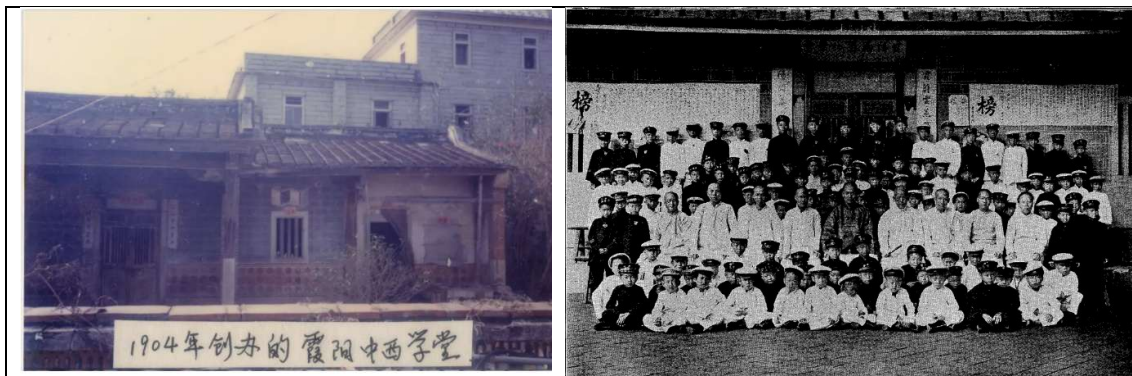


Yeo Cheow Kaw and his schools

In 1904 in Xiayang, China, at the age of twenty-six, Yeo Cheow Kaw (1878-1926) used his own financial resources to establish the "Xiyang Anglo-Chinese School," one of the foremost reformed schools before the fall of the Qing Dynasty. He personally served as the school's patron, superintendent, and principal. Initially, only two rooms of a family farmhouse were allocated as classrooms. He spared no expense in hiring excellent teachers from across the country to teach both languages and practical subjects such as mathematics, aiming to equip village children with the skills to make a living abroad. Within three years, the number of students grew to over one hundred, prompting the school to move to an old residential block owned by his father, Yeo Poon Meah. This institution eventually became known as Xiayang Primary School.



In 1907 in Rangoon, Burma, Yeo Cheow Kaw took over the management of Teong Hwa School, which had been established earlier as the first free Chinese school funded by the local Chinese community. School reports from later years highlighted his dedication: he visited the school every afternoon to inspect and converse with the teachers, and frequently invited them to his villa to discuss school affairs and host dinners. By the age of 35 (in 1913), he had become the president of the Burmese Chinese Education Syndicate. Recognizing that overseas Chinese schools were often divided by dialect clans, with different dialects used as the medium of instruction (e.g., Cantonese in Cantonese-run schools, Hokkien in Hokkien-run schools), he led efforts to mediate these factional schools and standardize Mandarin as the language of instruction. He utilized his villa garden to host inter-school sports events, organize student work exhibitions, reward outstanding students, and promote the holistic development of students. He also placed great emphasis on physical training and initiated police-cadet training for schoolboys.



Address of the Chinese Education Syndicate headed by Yeo Cheow Kaw was printed together with the appeal to Cai Yuanpei to help with teacher recruitment for the Chinese High School in Rangoon, in 1917.



The Chinese High School in Rangoon, was formally opened in February 1921, with the land donated by Chan Mah Phee, a contemporary philanthropist, and funding support from many other overseas Chinese. Yeo Cheow Kaw was on the board of directors for several years. The school was closed down after Myanmar's independence. The building has since been different government offices through the years.

Cheow Kaw was deeply concerned about the education of young family members in traditional Chinese culture and organized separate classes for Chinese classical studies. He also mandated that the younger generation speak only Hokkien and Mandarin at home. During his travels between Rangoon and Xiayang, he closely monitored the parallel development and mutual learning between Xiayang Primary School and Teo Hwa Primary School. As previously noted, police cadet training and sports activities were conducted in both schools.



