy of the Chia Clan of Shitang (in Chinese)	167
Notes	170
About the Authors	174

FOREWORD

by Professor Charlie Teo

I was approached by the producer of a reality TV show – “Who Do You Think You Are?” – to be the celebrity subject of an exploration into my ancestry. Apparently, they had been trying to make contact with me for several months and my office had “brickwalled” them. Had they approached me personally, I would have done the same. I had no knowledge nor interest in my heritage, and furthermore, why would I assume it would be interesting enough to engage the general public? Indeed, the first question the producer asked of me was, “What do you expect to get out of the show?” I had no answer. When pushed, I blurted out some juvenile desire to have been a direct descendant of Genghis Khan. By reading this book you will come to understand that my spontaneous response was not as unrealistic as you might imagine!

After six months of laborious investigating, interviewing, probing and travelling to far-off places and two weeks of filming, my whole attitude to the subject of ancestry did an about-turn. Although I had always thought of myself as a “present and future” type of person, I came to realise that the past serves some very important purposes. It might explain many of those lifelong questions: Why do I have this innate desire to help those in need? Why am I good with my hands when I have never been taught to be a handyman? It may give you a feeling of pride and

For Review only

responsibility to do the right thing by your ancestors, as they did for their forefathers. Finally, it puts you in touch with true “family”. These are complete strangers who oddly enough share both physical and emotional traits. When you meet these long-lost relatives, there is an instant bond and a sincere warmth and love that is immediately captivating. My meeting with Auntie Ruth was one such moment.

Auntie Ruth is one of those colourful characters you only encounter a handful of times in an entire lifetime. We enjoyed an instant rapport. She reminded me so much of my mother it was uncanny. Her accent, mannerisms, style, the way she ordered food for everyone, the food she ordered, the way she insisted on paying – everything about her reminded me of my mum, Chia Kim Fook. It only seems right that our family story should be told through her eyes and with her passion and love of history. I commend this book to anyone with a love of the past, with an interest in the history of Singapore, Malacca, Peranakan culture and China. Indeed, I recommend it to anyone who enjoys a good story told by a colourful and extremely knowledgeable character.

DR CHARLIE TEO is a world-renowned neurosurgeon residing in Sydney. He is known for taking on high-risk patients that other surgeons deem inoperable, and as a result he has saved the lives of many. Charlie hails from the line of Chia Ann Lim, brother of Chia Ann Siang. His mother, Chia Kim Fook, would be a 21st-generation Chia (the 6th generation in Nanyang), making Charlie nephew to Ruth Chia.

FOREWORD

by Freddy Lam

It never ceases to surprise me, whenever we meet, to learn that my good friend Ruth is busying herself with yet another new project. This year, with Singapore commemorating the bicentennial of Sir Stamford Raffles’s arrival and paying tribute to its founding fathers, I find her writing a book about her illustrious ancestors. I heartily congratulate Ruth and her co-authors Linda and Tiang Keng on this most timely and honourable endeavour. In my two decades of active participation at the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, including 14 years as Vice-President, I have met countless successful self-made businessmen. But as history attests, few can rival the gumption, ambition and foresight of the early pioneers like Chia Ann Siang and his contemporaries, whose legacies continue to shape modern Singapore.

Ruth is indefatigable, and her wide circle of friends speaks volumes about her character. Her days are filled hosting overseas friends, helping the less fortunate, and conducting chess sessions for the young. She is a true friend for all seasons, generous to a fault. She enjoys a good challenge, pushes boundaries, and is highly adaptable. These are strong, indelible traits inherited from her ancestors who, in the 18th century, journeyed from China to Malacca, and then to Singapore. It comes as no surprise that Ruth’s

For Review only

family were close friends with some members of the Al-Junied family, as both were trading families wooed to Singapore by Raffles and Farquhar in the 1820s. The Chia family's history is richly interwoven with Singapore's history. Their collective memories in this book open a uniquely colourful window to our country's past, which I believe readers will enjoy greatly.

My friendship with Ruth reads like a history book. Our families have known each other for a very long time. We met as 8-year-olds, back in early post-war Singapore, as neighbours in our beachfront houses along Pasir Panjang Road, or what was then known as Pasir Panjang "fifth-mile". We share many happy memories of climbing the 10-foot-tall starfruit tree in her family's garden, beach-combing, swimming and fishing from the private jetty. The sea was just a leap away when the tide ran high.

There was once I found an abandoned sampan near the water's edge and hopped in without hesitation. As I drifted happily out to sea, I was lulled to sleep and awoke some time later to discover that I was dangerously far from the shore. Fortunately, I found a long wooden pole in the sampan and many hours later, after much effort, I managed to row my way back to land – very tired but extremely relieved!

