

The Bo Ai Scroll

By Shaun Phua



Chinese calligraphy scroll with the words Bo Ai (Universal Love), read from right to left, presented by Dr Sun Yat Sen to Teo Beng Wan, on loan from Mr Teo Chee Hean, Deputy Prime Minister, Republic of Singapore. Photo courtesy of the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall

Remembered as 'the man who changed China', Dr Sun Yat Sen was undoubtedly an inspiring leader. In China he planned the various uprisings that eventually brought down the last monarchy and established the modern Republic of China. There were many who responded to the revolutionary calls of Dr Sun and readily lent their support to the armed uprisings; in Singapore Teo Eng Hock, Tan Chor Lam and Lim Nee Soon were considered the three most important supporters of Dr Sun.

Teo Eng Hock played a crucial role in coordinating the various revolutionary activities in Singapore and the Malayan Peninsula. Not only did he offer Wan Qing Yuan, his villa, to Dr Sun as a base for his revolutionary activities, but the villa also served as home to the *Tong Meng Hui* (the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance), Singapore Branch. In 1904, Teo Eng Hock published the *Thoe Lam Jit Poh* (a newspaper he co-owned with Tan Chor Lam) to spread revolutionary messages, with the assistance of both Tan Chor Lam and Lim Nee Soon. In 1908, after the failed Hekou Uprising in Yunnan, the three men set up a mining company to offer work and accommodation to fellow revolutionaries who had escaped to Singapore. According to Lim Nee Soon, there were at least 150 Chinese Revolutionary Alliance members in Singapore.

Dr Sun Yat Sen presented this calligraphy work to Teo Beng Wan, Teo Eng Hock's nephew. On it are the characters for *Bo Ai* (Universal Love) with the extended

meaning of 'to save the world, the people and the country'. This ideology was delineated in the concept of nationalism outlined in Dr Sun's *Three Principles of the People*. Teo Beng Wan, grandfather of Singapore's current deputy prime minister, was the eldest son of Teo Eng Hock's younger brother Teo Bah Tan. Before his untimely death Teo Beng Wan had worked at the Oversea Chinese Bank (OCB), which had been very active in fund-raising for the anti-Japanese movement in the 1930s. During the Second Sino-Japanese War, the OCB and other financial organisations participated in fund-raising activities, as well as provided a significant amount of their own funding to sustain China's wartime economy. It has been speculated that Teo Beng Wan was arrested by the Japanese for his high-profile involvement in the anti-Japanese movement and, along with many others arrested during the *Sook Ching* (massacre), was never seen again.

This valuable artefact also highlights the contributions of the overseas Chinese and the close relationship between the Teo family and Dr Sun Yat Sen.

Shaun Phua has been the General Manager of the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall since September 2010. Prior to this appointment, he was responsible for developing the heritage eco-system through the introduction of industry development efforts like the Heritage Industry Incentive Programme (Hi2P).
