

The good that men do, lives on after them. And so the descendants of educationist and philanthropist Ong Seok Kim, gather this Saturday to honour a hero in the family.

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COME Oct 5, there will be a big family reunion of some 380 descendants of the late Sitiawan educationist and philanthropist Ong Seok Kim. The gathering of three generations of the Ong family will be held at SJK (C) Puay Chai (1) in Petaling Jaya to commemorate the golden jubilee anniversary of the passing of Ong in 1964.

Some 713 descendants are still alive and more than half will be attending the reunion. Some family members will come from as far as China and Australia, while others will arrive from Indonesia and Singapore.

"It will be the biggest show in town that day," quips Ong Eng-Joo, 65, an organiser of the gathering. He is the 25th son of Ong Seok Kim and his mother was the third wife. Ong had three wives and 44 children, of which five were adopted.

"The last family gathering was in Sitiawan, Perak, in 1994. It was attended by 186 family members," says Eng-Joo, who flew in from Sydney, Australia, to oversee the printing of three publications which will be launched at the reunion. There will be a directory listing 782 descendants of Ong, and a book profiling family members. Both are for family members only.

The third book, *No Other Way Out*, is a 250-page biography of Ong based on the diaries he kept.

"My father came from China under difficult circumstances. He was from a poor farming family, worked very hard but did not earn enough to feed the family," says Eng-Joo.

"Then he heard about Nanyang (the South-East Asian region) but his father was reluctant to let him go. However, my father reasoned there was no other way out of poverty."

The book is co-authored by Eng-Joo and the 17th son, Jianshi. It tells of Ong's background and upbringing, his arrival in Malaya and how he made his money.

He later settled down in Sitiawan, Perak, and contributed greatly to the local community. He founded four Chinese schools in the Dinding district: Chung Cheng Primary School, Nan Hwa High School, Dindings High School and Ping Min Free School.

There is a chapter on Ong's ancestry. "We're related to the first King of Fujian and I'm from the 30th generation," says Eng-Joo, who set up a website (www.ongseokkim.com) on the Ong family tree. "The purpose of the publications and the gathering is to

A name that never dies



Proud sons: Ong It Shaw (left) and his older brother, Eng-Joo, with a draft of *No Other Way Out*, a biography of their late father, Ong Seok Kim, a Chinese educationist and philanthropist.

let the descendants know about the family history, and what drives a man to put in so much time, money and efforts to help society. Hopefully someone will pick up my father's philosophy and emulate what he did for the community. Life is not just centred on your immediate family."

Ong devoted 50 years of his life to philanthropic work, particularly in the area of Chinese education.

"My father founded Aik Tee Recreation Association for the local community. He bought land for a cemetery for the local com-

munity. He also bought land to build a maternity hospital in 1936," says Eng-Joo.

Ong also founded the Nanyang University Association in Dinding district. He was one of the pioneers who set up the Sitiawan Rubber Traders Association (in 1920s) and was chairman of the Sitiawan Traders Association.

Eng-Joo says the family is proud to support his father's causes.

"We have contributed to the Ong Seok Kim Memorial Education Fund (set up in 1965) and the Manjung Haemodialysis Centre. Every year, the fund gives out about RM100,000



Ong Seok Kim devoted 50 years of his life to philanthropic work.

under various schemes to assist students. So far, RM769,000 has been given out."

In the 1920s, Ong was a prominent figure in Sitiawan. He had a double-storey house on a 2ha land in Sitiawan. But most of the time, he was not at home.

"It was a trade-off because my father spent so much time doing community work," says Eng-Joo, who describes his father as a very kind person. "He took good care of his mother-in-law and relatives."

Ong's relatives from China also came to live with him until they found jobs.

Eng-Joo recalls how his father used to give him 50 sen for every grade A scored.

"My father was always not home. When I got my report card, I would look for him to claim my money," he says.

Ong's second youngest child, It Shaw, 57, was amused that his father would reward the children for pulling out weeds in the garden.

"He would weigh the grass that we pulled and paid us according to weight.

