

## The Tomb Inscription of Tjia Mah Yen, a Hokkien Businessman of French Cochinchina

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Note: The Chinese text of this tomb inscription appears in the Chinese language section of this issue of *Chinese Southern Diaspora Studies*. Tjia Mah Yen (1862–1940) was a very well-known rice merchant in French Cochinchina.

“His family’s original home was the Haicheng district of Fujian [but] his ancestors were Overseas Chinese in Batavia. His mother died when Tjia was young. His father brought him back to Amoy, where he went to school and learnt English. As Vietnam is a country abundant in rice that was located on the coast [and] thus easy to transport, as soon as Tjia became an adult and married he asked his father’s permission to go there. After a few years of saving he founded the Ban Guan rice company in Chợ Lớn. Three years later, when a steam-driven French rice mill was closing down, Tjia took his chance. He collected shares and bought the mill, which he renamed the Ban Aik Guan Steam Rice Mill Co. Ltd. Tjia managed the mill for about ten years, but he saw that the mill’s limited space was preventing it from developing further and attracting larger shareholding, so he bought land in the Binh Dong area in Chợ Lớn, along with new machines for the new factory. Three years later, when construction was finished, he named the company Ban Hong Guan. Its mill is a magnificent size. Tjia then opened a branch of his company in Singapore, and founded the Hock Guan Rice Hong and Hock Hai steamship company in Hong Kong. He did business among all the ports, from Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Japan in the east, to the Philippines, Singapore, and the Dutch East Indies. Tjia also saw the development potential of overgrown and unused land in Chợ Lớn. In a few short years he erected many buildings and the area became prosperous.

Tjia founded the Min-Zhang primary school and the Franco–Chinese High School in Chợ Lớn. Among the positions he held there were the head of the Hokkien congregation, membership of the Chợ Lớn Municipal Council, and chairman of the three schools that he had helped to found. Tjia was granted a first-class medal for literature and later a fifth-class Medal of Honour by the French colonial government.

Tjia died in July 1940 in Mai Son Street, Chợ Lớn, and was buried in the Minh Đức Cemetery in Phu Tho, Gia Định. He had two wives (both of whom predeceased him), [and at his death had] eight sons, four daughters, thirty grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.”

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