Another favourite playground for the children in our neighbourhood was Tiger Balm Gardens, now renamed Haw Par Villa. Imagine having over a thousand statues and colourful dioramas of Chinese mythological characters in one's backyard. It truly was the Universal Studios and Disneyland of our generation! We explored its every nook and cranny, played hide-and-go-seek and even discovered secret entrances. Nearby, Pasir Panjang "sixth-mile" was populated with provision shops, a bakery and

kopitiam. For us young ones, ice-cream and ice-kacang beckoned as after-school treats. Life was good in the carefree days of early Singapore.

As with many Singaporeans of our time, our families relocated due to urban redevelopment and I lost touch with Ruth. But as fate would have it, our paths crossed once again when my wife Junie and I returned from London after our studies, and Junie met Ruth when they both started work at Singapore General Hospital as medical professionals. Imagine my surprise and delight at reconnecting with my childhood friend! Junie and Ruth have been best of friends since then, and my two daughters consider Ruth part of our family.

I am very happy that the Chia family is generously sharing their deeply personal narratives in this book, which I am sure will not only entertain but inspire all readers. It is an honour to be asked to write this foreword. I wish Ruth and family every success with this publication.

FREDDY LAM is a businessman, industry veteran and established business community leader, with former roles as President and Vice-President of the ASEAN Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Vice-President of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, council member of the Singapore Business Federation, trustee board member of ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute Singapore and member of various national review committees, councils and statutory boards.

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The authors at Ann Siang Hill. From left: Soh Tiang Keng, Linda Kow and Ruth Chia.
(Photograph by Tan Teng Teng)

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Tan Teng Teng, for managing this project, contributing her primary research of archival materials such as newspapers, building plans, maps and photographs, reading the manuscript,

For Review only

INTRODUCTION

photographing historic buildings and places, and contributing towards the article on the history of Ann Siang Hill.

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Dr Gerald Seet, great-great-grandson of Chia Ann Siang, for his kind endorsement of the book.

Chay Kok Fan and Douglas Koh, for their IT assistance.

And finally, Melvin Neo and Justin Lau of Marshall Cavendish for their interest and support.

Seven years ago, when the tomb of Chia Ann Siang, my great-grandfather, was discovered on 23 September 2012, I sent an email to my lifelong good friend GA telling him my family history. It caught his interest, and he urged me to write the story of my family.

Initially, I could not get down to penning my memories of the stories I had heard from my mother and relatives. Then my friend Teng Teng visited me and I showed her the portraits of my great-grandfather and great-grandmother. She was excited on discovering that the artist was the famous Low Kway Song, who had painted the oil portraits in 1920. She was surprised to see that the 100-year-old paintings were so well kept. She suggested I show them to the curators of the Singapore National Museum. She then arranged a time for them to visit me at my apartment to view the paintings. The curators were keen to take a look. They had not seen portraits of a couple painted in that period.

Iskander Mydin, who was then a Senior Curator at the National Museum of Singapore, drew my attention to some finer aspects of the paintings that had escaped my notice before. We chatted about the stories I had heard about my great-grandfather. Iskander suggested I write about him.

There is more than enough information on Chia Ann Siang on the web and in the archives, but not on his private life.

In a recent book about Ann Siang Hill, Khoo Ee Hoon wrote a very good article on Chia Ann Siang and his businesses as the public knows it. Some people questioned how Chia Ann Siang accumulated so much wealth at such a young age. Like so many things in life, it was a stroke of luck and destiny.

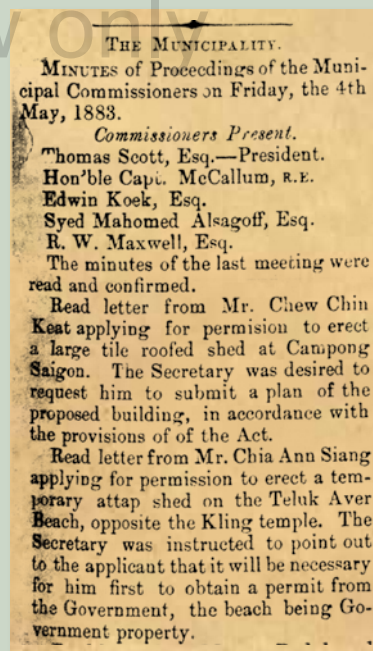
After reflecting on what Iskander said, a brain wave hit me. Let this be a project of the great-grandchildren of Chia Ann Siang. Linda Kow, the great-granddaughter of the “renegade” third son of Chia Ann Siang, agreed to write the stories she had heard about her lineage. Her brother, Ronald Kow, a retired editor of a local newspaper, would be her editor.

