Obituary

Celebrating the Life of Cheang Kum Seng – Inventor of the Digiscoping Adaptor

Kim-Chye Lim

Cheang Kum Seng, stalwart of Malaysian Nature Society (MNS), Perak Branch and a close friend, sadly passed away in Ipoh, Perka, Malaysia on 19 January 2025 after a short illness. He is preceded in death by his son Wai Keong and is survived by loving wife, Tang Miew Ching and sons William and Wilson. He was aged 81.

Cheang, as he was popularly known, worked as a bank officer but his passion was photography (Plate 1). An expert with the camera, he enjoyed photographing festivals, vanishing trades and models (incidentally, he did a photoshoot for Michelle Yeoh in her early Ipoh years) but occasionally took on commercial work. Cheang was an active member of Foto Image Perak (FIP) and regularly organised workshops and led photography trips for members. He was regarded as a sifu and has been honoured with awards including Associate of the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain (ARPS) and Hon. Fellow of FIP.



Plate 1: Nature photography was his passion.

I first met Cheang during an MNS Perak outing in the late 1980s. I was photographing some lovely bracket fungi when Cheang came over to see what I was doing. The beautiful sight of the colourful fungi, with intricate bands of ochre, gold and cream so amazed him that he immediately whipped out his camera to photograph them. I like to think that that chance encounter started Cheang on his lifelong journey in nature photography.

Despite his usual serious look, Cheang occasionally showed a lighter side. I remember chuckling when I first heard Cheang exclaiming "*Kaki Panjang*" while pointing to a Black-winged Stilt. He had an empathy with this bird which, like his nickname "*kou lo*", was a tall fellow! Another humorous, yet descriptive, bird name he had was "*Hung Ngan Kwai*", transliterated as Red Eye Devil - the Asian Glossy Starling!

Cheang served in the MNS Perak committee for several terms and generously contributed his time and numerous photos for many of its events and projects. His lanky figure, adorned with cameras and lens pouches, and his sons (he affectionately called them his "porters") were a familiar sight during MNS trips. Cheang's slide shows were a favourite with kids at the Children's Nature Camp and he contributed photos of Malim Nawar wetlands and its birds for the Kinta Nature Park proposal. Those lucky enough to join his Gopeng-Camerons trek will recall the adventure and camaraderie. Many of his stunning images depicting wildlife, forests and the natural environment have graced the cover of Malaysian Naturalist as well as appeared

in other magazines, newspapers and books including Windows on the Forest – *Glimpses of FRIM, Belum – A Rainforest in Malaysia, The Royal Belum – Crowning Glory of the Peninsula and Birds of Perak – Peninsular Malaysia & Where to See Them*.

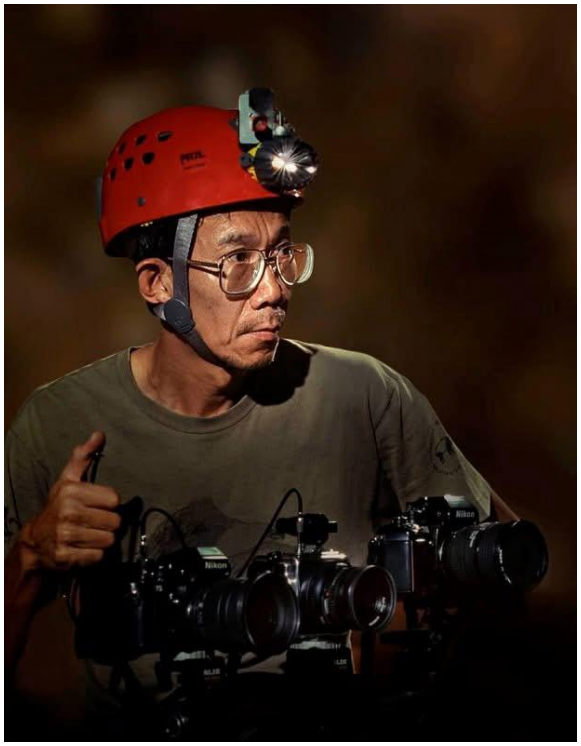


Plate 2: All geared up for cave photography.

Cheang had a keen interest in exploring the limestone hills and caves around Ipoh and was in the team that carried out the landmark MNS Study on the Limestone Hills of Perak (Plate 2). Faced with the challenging task of photographing in the low light and rugged conditions inside caves, he developed innovative photography techniques and obtained remarkable images of caverns and cave formations for the report. Cheang's collection of photos showcasing the spectacular karst landscape, caves and temples around Ipoh, taken over many years, have been published in his book, *Limestone Hills & Caves of the Kinta Valley*, which won the 2009 Perak Tourism Appreciation Award.

Cheang's mastery of photography enabled him to easily transition from the era of SLR cameras and film to the current scenario of digital images and flash cards. When the late Laurence Poh, in a light bulb moment, discovered digiscoping in 1999, there remained the problem of fitting cameras to spotting scopes. It was then that Cheang, together with Dr Chan Ah Lak, fabricated a gadget that could lock a digital camera to the eyepiece of a scope while allowing shutter release with minimal vibration. This novel method of nature photography thus omitted the need for expensive zoom lenses to photograph distant wildlife. His ingenious invention, known worldwide in the birding fraternity as Cheang's UDA (Universal DigiCamScope Adaptor), led to a surge in digiscoping among many local and foreign birders (Plate 3). To this day, Cheang's Adaptor, and subsequent commercial versions of it based on the same principle, is still used for digiscoping.

Despite his frailty, Cheang continued organizing photos on his computer until two days before he was hospitalized and subsequently passed away. Cheang will be remembered by many friends for his professional photography and willingness to share his expertise. He will be particularly remembered for his exceptional visuals of Nature, which have motivated initiatives to preserve the natural wonders of Perak, including the limestone hills and caves that he greatly cherished.



Plate 3: The Cheang's Adaptor seen here attaching a Canon EOS camera to Swarovski spotting scope.