

**Through  
rain and  
shine:**

**Cheng Lock** speaking at a rally. By his 40s, he was a leading member of the Straits Chinese community and noted for his intellect and views on the future of the Chinese immigrant community.



# Cheng Lock's vision and mission

# Tun Tan Cheng Lock played a pivotal role in getting the British to agree to hold Malaya's first federal elections in 1955, the prelude to the granting of independence in 1957.

By HENG PEK KOON

**M**ORE than any other Chinese leader in the formative period of nation-building, Tun Tan Cheng Lock was responsible for securing basic rights and privileges – citizenship based on *jus soli* (the principle that a person's nationality at birth is determined by the place of birth), protection of Chinese education and culture, and participation in the Alliance governing coalition.

An eighth-generation Malayan Chinese with a cosmopolitan outlook and proud of his heritage, Cheng Lock can be considered one of the country's first visionary leaders. He had imagined a Malaya that would be both multiracial and self-governing.

In 1926, when as a member of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council, he articulated a powerful vision of a "Malayan community with a Malayan consciousness". Twenty years later, he continued to exhort Chinese and Indians to identify themselves as Malaysians.

In 1932, speaking out against British discriminatory measures against Chinese education and land ownership issues, he called for colonial policies that would instead establish a "Malaya for Malaysians". He also argued for a common language of instruction to "Malayanise" students enrolled in the country's Malay, Mandarin and Tamil schools.

An advocate of English as the common medium of instruction, he called for the inclusion of mother-tongue education in the schooling system to preserve the country's rich multicultural heritage.

Aware that the Chinese had to show loyalty



*Malaysiakku Gemilang*

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to Malaya before Malay leaders would agree to their playing a role in a self-governing Malaya, Cheng Lock argued that the best way of inculcating a sense of patriotism among the Chinese was to give them "a fair deal in Malaya".

They would then, like the Straits-born Chinese, "regard themselves in the course of time as Malaysians first and Chinese second". To Cheng Lock, a fair deal meant equal citizenship rights, constitutional safeguards for Chinese education and language, religious freedom, and unimpeded opportunities for economic betterment.

Although Cheng Lock believed deeply that "equality is the very root and foundation of democracy", he recognised that the Chinese needed to make major compromises to accommodate Malay interests, particularly their economic needs. Because of their weaker

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