My cousin, Soh Tiang Keng, the great-grandson of Chia Ann Siang’s second daughter, offered to edit my manuscript and write about his great-grandmother, Chia Chee Bee Neo, who was given in marriage to See Ewe Lay, the founder of *Lat Pau*, the first Chinese daily newspaper in Singapore and Southeast Asia. Tiang Keng is a media consultant and editor and a retired journalist and correspondent of a local newspaper.

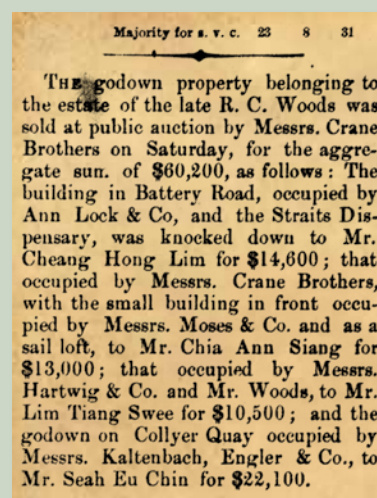
By another coincidence, Tiang Keng’s sister Mabel in Canada sent me a manuscript written by her late sister, Irene. Irene wrote this manuscript – a genealogy of the family – during the year she was fighting her battle with cancer. We have put her thoughts into this book.

Chia Poh Eng, the father of Chia Ann Siang, and his sons did a good deal of philanthropy in their lifetime. They contributed a lot of money to temples in Malacca and Singapore as well as institutions like the Hokkien Huay Kuan and Chong Wen Ge. In 1903, the Estate of Chia Ann Siang donated \$3,000 towards the building of a medical school.

For Review only



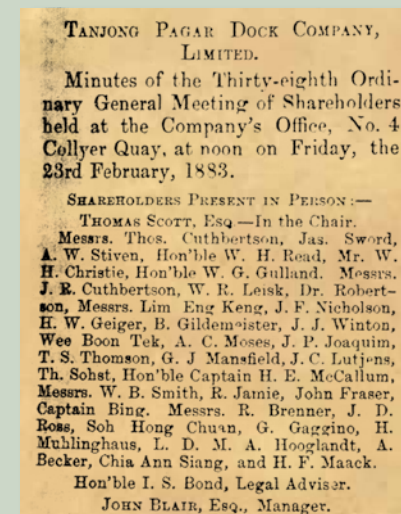
Application by Chia Ann Siang to erect a temporary attap shed on Telok Ayer Beach, 23 May 1883. (*The Straits Times* © Singapore Press Holdings Limited)



Acquisition of property, 19 February 1876. (*The Straits Times* © Singapore Press Holdings Limited)

Tan Tock Seng's Hospital.		
List of Chinese Subscriptions towards the erection of new wards at Tan Tock Seng's Hospital in place of the old attap building.		
Tan Kim Ching, Esq.	...	\$500
Tan Beng Giam,	...	500
Cheang Hong Lim,	...	450
Seah Chin Hin,	...	400
Koh San Tee,	...	400
Gan Eng Seng,	...	300
Oh Lam Seng,	...	300
Goh Tek Guan,	...	200
Chop San Ghang Chang,	...	200
Chop Ban San,	...	200
Koo Teong Poh, Esq.,	...	200
Wee Boon Teck,	...	200
Wee Koon Hong,	...	200
Ong Chong Chiew,	...	200
Koo Cheng Teong,	...	200
Chop Swee Tye,	...	50
Chop Guan Tong,	...	50
Chop Guan Watt,	...	50
Chua Tek Hong, Esq.,	...	50
Chop Hap Chin,	...	50
Koo Soo Seng, Esq.,	...	50
Chop Kean Hong,	...	50
Chia Ann Siang, Esq.,	...	50
Chop Heep Choon,	...	50
Choo Kong Lau, Esq.,	...	50
Chop Ghin Heep,	...	50
Boey Swee Ho, Esq.,	...	30
Kong Wah Seng,	...	20
Total	...	\$4,450

Chia Ann Siang's donation to Tan Tock Seng Hospital, 22 June 1887. (*The Straits Times* © Singapore Press Holdings Limited)



Shareholder of Tanjong Pagar Dock Co. Ltd, 5 March 1883. (*The Straits Times* © Singapore Press Holdings Limited)

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To build on this legacy of philanthropy, the oil portraits of Chia Ann Siang and his wife will be donated to the Singapore National Museum. Although they were painted in 1920, the technique is modern and unusual. This gift is a gesture of social and historical responsibility by Chia Ann Siang's descendants to Singaporeans present and future.

This book will explain how the Chia family made its wealth and supported the family for nearly 70 years after the death of Chia Ann Siang in 1892. When I was growing up, I knew we were living off my great-grandfather's money. My grandfather and father never did anything for a living. I pretended not to know who my great-grandfather was, as I was fearful that the wealth had come from opium, gambling, prostitution or human trafficking.

