ABSTRACT

Although education was only one aspect of Tan Kah Kee's full and complicated life, he firmly believed that education was the best solution to China's problems.

This academic exercise aims at studying the educational enterprise and the limitations of the contribution of Mr. Tan Kah Kee (陈嘉庚, 1874–1961), a leader of 10 million Chinese in Southeast Asia during the first half of the twentieth century, who first came to Singapore at the age of 17. He worked in his father's rice shop and later went into rubber and shipping business, which earned him a fortune. He donated most of his fortune to education, both in China and in Singapore.

Structurally, the paper is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter is an introduction which spells out the objectives of this study and shows the scope and the source of research.

The second chapter presents a biographical sketch of Tan Kah Kee and examines the influence of socio-political milieu and historical background in both China and Southeast Asia in which Tan operated his business and launched his educational projects.

The next three chapters are devoted to the three most important educational enterprises established by Tan. The third chapter focuses on Ji-mei (集美), the hometown of Tan Kah Kee, where he devoted much of his effort in popularising education. Chapter four deals with the establishment of
Xiamen University (厦门大学), which Tan single handedly founded. This chapter analyses the motivation for founding the university, its problems and development. The fifth chapter studies his educational enterprise in Singapore. He was the chairman of the Fujian Association and helped in many ways to promote the three schools - Tao Nan (道南), Ai Tong (爱同) and Chong Hock (崇福). However, his main contribution was in the setting up of the Chinese High School (南洋华侨中学), the first Chinese high in Singapore.

From the above three chapters, we are able to discern the distinguishing characteristics of Tan's educational enterprises and some of his educational thoughts. Chapter six is thus an elucidation of Tan Kah Kee's contribution to education.

The study concludes that Tan Kah Kee was somewhat influenced by regionalism, which was unavoidable and understandable during the particular period of time in which he lived. However, the educational enterprise of Tan Kahkee had not only helped to promote education in China and Singapore, it had also influenced people like Lee Kong Chian (李光前) and Tan Lek Sai (陈六使), who subsequently made significant contribution to education in both countries.