



# Book Recommendation

By Ismail Johari Othman

## I, KKK: The Autobiography of a Historian

Writer: *Khoo Kay Kim with Eddin Khoo*

The tin mining industry of Perak in the 18<sup>th</sup> century somewhat accelerated the development of the state and has been documented in many forms by scholars and practitioners including its two illustrious sons, namely Prof. Emeritus Tan Sri Dr. Khoo Kay Kim and Datuk Mohd Nor Khalid (Datuk Lat). Both diligently captured their observations on the society around them. Unknown to many, both followed their civil servant father serving the state during their formative years. Interestingly, both launched their respective biographies within a space of less than a year. The book recommendation for this issue is about the former. Published by Art Printing Works in April this year and launched by none other than the Sultan of Perak himself, the book walked through the different life phases of Prof. Emeritus Tan Sri Dr. Khoo Kay Kim until today.

One of Tan Sri Khoo Kay Kim's influence in life was his grandmother, which intriguingly was shared through simple conversations and storytelling. Through these means, Tan Sri Khoo Kay Kim learned

about his family's history, rituals, and customs. Some of the stories, such as the opium smokers, resurfaced in the latter part of his life when he studied about Chinese communities' dialects in early Malaya. The broader pictures of life such as football, cinema, and society mostly came from his father, who was also his role model as far as discipline and law abiding is concerned. He fondly remembered how his father took a great deal of time to explain things to him. His strict yet very loving mother instilled a sense of responsibility in him by giving him the task to look after chickens and ducks. Tan Sri Khoo Kay Kim was open about the recurring arguments between his mother and grandmother, which to him was a case of two very strong personalities – apparently a typical *Peranakan* trait.

Tan Sri Khoo Kay Kim seemed to enjoy every moment of his teenage days in Anglo Chinese School and St. Michael's Institution, especially the social life and the life outside the lessons. Teachers evidently played a role in shaping the growth of the students – often to balance their interests.

As for Tan Sri Khoo Kay Kim, this was the period when he developed interest in debate. Like his peers, he was also influenced by the popular culture then such as Tarzan, Elvis Presley, and P. Ramlee, to name a few. It was during this time that he picked up the smoking habit, an effect of what he called the “social liberation” in the 1950s.

Even before this book was written, Tan Sri Khoo Kay Kim has been synonymous with football. He used to be a regular contributor to the media – sharing his thoughts and history about the local football scene. Through this book, one could gain some insights on his coaching perspectives. His father spotted his interest and talent in football. He attended practically every game that his son played, gave critical feedback, and encouraged the latter to read newspaper articles on football where techniques and analysis were discussed. To Tan Sri Khoo Kay Kim, the one who received the coaching should have natural talent, a foundation to develop further. On the other hand, given his father who was never a football player, passion and being critical may be potential factors to be a good coach.

Tan Sri Khoo Kay Kim attended University of Malaya in Singapore when socialist movement was at its height in the island city. Having said so, his participation in student politics was limited to attending

talks, debates, and discussions. Apart from time at the football field, he frequented amusement parks in Singapore until he became quite adept to waltz, rumba, and samba. It was also here in Singapore, he met scholars like Zainal Abidin Ahmad (Za'ba), D. P. Singhal, and Professor K. G. Tregonning who made considerable impact on Tan Sri Khoo Kay Kim's appreciation for certain things that was proven useful in his career towards the later years such as attention to details, focus on society in analysing a situation, and acquiring primary sources in forming opinions.

Finally, discussing the life of Tan Sri Khoo Kay Kim would not be complete without mentioning a lady by the name Rathimalar Navaratnasingam (Rathi) given the fact that he passed through school and university without having a girlfriend. Rathi, a pretty and responsible girl that Tan Sri Khoo Kay Kim first met in 1962, has been his pillar of strength all along. They are blessed with three sons whom the eldest co-authored this book.

This book is highly recommended to aspiring and evolving leaders who want to explore leadership related concepts in life like influence, coaching, and mentoring. It is also a potential source of inspiration to career civil servants on how they can make a difference in their family and life through basic approaches like conversations, storytelling, and continuous encouragement.