Later, when I was introduced to the Bukit Brown enthusiasts, they sparked my interest in my forefathers, especially my great-grandfather, the third generation of the Chia clan in Nanyang (Southeast Asia).

Surprisingly, there was plenty of information on him in the archives and as I researched, I was so relieved that the wealth came from traditional businesses. I felt that a cross had been lifted from my shoulders. Then, I became interested in his life. My parents, whom I lived with until their demise, told me stories about the family.

Although Chia Ann Siang's sons had no talent for business, his eldest son Keng Beng was visionary enough to liquidate all his fixed assets that lasted beyond two World Wars. A lot of the old-money Straits Chinese (the Peranakans) lost their wealth when Singapore fell into Japanese hands during the Second World War. Chia Keng Chiang, Ann Siang's third son, gave up his inheritance

for a Eurasian girl he fell in love with and married against his father's wishes. Despite the loss of this inheritance, Keng Chiang's lineage excelled in their professional lives.

The rule of nature is such that in every century we see new wealth being made by people who are visionary and able to grasp new opportunities, and the demise of old wealth in the hands of those who are too complacent to see any future for new businesses. Such is the invisible hand of destiny.

Maybe our family, the Chia clan, is protected by destiny. The Chinese believe that retribution happens in this lifetime, and if not, in the generations to come. By the time my siblings and I completed our education, the money that had been bequeathed to my father by his grandfather was depleted. There were eight of us who kept our parents in their comfortable lifestyle. I believe this must be because our forefathers did a lot of philanthropy, which flowed down to grace their future generations.

The 7th and 8th generations of the Chia clan have done very well in their professions. An excellent example is Dr Charlie Teo, the great-great-grandson of Chia Ann Siang's brother Chia Ann Lim. An internationally renowned neurosurgeon, Charlie is contributing to society with his Charlie Teo Foundation.

The Chia clan has now been in Singapore for over 200 years. Our ancestors, guided by their destiny, contributed to their adopted land while retaining the customs and language of their country of origin. Over the years, we have blended with the other communities here in Singapore and adopted the culture, the food, the way of life. In the process, we have become Singaporeans.

At the same time, however, there is always an intrinsic human need to know where our forefathers came from. As Prime

Minister Lee Hsien Loong wrote in 2015, quoting Marcus Garvey: “A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.” I hope that this book will do its part in deepening and strengthening the roots of our collective Singapore family tree.

Ruth Chia
September 2019

For Review only

PART I

CHIA ANN SIANG

by Ruth Chia

THE STORY OF THE PORTRAITS



Portraits of Chia Ann Siang and his wife Chan Chee Lee Neo (oil on canvas, 77 x 63 cm), by Low Kway Song, 1920. (Collection of Ruth Chia; photographs by Khoo Ee Hoon)

My great-grandfather, Chia Ann Siang (谢安祥), was born in Malacca on 18 May 1834 and had three daughters and four sons. He was the third generation of the Chia family in Nanyang.

The portraits of my great-grandfather and great-grandmother were fixtures of our home for as long as I can remember. The two oil paintings were painted by a famous artist of the time, Low Kway Song, in 1920. The paintings were commissioned by Chia Keng Beng, the eldest son of Chia Ann Siang.

My guess was, it is an act of remorse by Keng Beng because in 1919, he had had to auction all the properties of the estate of Chia Ann Siang as he was saddled with a personal financial crisis. The oil paintings were a remembrance of his parents.

After my mother married my father, they had to stay in the family house. My father had great respect for his grandfather, Chia Ann Siang. The two portraits were very precious and were always prominently displayed in our home, wherever we moved.

When I got to the age of being conscious of my environment and family ancestry, I asked my mother who the people in the portraits were. She pointed out that the one on the right was my father's grandfather, Chia Ann Siang, my great-grandfather, and the one on the left was his wife, Chan Chee Lee Neo, my

great-grandmother. Looking me in the eye, my mother said, “You come from good stock. See that you behave yourself.”

My age did not put an end to my youthful escapades, however. I kept on climbing trees, went with my father and brother and cousins on their fishing trips, and flew kites with my brother and cousins, not in the least behaving like a lady of some bearing.

We were then living in a big bungalow in Pasir Panjang. There was another smaller house on the same piece of land, which we rented out. The property had a brick wall surrounding the garden. At the end of the garden was the sea. During high tide, the water crept up, nearly as high as the top of the wall. There were steps leading to the beach, where at low tide we caught crabs and cockles. A vacant plot of land next door, which was as big as the land of our two houses, was where we kids played kites. Later, I was told that our home had been bequeathed to my father by granduncle Keng Beng.

