

# TAN KAI HEE

SOARING WITHOUT FEAR AND REGRETS

by TAN YEN FONG



**Kanyin**<sup>®</sup>  
PUBLICATIONS


年八十  
無畏無悔

拿督斯里何国忠博士





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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Tan Yen Fong

Editor in Chief of The Fame Media House,  
Chief Editor of *Kanyin Classics*

### **A Genuine Socialist Business Model Mr Tan Kai Hee chosen to be included in *Kanyin Classics***

*Generous dividends and philanthropy – these are the manifestations of socialism's “sharing of surplus value”. In this competitive business environment, Tan and Hai-O have chosen to be different by adopting the socialist ideology as their business philosophy. This is evidenced by their exemplary efforts in caring for the weak and underprivileged, in upholding integrity and not getting drunk in power, and not lusting after wealth and glory. As a result, they have enjoyed the loyal support of their small shareholders and staff.*



I have been writing political commentaries in newspapers for years. I have always been interested in political news and my work has gained some loyal readers. During my time as the chief editor of a business magazine for a decade, I interviewed numerous successful entrepreneurs and Chinese leaders. I found that the success stories of Malaysian Chinese – how they migrated to Malaysia and thrived despite the political realities that didn't favour them – were far different from the stories of the entrepreneurs in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. The stories of the Malaysian Chinese entrepreneurs revealed a success model that is uniquely “Nanyang Chinese”, and are worth telling.

Thus, I decided to launch a writing project and set up The Fame Media House to publish biographies of outstanding Malaysian Chinese entrepreneurs and enterprises to record for posterity their struggles and achievements despite political opposition to their business advancement.

### **Creating biographies for enterprises and entrepreneurs**

Compared with foreign entrepreneurs who would normally publish their success stories, Malaysian entrepreneurs usually keep a rather low profile. By not sharing their business principles and know-how, this is actually a big loss for the business community in our country. Furthermore, the achievements of home-grown successful entrepreneurs from Malaysia definitely have a place and influence in the international arena.

Some entrepreneurs may not realise that publishing a book is a branding effort that can have a sustaining effect on their

business. Internally, the book is an enterprise education – it helps to strengthen unity and coherence, and promote a sense of honour; externally, the book marks the enterprise's “commitment” to their customers and society, and this “commitment” is much more cost-effective than any advertisement.

I was introduced to Kanyin Publications by chance. The publisher is dedicated towards promoting local writers and it believes that home-grown success stories are more meaningful to local readers. Based on these, we decided to launch *Kanyin Classics*.

We made our debut with two books – an enterprise biography, *Senheng: Corporate Culture – The Engine of Growth*, and an entrepreneur's biography, *Robert Kuok*. Fortunately, the books received great support from readers, particularly the Chinese and English versions of *Robert Kuok*, which are among the bestsellers in major bookstores, and have been reprinted three times since their first edition.

The fact that the two books have been well-received by readers confirms my belief that home-grown enterprises and entrepreneurs are influential and their stories do attract the market. Readers are looking for key principles in local success stories that they can learn from for their personal development. Although stories of the rich and famous from foreign countries have their own charm, our local situation is different. For instance, local entrepreneurs may find it hard to imitate Li Ka-Shing, but they can glean principles from the success story of Senheng Electric and leverage on them.

Senheng Electric is Malaysia's largest consumer electronics retail chain store. The founder, Mr Lim Kim Heng, was born

in poverty and started from scratch and yet, he made it. While his rivals were still doing business the old way, reducing prices to gain sales, he boldly forged ahead with branding and reforming publicity, information dissemination, human resources and management. Now, the company's competitive advantages are far ahead of its rivals and with powerful backing from over a million members. Internationally renowned electrical product suppliers knock on its doors to get help to penetrate Malaysia's domestic market. For decades, the secret of success and continuous growth of Senheng Electric has been driven by its three culture pillars – Dare to Challenge, Integrity and Gratitude.

The publishing of *Senheng: Corporate Culture – The Engine of Growth* is one successful investment of Senheng Electric. The book is circulated among and read by suppliers, rivals and customers, and used internally as a teaching material (all new employees are given a copy to read so that they understand the company culture). Managing Director Mr Lim Kim Heng has expressed his desire for a second edition. We are now at the stage of content planning and hope to publish it soon.

