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Other family trees

Local genealogy enthusiasts share their experiences in tracing their ancestry.**Dr Philip Tan Chee Lin**

HE became interested in genealogy when he realised how he much he had lost with the passing a few years ago of one of his late father's sisters-in-law.

At the aunt's funeral service, he noticed that the relatives hardly knew each other. He then took the initiative to compile his family's genealogy on a spreadsheet, beginning by finding his grandparents, Tan Pow and Lim Mui.

"My original objective was to compile all the information about the generations for the sake of my nephews and nieces, so they could know how they are each related to one another," he says.

When he visited his ancestral village, Xiau Ku , a small village in Yong Chun in China's Fujian Province in 2007, he became even more interested in tracing his roots.

Currently, he has traced them back to the first Tan, Chen Hu Gong , who lived in circa 1028BCE and who married Da Ji , the eldest daughter of Ji Fa and Zhou Wuwang , who was King Wu of Zhou.

Dr Tan is a 105th generation descendent of the first Tan. Tracing even further back, he is the 138th generation descendent of Shun Di who lived in about 2255BCE.

Stephen Lim Kee Soon

LIM has traced his roots back to 1117CE, during the reign of the Soong Dynasty. His ancestor was Lin Jao of Yong Chun (Pinyin for what is known as Eng Choon in the Yong Chun dialect), a town in Fujian Province.

In 2006, with the help of the Foreign and Overseas Chinese Affairs Bureau in Yong Chun, Lim visited the clan's ancestral house in Fujian; it turned out to be a very grand community hall in which the ancestor tablets are placed. Family members use the hall for wedding ceremonies and for entertaining when the clan is visited by descendents from overseas, like Lim.

He is the 28th generation of Lin Zao – or the 138th generation descendent counting from the original Lin ancestor from Xian Province on the western bank of the Huang He River ; this ancestor lived during the Shang Dynasty (1600BCE-1100BCE).

The connection to this older ancestor is a little more tenuous because it is based on a clan legend.

According to Lim, the legend says that one of the emperor's concubines had accused an ancestor called Bi Gan , who was an Imperial official, of being disloyal to the emperor. To prove his loyalty, Bi Gan decided to kill himself.

"If I have a black heart, then it is true, but if my heart is red, it shows that I am still loyal to the emperor," Bi Gan is believed to have said to the emperor before he died.

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hastiness and, to make amends, sent officials in search of Bi Gan's frightened, pregnant wife who had gone into hiding. When she gave birth to a boy, the emperor took him in and gave him the surname Lim.

One of that Lim's descendants was Lin Jao, who later settled down in Yong Chun. Lin Jao started his clan, Mei San Lin (the Lin – or Lim – Clan of the Beautiful Mountains).

"And that is where I am descended from," says the present-day Lim proudly.

Datin Patricia Lim Pui Huen

AN author and vice president of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Patricia published her own book about one of her ancestors in 2003: *Wong Ah Fook: Immigrant, Builder & Entrepreneur*. (The book is no longer in print.)

It was her attempt to trace her roots back to her great-grandfather, Wong Ah Fook, who was a major contractor for the Johor State Government.

"The research took over 10 years," she says. "There were few written documents in those days. Most business transactions were done based on one's word. Business had to involve a lot of trust."

During American-Chinese genealogy enthusiast Henry Tom's recent visit to Malaysia, Patricia had a dinner meeting with him and exchanged notes about their common interest in genealogy.

She is now in the process of publishing two other books: *Johor 1855-1957: Local History, Local Landscape and Through the Eyes of the King: The Travels of King Chulalongkorn in Malaya*.

Useful resources on the Internet

LIST of Chinese surnames:

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_common_Chinese_surnames

Tracing the origin of Chinese surnames: yutopian.com/names

A portal dedicated to learning and discussing Chinese history:

chinahistoryforum.com

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