My father, Chia Teck Chye, had been matched in marriage with my mother, who did not see him until their wedding day. My mother, Koh Loon Neo, was taken out of her convent school at the age of 16. She had led a sheltered life, knowing very little of the world. She was the eldest of her family, a dreamy, good-looking and innocent girl.

Right up to her demise, my mother loved reading novels by Denis Robbins and Barbara Cartland and the Saints series by Leslie Charteris. Dreamy as she was, she could never visualise my father as a knight on a white horse. Nevertheless, they had eight children – six girls and two boys.

After their marriage, my parents lived in the “family house” at No. 9 Scotts Road. My granduncle Keng Beng, the trustee of



Wedding photo of Ruth Chia's parents, Chia Teck Chye and Koh Loon Neo, taken at the front door of No. 9 Scotts Road, 14 May 1933.¹ (Courtesy of the family of Chia Teck Chye)

the estate of Chia Ann Siang, was a paralytic², but was otherwise able to function normally; my grandfather, Chia Keng Sian, had suffered a stroke and was bedridden. His wife, my grandmother, had passed away, so my mother at 16 years old became the head of the house. After my grandfather and granduncle died, my parents moved to the house at Pasir Panjang around 1938.

My father led a charmed life. He knew nothing about the value of money, as it was always there for him. He was a Peter Pan. He loved children and was fond of taking us and my mother's siblings for movies and outings. He had a pure and trusting nature, and many came to entice him into business ventures that inevitably turned sour.

So, my father lived on his inherited capital and rental income. But later, inflation and the government's Land Acquisition Act eroded his inheritance, and gradually, the money dwindled away.

My father was always more traditional than my mother. He maintained the traditions he grew up with. During Chinese New Year, he would get up very early to open the front door, pay respects to the heavenly god Tua Pek Kong, and then light firecrackers to usher in the new year and drive away the bad luck of the past year. When we children woke up, we would put on our new clothes, line up in front of our parents, and kneel with our hands clasped to wish them a happy new year and long life. Then we were given red packets with money inside. After breakfast, of the usual *mee sua* (new year noodles signifying longevity) and other festive goodies, we all packed into the car and went to pay new year greetings to my mother's parents.

At our Pasir Panjang home, my father maintained the same standard of living he had enjoyed at Scotts Road. He had a



Chia Teck Chye and Koh Loon Neo with their children, c. 1949. From left: Grace, Ruth, Doreen, Rosalind, Kathleen and George. Swee Eng is on Loon Neo's lap and Harry is standing in front of Teck Chye. (Courtesy of the family of Chia Teck Chye)

Hainanese cook and cook boy to serve him who had followed him from the family home.

We also had a Malay driver, Kas, and a maid, Ah Lin, to look after us children. My brother George, who is three years my senior, and I would often run down to the servants' quarters outside the main house, where we would eat with them, sitting on the floor and eating with our hands. Kas loved my brother. He would put George on his lap and show him how to drive the car. Both of them, together with my father, would frequently go fishing on the boat when the tide was high.

We had a starfruit tree in our garden. I loved to climb it and swing on its sprawling branches. Then as usual, came Ah Lin with

For Review only

a cane, screaming for me to get down. My three older sisters were very well behaved and played among themselves.

All this went on until the money ran low, forcing my father to sell the house and move us to a smaller house in Katong. We could then only afford a maid, so my mother had to cook. We children – the girls – were assigned household chores.

The Katong house was smaller but we still had the portraits of our great-grandparents hanging on the wall. Gradually, my father had to sell his properties one by one to keep up with our living expenses. Somehow, my great-grandfather Chia Ann Siang left enough money to give us children an education, enabling us later to have professional careers.

His sons and grandsons never had to work for a living. Poor great-grandfather gazing from above must be terribly disappointed with his sons and grandsons. None of them had his talent for business or the habit of working for a living. He supported three generations. By providence, his great-grandchildren were able to support their parents with a comfortable life, albeit not at the same level of luxury they had grown up with.

WHERE IN CHINA DID THE FAMILY COME FROM?

In July 2017, the Australian TV station SBS produced a series on tracing family trees called “Who Do You Think You Are?” and the celebrity featured on one of the episodes was my nephew, Professor Charlie Teo, who had been nominated as Australian of the Year. Charlie’s mother, Chia Kim Fook, is the great-granddaughter of Chia Ann Lim, Chia Ann Siang’s younger brother. As a supporting character on the show, I was given a copy of the Chia family *Zu Pu* (族谱), the family’s genealogical record, with information on the generations of the Chias, their wives and children, their births and deaths and their achievements. This was an eye-opener for me. It gave me information that I never knew about our family – from the time they were in China to when some of the members emigrated to other countries.