Xiayang Primary School

Teong Hwa School

In 1922, Cheow Kaw became the chief director of Sit Teik Tong (STT), the Yeo Gongs in Rangoon. He personally funded the new building of STT on Strand Road, in a hot business district. The glamorous building was completed in the winter of 1925. It is still in use today, with the third and fourth floors of the building serving as the permanent clubhouse of the SST in Myanmar. The ancestor shrine of the Xiayang Yeo Clan is located on the third floor, and the See Tow Gong, a deity god traditionally worshipped, is located on the fourth floor.



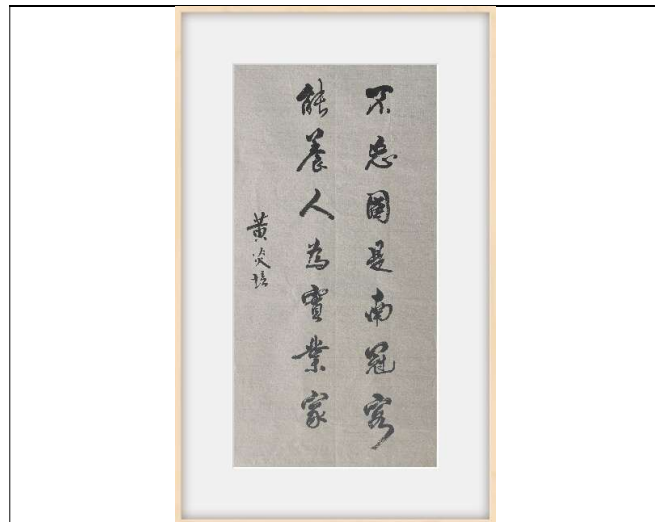
Sit Teik Tong in Yangon after its latest renovation in 2016.



A couplet in the hall of Sit Teik Tong, Yangon, reads, "*Plant seeds of beauty and quality to carve the future mainstay of China, and praise the virtues in writings to keep in family books for generations.*"

Huang Yanpei, a well-known educationist, was appointed as the official chief school inspector to visit overseas Chinese schools from January 25 to April 24, 1919. He was in Burma from February 23 to March 25. He witnessed the re-election of the School Syndicate, and the solemnising of Yeo Cheow Kaw continuing as an incumbent president. He immediately inscribed a couplet with these words and presented it to Cheow Kaw.

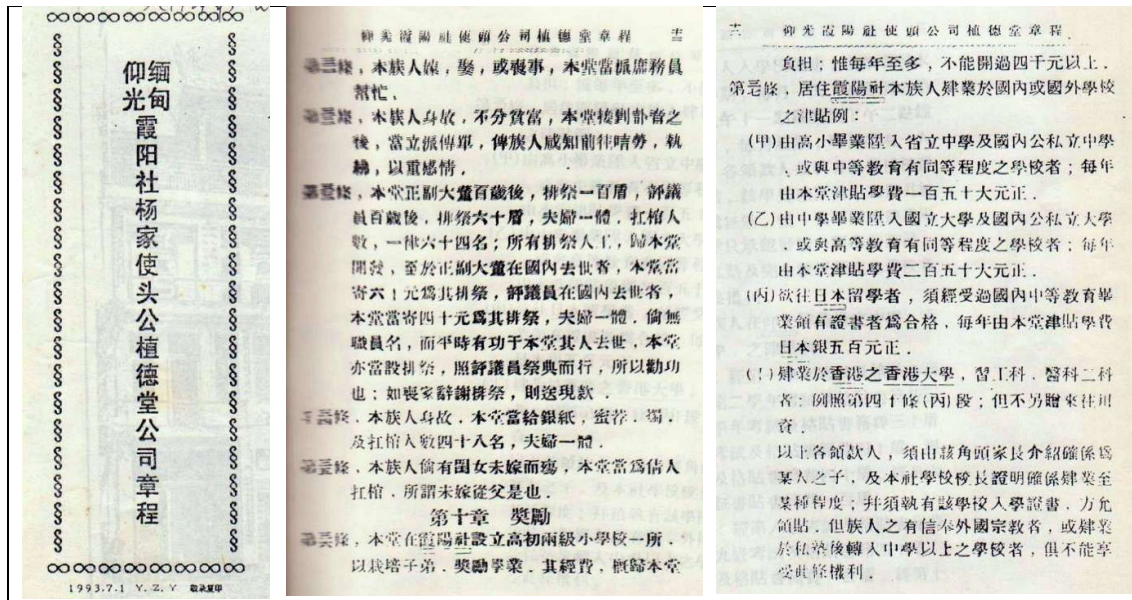
"Motherland at heart is with this Southerner gentleman, nurturing young bloods among his industrialist's goals"



The original copy of this couplet has been lost. Huang's calligraphy was imitated by Mr Yang Yao Ming from Xiayang, in 2024. Xiayang Primary School now keeps it. Huang's account appears in Huang's Diary, Volume 2, published by Beijing Chinese Publishing House [Page 46 & 47].