*Kanyin Classics* advocates wealth with virtue. The success of *Robert Kuok* was highly significant as it revealed the deep patriotic love of a Malaysian Chinese. Born and raised in Malaysia, Kuok has a deep affection for his “motherland”, China. He believes in the power of self-reliance, has a magnanimous heart and embraces Confucianism. His business ethics are evidence-based and not just hearsay.

As we expected, *Robert Kuok* has been and continues to be well-received in the market. This is because Kuok has a sterling reputation in the business world and is one of the most respected entrepreneurs in the local community. Although he has migrated to Hong Kong, he retains his Malaysian citizenship. He is expanding his business in China but he has never forgotten to contribute and give back to his home country, Malaysia. Despite being rich and famous, he remains humble, low-key and modest. He has never flaunted his wealth, is benevolent and philanthropic.

*Robert Kuok* was prepared based on the *Golden Rules of Business Success* by Tao Zhu Gong, “Ability to handle people. Never pre-judge a prospect”, in order to highlight Kuok’s factors for success, which are his virtues for business and wealth. I am really grateful that my points of view are supported by our readers.

The candidates for *Kanyin Classics* must fulfil a few criteria. As the saying goes, a noble man makes his wealth with ethical means. We want to share about the virtues rather than his wealth or achievements. A successful person demonstrates the goodness and beauty of human nature; a wealthy person has a heart for and helps the poor and needy in society.

Soon after completing *Robert Kuok*, we began looking for the next subject for *Kanyin Classics*. Mr Tan Kai Hee was a natural target. Then, he announced that he would donate all his fortunes – the first local entrepreneur to make such a pledge.

Because of this, we agreed that Tan is the next best subject for *Kanyin Classics*. Coincidentally, I had always wanted to write about him.

### **The socialist characteristic of Hai-O**

As a media person, I am familiar with Tan Kai Hee as I have always held a long-term interest in the socialistic philosophy espoused by Tan and the Hai-O Group. They can be considered a rare enterprise in the local business community. Their distinctive socialist characteristic makes them stand out from the rest and they represent a different face of success. In order to know his route to success, you will first need to know Tan's commitment and dedication to socialism – something I knew well and learnt from my grandmother since my childhood.

Grandma was the most politically-minded person in our family. If she were a man, I am sure she would have been an activist for socialism back then. She might even have been Tan's comrade.

I have always heard about the Labour Party of Malaya (LPM), Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM) and Tan from Grandma. From her stories, I could imagine the time during the rise of socialism, how LPM almost managed to change the political climate in Malaysia's history. Unfortunately, as the years passed, LPM had just become a historical name to most of later generations.

My interest in LPM grew because of Grandma. All this while, Malaysia's left-wing politics have been my main interest and the name "Tan Kai Hee" was imprinted in my mind. I remember Grandma used to say he was an eloquent person. He would ride on a trishaw, blowing horns and giving speeches from the vehicle. His appearance would attract cheering crowds as well as adoration by onlookers as if he were a movie star.

When I joined the media industry and met Tan for the first time, he looked exactly like the person described by Grandma. When I excitedly told Grandma that I had met Tan in person, she responded with a smile, saying, "Times have changed." Grandma read widely and she gathered from the newspapers that Tan had entered the business world and was doing well.

While spring cleaning some years ago, I discovered a few old and used herbal tonic bottles of *Ling Zhi Chiew* and *Baji Chiew*. Although the bottles were old, the colours of the images were still vivid and clear. They were Chinese New Year gifts I bought for my father many years ago. Then, I had just left school and started working. With a limited income, *Ling Zhi Chiew* and *Baji Chiew* were my first choice for Chinese New Year gifts. For years, I took home the two bottles of herbal tonic, and was very careful not to break them during the long-distance ride in the bus. When the Hai-O chain store expanded to Kluang (my hometown), I was spared from the trouble of buying and carrying them all the way from Kuala Lumpur as my father could buy them whenever he needed them.

Just like what Tan said throughout this book, Hai-O enterprise is a low-margin, high-volume business. *Ling Zhi Chiew* is made from over 30 types of herbs and the bottle itself is a beautiful art piece. The earliest bottle sold at just over RM20 each, which was why I could afford it back then! Today, the empty bottles are reused as vases and placed on the home altars.

Since its establishment till now, Chinese herbal tonics have been Hai-O's bestsellers at its retail outlets. Over the years, I believe that many families have kept these delicate and beautifully-designed bottles in their houses. For most people, the bottles have sentimental value and bring back nostalgic memories of yesteryears.