The Chia family originated from Shitang village (石塘村), on the outskirts of Xiamen (厦门; also known as Amoy), a coastal city in southern Fujian (Hokkien) province known for producing great seafarers like the Ming-dynasty diplomat and explorer Admiral Zheng He. Zheng He and others like him sailed out of China seeking adventure and fortune in Nanyang (Southeast Asia) and farther afield. The stories they brought back, with extravagant claims of great wealth, must have been inspiring to those back home.

DISCOVERY OF THE TOMB

Many years later, when my nephews from third granduncle Keng Chiang were looking for the grave of their great-grandfather, they asked the Bukit Brown enthusiasts for help. I told them that I had read in the *Straits Times* archives that Chia Keng Beng had written to the British Municipality for permission to bury his father, Chia Ann Siang, in his Bukit Timah nutmeg and clove estate. The nutmeg plantation was very large, covering Malcolm Road, Bukit Timah Road, Whitley Road and Mount Pleasant Road. The answer was positive, and the British Municipality gave permission for a path from No. 34 Malcolm Road to the tomb. The area for the tomb was $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre.¹¹

While he was alive, Chia Ann Siang had donated part of his plantation land for a Hokkien cemetery that came to be known as *Kopi Sua*.¹² But he was not buried there. Instead, on 23 September 2012, after much searching, the Bukit Brown enthusiasts found my great-grandfather's tomb in the middle of the forest between St Joseph's Institution and Singapore Chinese Girls' School.¹³

Although overgrown with foliage, the beautiful Chinese tomb was in perfect condition after more than a century. The inscription on the headstone gives the name of his ancestral village in China, the date of his demise, the names of his sons, daughters and grandsons, and states that he was a fifth-ranking official of the Qing court.



The headstone of Chia Ann Siang's tomb, with the inscription highlighted with chalk.
(Photograph by Raymond Goh)

In response to an enquiry, the Land Transport Authority (LTA) told me that his tomb had been rezoned in 1981 as burial land and the land cost was the minimum market price of 15 cents per square foot. I wrote to the Supreme Court to renegotiate on the terms that one tomb does not make a burial ground. They advised me to get a lawyer. Subsequently, three letters were exchanged, and I was given the same answer. So I left it at that.

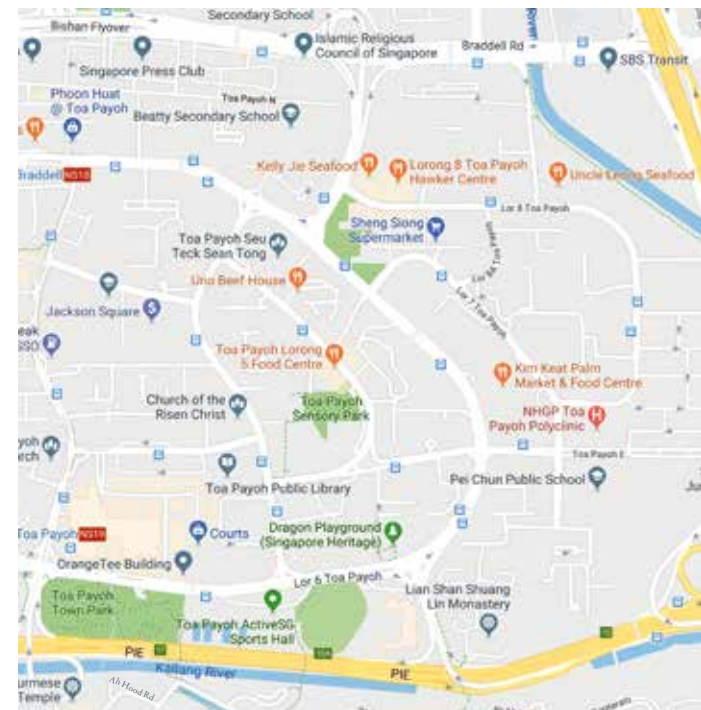
My great-grandmother and my granduncle Keng Bock were buried nearby, at the lower end of Malcolm Road. Their two tombs covered an area of more than 1 acre. In the 1980s, I



Map of the graves of Chia Ann Siang and family members in relation to Kopi Sua Hokkien cemetery (donated by Chia Ann Siang from his plantation land) and Bukit Brown, based on map specialist Mok Ly Yng's reconstruction. (Imagery © 2019 Google)

checked with the LTA and the Government Gazette, and was able to confirm that the land had been forfeited by the government for public use. It is now part of St Joseph's Institution's grounds, where the tennis courts are.