As the Chinese saying goes, "it takes ten years to grow trees and a hundred years to cultivate people", Yeo Cheow Kaw not only took care of the construction of school software and hardware, but also ensures a living source of educational funds from an institutional perspective. He headed the formulation of a Charter of Sit Teik Tong in Rangoon, which clearly stipulated that the funds for running Xiayang Primary School should be borne by the Xiayang Yeo Gongsu, aka STT. The revision of this charter has also enabled Penang Sit Teik Tong to join hands in financially supporting primary schools they

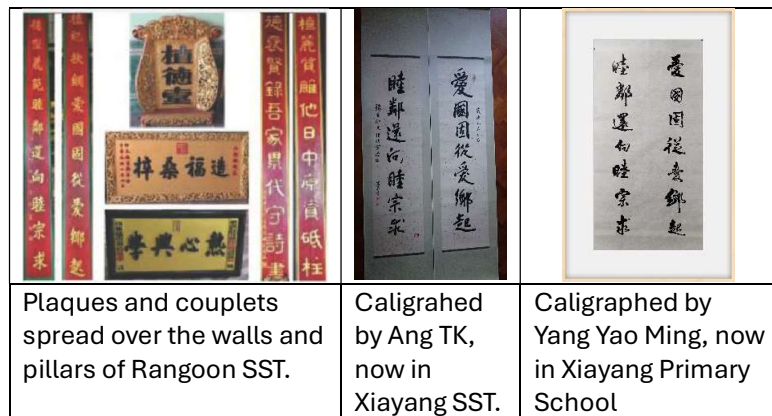
set up, as well as subsidizing and rewarding villagers' children to continue their studies in secondary schools, universities and even studying abroad. The "Charter" stipulates that as long as they were descendants of the Yeo Clan in Xiayang, regardless of whether they were studying at Xiayang Primary School or other Chinese School in Rangoon, they would be eligible to apply for student aids from either Rangoon or Penang Gongsi. Under his active advocacy, many students received financial support from Sit Teik Tong education funds and continued their studies. After they had achieved success in their careers, numerous of them had returned to their hometowns to give back to the communities.



Another couplet from the Rangoon SST, reads,

"Love the country by starting to love one's hometown.

Seek the harmony in communities by first seeking the harmony in one's ancestral clan."



Plaques and couplets spread over the walls and pillars of Rangoon SST.

Caligraphed by Ang TK, now in Xiayang SST.

Caligraphed by Yang Yao Ming, now in Xiayang Primary School

These words are a horn to encourage the clan members to unite to work hard for the families in both foreign lands and hometowns. The calling incites a great feeling of clan and homeland.

Looking back a hundred years from now, old China was poor and backward. Nevertheless, many overseas Chinese worked hard, lived frugally, to save to donate money and

materials to benefit their village people. They built "big red brick houses" for their parents and relatives; they worked together to pave "cement roads" for the community; they spent huge sums of money to purchase river stones and build the river port that generations have relied on for survival. In the era of hardship, relatives brought back life essentials, like rice and matches back from Rangoon. Today, the elders often look back on that happy time of "eating Rangoon rice and burning foreign matchsticks." Yeo Cheow Kaw, a leader of a generation of overseas Chinese, practiced his philanthropic deeds of promoting education and benefiting his hometown, inspiring generations of his clan members at home and abroad to participate in the cause, jointly created the beauty and prosperity of his hometown Xiayang. This is a popular portrait of overseas Chinese in that tumultuous period in the 19th and 20th turn of the centuries.

[The original article, in Chinese, was written by 楊大立、楊光注 and 楊宜瑾 to mark the celebration of 120th Anniversary of Xiayang Primary School in November 2024. Special appreciation of Mr Yang Yao Ming 楊耀明 is noted hereby.]

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