### **Soaring high amidst rumours**

In the early years, Hai-O sponsored quite a number of Malaysian Chinese literature and cultural festival events. At these events, one would see Tan laughing and socialising with a glass of stout in hand. Once, I showed a few photos portraying Tan's businessman image to Grandma. She looked at them and after some time, sighed and said, "He is getting old!" I was surprised as Tan seemed to me to be at the prime of his life but to Grandma, he was no longer the hot-blooded young man she used to know.

At that time, Tan was the spokesman and ambassador of Hai-O. His successful dynamic businessman and ebullient personality had helped promote Hai-O as a highly esteemed company in the Chinese community due to its generous

and enthusiastic sponsorship of many Chinese community events.

Like many other media personnel, I had witnessed the growth of Hai-O and heard different kinds of comments about Tan. One of the most commonly heard comment was, “Wasn’t Tan the general secretary of LPM that advocated ‘socialism’? Well, he is now a true capitalist for sure!” The remark spread widely along with Hai-O’s booming business.

The first question that came to my mind when I heard that remark was, “What if Tan had not succeeded and Hai-O business was not doing well? What would these people say? Or perhaps Tan has to be defeated by capitalism in order to meet these people’s ‘standards’?”

Regardless of what people say, Hai-O’s business was unstoppable. Just like many other SMEs, from a small company with limited funds and after decades of struggles and weathering all kinds of storms, Hai-O grew into a listed company. Today, the Hai-O Group is also one of the highest dividend-paying companies in the stock market. With a flourishing business reputation, its direct-selling business has thrived and outshone its rivals.

Meanwhile, Tan has also been very active in cultural and trade activities in the Chinese community. Hai-O continues to sponsor activities, and he is especially dedicated to promoting peace and friendship between Malaysia and China, where he is often dubbed as the “unofficial ambassador”. He is no stranger to the Chinese media, being one of the most familiar entrepreneurs and successful figures in the Chinese



community. On the other hand, the young generation may see Tan as just the founder of the Hai-O group and many may not know about his socialist background.

As he ages, Tan has become a “senior” among the local Chinese community of elders and celebrities. He has no title, not a Datuk or Tan Sri, but he is always revered and treated as a VIP, just like any Datuk or Tan Sri. Like others, I address him as “Mr Tan”, a testament of the roots and simple nature of socialism.

### **Fearing no controversy**

I have had the opportunity of meeting Tan in person and done quite a number of media interviews with him on different topics. Every time, he would enthusiastically invite me for lunch or dinner after the interview. During the lunch or dinner, he would encourage me to write more positive articles about leaders from China. Perhaps he does not remember this: the fact is, I had never thought about writing about leaders from China. But I now understand why he is so concerned about China’s affairs. Each generation has their own ideals. However, his persistence somehow surprised me.

One of the incidents that probably demonstrated his persistence on things dear to him is the Unico Holdings saga, where he singled out six prominent figures in the local Chinese business community. The incident stirred wide implications, and the proclamations from both parties made headlines in the mainstream media. People couldn’t help but

question: why did Tan go against the majority for something that did not bring any beneficial interest to him?

From 2007 to 2012, despite constant ridicule and criticisms, doubts and contempt, and with a number of silent supporters, Tan spent millions of ringgit in lawsuits arising from the Unico Holdings incident. To him, it was never about money spent but the result. To date, he is still indignant about the unsatisfactory ending. To him, he feels that justice has not been served.

Another issue that has often raised concerns in the Chinese community involved the Dong Zong (United Chinese School Committees' Association). He personally donated RM500,000 to Dong Zong for emergency use. Despite giving his full support to Chinese education and cultural activities for decades, his good intention has been labelled as betraying Chinese education by supporting the reformist group. Some people have even called for a boycott of Hai-O. Nonetheless, Tan remains unperturbed.

The Unico Holdings and Dong Zong incidents were two big episodes for the local Chinese community in the last 10 years. And Tan, coincidentally, was at the centre of attention in these two events, which added controversy to his successful businessman image, and triggered many negative comments about him in the social media. Yet, we at The Fame Media House and Kanyin Publications have no doubt that Tan is just as qualified as Robert Kuok for inclusion into *Kanyin Classics*.