Many of the properties from the estate of Chia Ann Siang were acquired by the government for public use. His 38-acre estate in Toa Payoh, stretching from Lorong 6 to Lorong 8, was acquired in 1951. There were a few graves but mostly there were farms (see page 73, "The Other Ann Siang Hill"). The rental from the farms was gone and so was the income.



In Toa Payoh, the estate of Chia Ann Siang and his brothers stretched from around Ah Hood Road at the bottom left of the map to around Braddell Road at the top of the map. (Map data © 2019 Google)



Tay Geok Teat (1832–1893)
of the firm Geok Teat & Co.,
which Chia Ann Siang was
a founding partner of.

Chia Ann Siang not only invested in nutmeg plantations, he also expanded into other businesses while still working as Chief Storekeeper at Boustead. In 1860, he ventured into the timber business, partnering his future son-in-law (husband of Chee Hay Neo). In 1863, he and three other partners, including Malacca-born trader Tay Geok Teat, formed a firm, Geok Teat & Co., for warehousing and commission agents.¹⁷

Chia Ann Siang died on 23 September 1892 at the age of 58 years. His wife carried on his business although his eldest son, Keng Beng, was the trustee of his estate.

For Review only

A SHORT HISTORY OF ANN SIANG HILL

Ann Siang Hill is the only remaining hill out of three hills that once stood around the old Telok Ayer basin. It was originally known as Scott's Hill after its owner, Charles Scott (1802–1858), who planted nutmeg, cloves and coffee on it, and built a grand house at the summit which he christened *Lessuden*. The other two hills were Mount Wallich and Mount Erskine, both of which have since been levelled.



An 1846 map showing the original three hills of Telok Ayer – Mount Wallich (levelled in 1909–12), Mount Erskine (levelled in the 1960s to build the Ministry of National Development building), and Scott's Hill (Ann Siang Hill today). (Private collection)

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View of Singapore from Mount Wallich, painted by Percy Carpenter in 1856. In the middle-ground are two hills – Mount Erskine, surmounted by a large house, and behind it, densely planted Scott's Hill. Further in the distance is Government Hill (later Fort Canning Hill). (Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board)



Chinatown as seen from Pearl's Hill, 1860s. On the right of the photo, Scott's Hill can be seen in the distance, with *Lessuden*, the house built by Charles Scott, at its summit. (Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board)

Scott's Hill was later bought by John Gemmill, Singapore's first auctioneer, and came to be known as Gemmill's Hill. Gemmill also owned Mount Erskine and its surrounds.¹⁸ After he died in 1865, the bulk of his properties – Lease No. 1634 SN 8229 – was sold at auction to Whampoa Hoo Ah Kay (1867), and then later sold to Chia Ann Siang (1873).¹⁹

Chia Ann Siang was an astute property investor. He acquired much real estate starting from about 1870, when he was just in his mid-thirties.²⁰ By the time he died in 1892, he owned an impressive collection of properties, including 38 houses and building sites at Ann Siang Hill, 15 houses and building sites at Erskine Road, 10 houses in Telok Ayer Street and 14 houses in Amoy Street.²¹ Because of his dominance on Gemmill's Hill (i.e. Scott's Hill), the area came to be known as Ann Siang Hill.

The Ann Siang Hill area, being situated on high ground, stood apart from the hustle and bustle of Chinatown; it was a rather quiet, predominantly residential, enclave.²² How apt, as Chia Ann Siang's name (安祥) literally means "serene and auspicious".²³ It would also soon become home to various social clubs for Chinese businessmen – such as Kee Lam Club, Chwee Lan Teng, Goh Loo Club and Ee Hoe Hean Club – as well as many clan and trade associations, particularly along Club Street, which linked Ann Siang Hill to Cross Street.

"Ann Siang Hill" was also the name of the road that led up to the top of Mount Erskine, where there was a large house (the site of the Ministry of National Development car park today). At the same time, as can be seen in an 1893 map of the area, there was a second path leading to the top of Mount Erskine, branching off South Bridge Road and running approximately parallel to Ann