"The last few children have interesting names," recalls It Shaw. "My name (It Shaw) means the 'last one'. But then another son was born when my father was 75. My youngest brother then became the last child. He was given the name, Thean Sang (which means Heaven Given).

"A son, Chung Cheng, was named after the Chung Cheng Primary School, while Thean Deng was named after the Dinding district, and Kean Tau after a town in China," says It Shaw. One of Ong's daughters was named Chong Keng after Chungking (now Chongqing) in China upon his return from a trip to his motherland in 1940.

Dedicated to a life of service

Rongzan and Wang Lisheng. He was a 29th generation descendant of Wang Shengzhi, the first king of Fujian.

At 15, Ong eked out a living as a shop assistant and kitchen hand. Life was hard for his family. In 1903, when he was 19, Ong left China for Malaya in search of a better life.

He landed in Teluk Anson (now Teluk Intan), Perak, and worked as a shop assistant. Later, he started a business settling clothes, shoes and knick-knacks.

Three years later, he moved to Sitiawan. The hardworking Ong made his fortune and later invested in retail shops and rubber plantations in Segari, Kampung Koh, Ayer Tawar and Changkat Jering in the Manjung district. Before 30, Ong was a wealthy man.

At the age of 29, Ong was co-founder of the Aik Tee Recreation Association in Sitiawan. It was a gathering place for the local community, especially the youths. The association's building was destroyed during the Japanese Occupation but Ong rebuilt it after the war. He was the association's chairman for 40 years.

In 1920, Ong and a few community leaders founded Chung Cheng Primary School in Sitiawan. He convinced a rich landowner to donate a piece of land for the school.

The Sitiawan Rubber Traders Association which Ong helped set up, levied 50 sen on every ton of rubber sold in Sitiawan, to raise funds for building classrooms and facilities in over 10 Chinese primary schools in Sitiawan and Ayer

Tawar in Perak.

Ong bought and donated 2.4ha of land for the construction of the Sitiawan Chinese Maternity Hospital in 1936.

In 1911, Ong, a nationalist loyal to his motherland, joined the Dr Sun Yat-sen led Kuomintang party's Penang branch. In 1923, he was appointed chairman of the Sitiawan branch by Dr Sun, the first president and founding father of the Republic of China. Ong held the position until the mid-1950s.

He raised funds to help China during the 1920 drought and donated money to build schools and roads in Yongchun county. When China's destiny was at stake in the 1937 Sino-Japanese War, Ong raised funds to defend China against the Japanese.

In recognition of his contribu-

tions to the local community, Ong was bestowed a Justice of Peace (JP) award in the early 1960s by the Sultan of Perak, and the Kesatria Mangku Negara (KMN) by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong in 1964. Ong passed away a few months later.

Local community leaders led by Ng Kuok Thai, Saw Cheng Chor and Ong Boon Tee, among others, set up the Ong Seok Kim Memorial Education Fund in 1966 in his honour to provide bursaries, incentive awards and scholarships for poor, deserving students.

During the last decade, Ong It Shaw, the 28th and second youngest son, helped to raise RM1mil for the fund. Ong Siew Bee, a granddaughter, also made substantial contributions to the fund.

It Shaw, in the same spirit of his father, also raised funds for the construction of the non-profit Manjung Haemodialysis Centre to serve the poor. — By Majorie Chiew

ONG Seok Kim was an extraordinary man with a big heart. A pioneer in the early development of Sitiawan and the Dinding district (now Manjung), Ong dedicated almost 50 years of his life to the betterment of the local community.

Known as an educationist, social worker and philanthropist, Ong lived to the ripe old age of 80 before he passed on in 1964. At his funeral, many Chinese community leaders in then Malaya and South-East Asia came to pay their last respects. A big crowd of mourners, including students, lined the roads, during the funeral procession.

Ong founded four Chinese schools in the Dinding district and was a patron in many other schools. He was also a prime mover in social and charity organisations.

Born in Gehou in Fujian province, China, in 1884, Ong was also known as Wang Shujin, Wang