## **Four main reasons Tan is chosen for *Kanyin Classics***

### **First: Brilliant career achievement**

Hai-O Group was established in 1975 with a capital of RM168,000. Today, 40 years later, it is a listed company with a market value of RM1.2 billion. Such a brilliant achievement is only made possible by Tan and his team's conscientious dedication to continue striving for success. He is an excellent model for Malaysian Chinese entrepreneurs.

### **Second: Excellent leadership**

Tan is a natural leader. He took part in the socialist movement during his youth and fought for the rights and interests of the lower middle class when he was with LPM. The older generation remembers him as the person riding on a trishaw, blowing horns and giving speeches. With his strong charisma, he often has the ability to mobilise support. He has not regretted the loss of freedom for eight years (when he was put in jail for his beliefs) because of his devotion to his ideal.

When Hai-O was established, with a limited capital at the start, Tan stoically assumed the burden of leadership. His superb advertising strategy created wide publicity for the company and its products, and laid a solid foundation for the business. He produced numerous top products and among them is the famous *Ling Zhi Chiew*, which remains one of the company's bestsellers.

Tan also has a strong moral outlook. He is a socialist. He is strict with himself. He practises what he preaches. He is ever just and righteous, trustworthy and kind-hearted. Integrity



A WANDERING CHILDHOOD

A ROUGH JUVENILE

A HEROIC YOUTH



## Chapter 1

### **Troubled Times and Desperate Days that Shaped the Ambitious, Courageous Young Man**

*Excerpts from “Tan Kai Hee and Labour Party of Malaya  
《陈凯希与劳工党》” written by Chu Eng Keat*

*Tan’s childhood was the epitome of social unrest in Malaya pre- and post-World War II. During this trying time, he was on the run and suffered the ordeals of war, fear, hunger, separation from family, death...*

*Tan had an insecure nomadic childhood as his family had to move from place to place because of the war. Separated from his parents at the age of 13, he led a purposeless, hand-to-mouth existence and did many different jobs just to survive. With a lot of time spent on work, he couldn’t focus on his studies and was often in and out of school. In his six years of primary schooling, he attended six different schools! Nevertheless, life itself is the best teacher. His tough days and harsh experiences turned him into a resilient warrior while the poverty nurtured his compassion and sense of justice.*



Tan was born in 1937 in his home at Jalan Mengkibol in Kluang, Johor. His parents, Tan Yu Ting and Lim Qian Qi, were teachers at Mengkibol Elementary School. Tan was the eldest son and has an older sister, Loo Wei.

Tan's mother came from Fujian. Although she was born into a traditional family, she was different from her peers in their conservative society. She refused to subject herself to be matchmade or go into "blind" marriages and chose to leave her family to be independent. Lim and Tan Senior (Sr.), who strongly advocated the right to choose love, came together through their shared interests and spirit for the revolution in China. Due to the persecution in China and to escape the Kuomintang's manhunt, they fled to Singapore. The family later moved to Kluang after their eldest daughter was born.

In 1942, the Malay Peninsula was occupied by the Japanese troops and thousands were displaced.

Tan's family started to shift from place to place, always living in fear. Every day, they had to look for a new shelter and as a result, Tan missed the opportunity for pre-school education.

### **Homeless during the war**

Right before the Japanese troops arrived in Kluang, Tan's family and his uncle's family from Singapore, sought refuge at a forest nearby. Together with many other refugees, they lived in an abandoned bungalow. Although it was crowded, every one made space and took care of one another during this bitter period.

Soon after the Japanese troops occupied Singapore in 1942, the inhuman massacre began on Feb. 21 the same year.

The number of deaths was shocking. Kluang did not escape the carnage. Fortunately, Tan and family managed to dodge death just in time.

Following the massacre and cruel oppression, the Japanese army established the military government in Singapore and Malaya. Everyone had to comply with the military's tyrannical control, particularly the household registration system, which demanded that every household must have a residence permit to be considered as legal residents.

By the end of 1942, those who sought refuge in the forests returned home to live a bare, spartan life. Tan and family moved into the living quarters of Kai Ming Elementary School. Tan's uncle, who had been sick for some time, did not make it. Tan was devastated as he has always regarded him as a father-figure.

At that time, Tan had just turned seven years and was supposed to start primary school but that opportunity eluded him. Tan's mother became Tan and his sister's teacher, and she fixed a time for learning every day. However, Tan was an active kid. He disliked sitting still and his learning progress was slow. He missed the golden learning period as he didn't realise the importance of education then. To him, having enough to eat and wear was the most important thing. To a child, education was a luxury item in those troubled times.