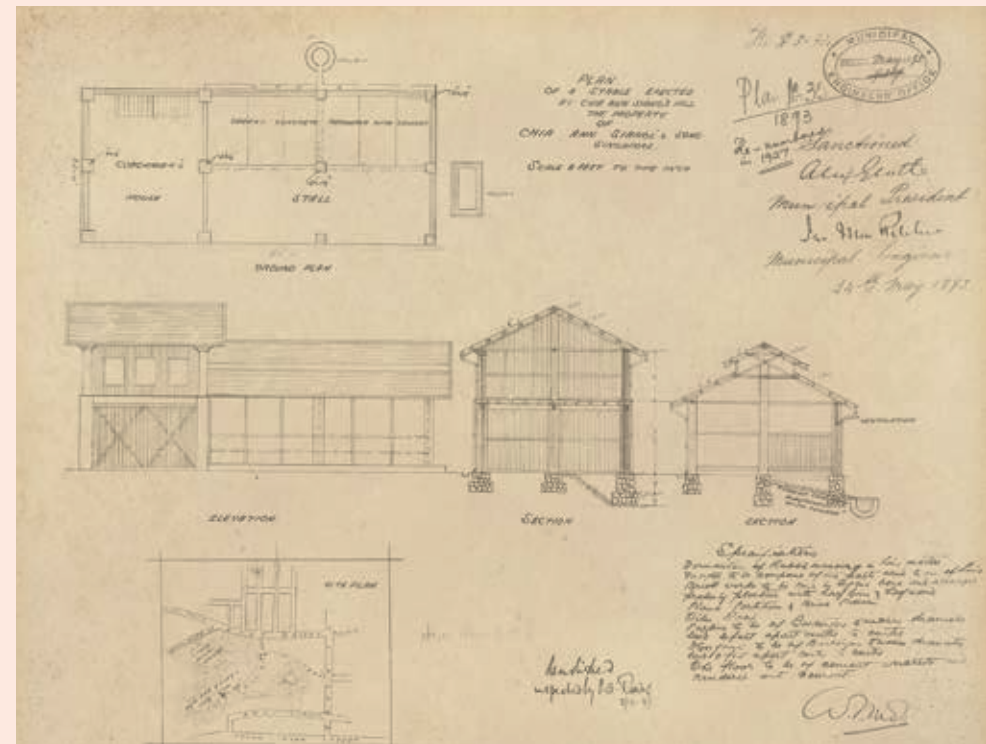
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An 1893 map, showing the original course of the road named Ann Siang Hill. The second-last house on the left of the southern end of Telok Ayer Street is No. 59, once owned by Chia Ann Siang.

Siang Hill; this is today's Erskine Road. Finally, connecting the two was an unnamed path, which officially became Ann Siang Road in the early 20th century.²⁴ According to some old residents of the area, the name "Ann Siang Hill" originally referred to the hill at the end of Ann Siang Road – in other words, Mount Erskine, rather than Scott's Hill.²⁵

After Chia Ann Siang died, his eldest son, Keng Beng, developed several properties in this area, including many rows of shophouses, carriage houses and stables.



Plan of a stable to be erected at Chia Ann Siang's Hill, on the property of Chia Ann Siang's sons, 1893. (Building Control Division Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

RUTH CHIA SOH KIM (谢秀金) is a 6th-generation Chia in Nanyang, the great-granddaughter of Chia Ann Siang. She studied physiotherapy at the University of Melbourne on a Colombo Plan scholarship. Upon her graduation, she returned to Singapore to work in government hospitals. She took two years' no-pay leave to work at the Toronto Workmen's Rehabilitation Centre. Upon her return, Ruth went into private practice. She was a pioneer in her field to do so. Despite her mother's conviction that she would fail, Ruth ran a successful practice. In 1978, Ruth went to Taiwan to study acupuncture. When Wearnes Tech invented an electronic machine known as the Likon, Ruth was asked to test its clinical applications, including its use in acupuncture. In 1988, she co-authored *The Layman's Guide to Acupuncture Without Needles* with Professor Tan Chwee Heng. Ruth retired in 2013 and spends her time reading, exercising, organising chess games for children and fellowship with friends.

LINDA KOW SUAN SIM (侯钻心) is a 6th-generation Singaporean. Her ancestors landed in Singapore in 1820. She is the great-great-granddaughter of Chia Ann Siang. Married to Lim Yan Ping, they have two sons, Kevin and Colin. Linda is retired and divides her time between Singapore and Melbourne, where she spends time with her grandchildren. Prior to retirement,

she owned a web development company specialising in e-commerce, internet applications and web designs for a diverse range of corporate clients, ranging from multinational companies and government corporations to small and medium enterprises.

SOH TIANG KENG (蘇長慶), now in his late 70s, is the great-great-grandson of Chia Ann Siang and the great-grandson of See Ewe Lay. He is married to Jane Yim and they have two daughters, Ching Ling and Lydia. His family worships at an Anglican church. Tiang Keng was a finance and business journalist with the *Business Times* and *Straits Times* for nearly 40 years before his retirement in 2002. He has also written and edited publications and magazines on finance, business, health and Christian matters. For the last 11 years, Tiang Keng, who studied at the London School of Journalism, the University of Wales, Cardiff, and the East-West Communications Institute, East-West Center, Hawaii, has been working as a part-time media consultant with Stratagem Consultants, an investor and public relations firm. He holds the Singapore British Council's Tutors Award for teaching English.