

PREFACE

This book is first of all written for Malaysians so that they may know themselves and their past more profoundly. It is a story about one of the country's founding fathers. Not only did Lee Hau-Shik help found many important institutions, foremost of which was the Malayan Chinese Association, his is the only non-Malay signature on the Declaration of Independence signed in February 1956 in London. If one further considers the fact that he was not even born in Malaya, a supremely race-conscious country, then one has to be curious about who this remarkable person was, and what the times he lived in actually were like.

This Chinese community leader who ignited Malaya's hugely successful independence movement that we remember as the Alliance; this owner of tin mines on whose head the invading Japanese army put a high price; this civilian who became a colonel in both the British army and the Chinese army; this stern person of extremely short physique who, when he withdrew from politics at the age of 58, carried the title of "Sir" and of "Tun", the latter the highest honorific one can attain in Malaya; this migrant who became Minister of Finance and to whom much credit for the founding of the Central Bank of Malaya is given—how is one not to be curious about this man, about his life and times and how this capitalist came to play such a central role in the anti-colonial movement?

Colonel Henry Lee Hau-Shik and Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman were the two people Tunku Abdul Rahman chose to sit on the colonial Executive Council in 1953 to project the interests of the emerging nation of Malaya. It is my hope that this biography of Hau-Shik, read together with my earlier book on Ismail, *The Reluctant Politician* (2006), will provide future generations of Malaysians with an easy yet steady grasp of how their country came into being, and encourage a deeper understanding about the expediencies of the age.