The cruelty of the Japanese army, the perils of war, the loss of lives, the heroism of the anti-Japanese army members, and the pain of the people – all these left a deep impression in Tan's young mind.

In 1945, the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army began to station themselves in strategic locations and towns. People's





committees were set up to implement self-governance and maintain social order.

As the situation improved, Tan Sr., who was the headmaster of Kai Ming Elementary School, rallied residents to rebuild the school. After some inexpensive repairs and minor restorations, Kai Ming Elementary School resumed classes within a short time. Many students, including Tan, were overaged due to the war. Tan attended Standard One at the age of eight while his sister, who was just a year older than him and had made great progress under the careful guidance of their mother, went straight to Standard Five.

A year later, Tan's mother joined the teaching staff at Chin Chiang Elementary School in Rengam. Tan and his sister followed their mother and continued their education in Standard Two and Standard Six respectively. Due to their constant relocation, they had few childhood friends.

### **From bad to worse**

In 1947, Tan followed his mother back to Kai Ming Elementary School. While he was enrolled in the Standard Three class, his sister finished Standard Six and was enrolled at a boarding secondary school in Batu Pahat. Meanwhile, Tan Sr., together with a few friends from the education sector, started a wholesale business in Batu Pahat. At the same time, Tan Sr. joined the Malaya Division of China Democratic League and became the chairman of the preparatory committee of the Kluang subdivision. He actively set up culture and service centres, recruited and developed members, and responded to Sin Chew office's initiatives.

Even though Tan Sr. was working as a teacher then and had a joint wholesale business, he focused solely on political



activities. Compounded by his lack of business experience, the wholesale business quickly and expectedly crumbled. Life got harder for the Tan family, who were already stretched financially.

Tan Sr. spent most of his time travelling back and forth between Singapore, Batu Pahat and Kluang. Like any other party members, he was closely connected to the local left-wing movement, especially the Anti-Japanese Ex-Comrades Association.

During that period, Tan kept changing schools – six schools altogether. Tan spent the most time in Kai Ming Elementary School (which is now SJK(C) Pa Yai). He loved the “jungle” environment in the school and spent lots of time roaming this little paradise, catching and playing with lizards, having fun by the river or exploring the place.

His activeness and mischief earned him many “memorable” experiences – attacks by wasps and injuries by wild monkey. Yet, Tan preferred these “unfortunate” incidents than living an aimless life. Sometimes, he would become the delivery boy, sending food, gifts and messages to his grandfather and uncles.

On February 1, 1948, the British colonial government announced the establishment of Federation of Malaya, declared war on Malayan Communists after three senior officers were assassinated in Sungai Siput, Perak, and gazetted the 1948 Special Emergency Act. Everyone was tense and fearful.

### **Father arrested and family separated**

In 1948, the British colonial government began a series of





arrests nationwide. Tan Sr. was in the list of people to be arrested. His arrest badly affected the family. With nine children to feed, Tan's mother had to juggle two jobs – teacher by day and tuition teacher by night – while running around, looking feverishly for her husband's whereabouts. Seeing his mother's sufferings, 11-year-old Tan had only one desire – to grow up quickly and share his mother's burden.

His desire was speedily fulfilled when he turned 12 and started working at his fifth uncle's newly opened grocery store. His uncle had been arrested for helping the local people's liberation army. Desperately needing someone to help at the store, his aunt asked for Tan. Although Tan was really hoping to help make ends meet, the pay he received was just a drop in the bucket.

Tan's family was in dire straits and they had to live on credit from local merchants. The only hope that drove Lim to persevere was the thought of the day Tan Sr. would be released and reunited with the family. Sadly, that hope was never realised. Tan Sr. was deported to China by the British colonial government after a 13-month detention. The family was devastated by the decision.

Tan continued to work at the grocery store after his uncle's release. He rode a bicycle to deliver pork to customers and seeing him, people would sigh, "What a poor kid!" On his bicycle, Tan felt as if he was cycling to a bleak future.

Tan Sr. was deported to China in July 1949 and that same year, Tan returned to Kai Ming elementary school to start his Standard Five education. In view of his weak foundation, he couldn't cope and lost motivation to study. As a result, he failed the exam and had to repeat the level.

That same year too, Tan's home in Kluang was mowed down by the British army as his village was chosen for the "Chinese New Villages" project. The villagers were moved to a barren place where they lived in shabby houses and did not have jobs and enough to eat.

### Helpless siblings living on their own

Desperate to survive, Lim decided to return China to reunite with Tan Sr. Since she didn't have enough money to pay for the travel expenses for the entire family, she made the heart-breaking decision of leaving behind the older children – Tan and sister Loo Wei. Another child, her fifth son, was given to the sixth uncle for adoption. Loo Wei was to continue her studies in Singapore to become a teacher while arrangements were made for 13-year-old Tan to work as an apprentice at a bicycle shop. The night before Lim and Tan's other siblings left for China, the sorrow of separation was inconsolable for Loo Wei and Tan, two lost souls left behind.

This being the first time that Tan had ever felt the pain of separation, it became the turning point of his life. Although the days had been hard with little money to go around, at least they were together as a family and he felt the warmth of family, and protection and love from his mother. In the blink of an eye, all these were taken away from him. With no safety net, he was overwhelmed by the fear of the future. As they were bidding farewell, embracing one another and sobbing, Tan desperately wished that it was all just a dream.

As his mother tightly hugged him and her tears trickled freely down his back, Tan realised then that he had to face the unknown future alone. Fortune had not smiled on this 13-year-old teen.





Not long after, Tan worked as a handyman in a shipping company. Not only did he have to chop and stack the logs, he was the truck attendant and sometimes, he even had to “pull” the logs together at the back of the truck. Pulling logs was something that required brains and brawn. The attendant would stand in between the logs, holding them together. It was dangerous work as the logs had the potential of rolling down if something untoward happened. But Tan had little choice. Now that he was on his own, he had to make a living. Risking his life or getting enough to eat, he chose the latter.

Tan found chopping wood the easiest task of all. For all the hard work and risks, he was paid a meagre 50 cents a day.

At one point, Tan did not get paid for four months despite his hard work. But he didn’t gripe or demand for his pay as all he needed were shelter and enough food to fill his stomach. He endured the hardship and took them as lessons of life.

When Loo Wei learned that her brother was suffering such hardships, she was outraged. Without a second thought, she took Tan to Singapore and enrolled him in the Standard Six class at the school she was teaching. Before leaving, Loo Wei demanded from Tan’s boss the 60 dollars he owed her brother. That 60 dollars was Tan’s first “asset”. Thanks to his sister, Tan was finally reunited with his one and only family member.

### **Worked hard to improve himself**

Tan did not waste the last year of his primary school. Unlike the past, he worked really hard this time around. He took the initiative to study and do his homework. In 1953, 16-year-old Tan managed to get into Foon Yew High School in Johor.

With just a monthly salary of 100 dollars, Loo Wei had to support herself, Tan's school fees and their family in China. The burden seemed too much for her to bear. Fortunately, every cloud has a silver lining, and the silver lining appeared when their sixth uncle and his family moved to Johor Bahru from Kahang. They had just acquired an ice-cream factory and Tan moved into their home, helping them to with stocktaking and packaging works, and sometimes selling popsicles to earn pocket money.

After the first semester at Foon Yew High School, Tan received a letter from Tan Sr. asking him to move to China. Eager to reunite with the family, Tan quit school to work in the Lee Pineapple factory to earn enough for the ship's ticket. There were several processes in the pineapple factory: peeling, eye-removing, boring the hollow circles, cooking and canning. Tan was assigned to processes that involved cutting tools, so getting cuts was a norm and scars began to "adorn" his hands. Luckily, the workers were mostly Hainanese and they treated Tan as family.

As he was planning for his family reunion in China, a few of his friends travelled from Singapore to the pineapple factory to dissuade him from going to China as the situation there was unstable. It was better to stay than to take unnecessary risks, they said. His friends even offered to take turns to provide him accommodation and food so that he could complete his studies. Eventually, due to the turbulence in China, he gave up his family reunion plan. After several twists and turns, Tan finally enrolled into Chong Cheng High School in Singapore to complete his studies.

In school, Tan became a bookworm and would read any book he could borrow. However, a few weeks after starting Year 2, he was forced to leave the school to escape arrest because of his involvement in the Chinese Middle Schools Student Movement.





*Nov. 9, 1952. Tan's (back row, third from left) high school graduation photo.*



*Elementary school graduation trip to Singapore. Tan is the first from the left.*