



**An Interview with  
Boon Eng Keat  
Ipoh's "King of Trishaws"**

Name	Boon Eng Keat	Company	None
Date/Time	10 July 2005 / 1600	Place	I.5 Waller Court
Interviewer	Cdr. Ian Anderson RN (Rtd)		Ipoh, Perak


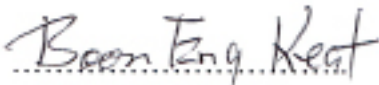

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**CERTIFICATION**

**The original of the following certificate, signed by Chin Meng Wai and Boon Eng Keat, is part of the bound master copy of the interview held in the ipohWorld library.**

<b>To whom it may concern:</b>		
This is to confirm that the above is an accurate record of the interview of 10 July 2005 and the subsequent clarifications with Boon Eng Keat.		
 ..... CHIN MENG WAI	 ..... BOON ENG KEAT	 ..... DATE

# Boon Eng Keat

## Ipoh's King of Trishaws

*This was an interesting, but somewhat difficult interview to complete as Boon Eng Keat's English is not too good, which is entirely understandable when you see how little formal schooling he had. Consequently the interview was conducted in Cantonese, with the help of Ms Chin Meng Wai (my wife) and Ms Boon Poh Kam, Eng Keat's eldest daughter. His wife, Mme Ma Sau Chen was also present. However, as we got to know him we discovered that his English is better than he likes to admit. The interview was then added to, with detail from various local Chinese newspapers, translated by my wife, dating back to 1979 and lent by Eng Keat, which featured both him and the Trishaw Associations. Where Chinese names, other than the Boon family, are quoted they are spelt as they sound and may not be accurate representations of the actual name.*



**Boon Eng Keat 2005**

Boon Eng Keat was born in Sumatra in 1928, the son of Boon Siek Meng, a Kapitan, and Chew Keiw Chee, his fifth wife. Young Eng Keat arrived in Malaya in 1933 (aged five) with his mother, father, elder sister and father's first wife and son. The family party also included two more sons from two of his father's other wives. His father was Chinese born, moved to Sumatra and achieved a high position there. His first and fifth wives were Sumatrans, making the family equivalent to the Baba-Nyonya 1 of Malaya. The second, third and fourth wives were Chinese and probably remained in China. Although in a high position in Sumatra at the time, it seems as if the family decided to come to Malaya to start a new and hopefully more successful, enterprise in this land of opportunity. As far as Eng Keat knows, the second, third and fourth wife and the remainder of the family were left

behind. They most likely returned to or remained in China, although this is not clear. He has never heard of them again. The actual reason that the family moved to Malaya is a bit of a mystery, for Eng Keat remembers clearly that they were not short of money, but that it was tightly controlled by his father's first wife, who boasted that they had enough to buy several houses if they wished to do so. Indeed, back in Sumatra his father had always celebrated the birth of a grandson by running week-long street shows and opera, the mark of a rich and successful man.

The new Malayan enterprise turned out to be 'Sin Meng Hong' a bicycle shop at No. 80 Anderson Road, Ipoh. The shop was firmly managed by first wife who was very much the Matriarch of the family, held all the power and made everybody's decisions for them. Consequently, Eng Keat, his mother (father's fifth wife), who he remembers always wore a sarong like the Nonyas, sister and two half brothers, were packed off to Tambun, just North of Ipoh, where after a while he went to a small Chinese school and started to learn Mandarin among other subjects. He was probably in Standard 1 or 2 there, while his mother and sister found employment in the local rubber factory. One of his half brothers also had a job at the Tanjong Rambutan Mental Hospital, where he worked for many years.

*Note 1. The common name used in the Straits Settlements of Penang, Malacca and Singapore to refer to the descendants of Chinese immigrants who had married ethnic Malay wives. The son of these mixed marriages was known as a Baba and the daughter as a Nyonya. Hence the term Baba-Nyonya.*



**First Wife**



**Boon Siek Meng, Father**



**Chew Keiw Chee, Mother**

Of course, before going to school and when lessons were over for the day, young Eng Keat would find himself in an empty house and at that very young age he was expected to take care of himself for the rest of the day, including cooking his own meals. This was a far from satisfactory arrangement and so his father eventually took him away from his mother in Tambun and from then on he lived at the bicycle shop premises in Ipoh. However he did not have to work in the shop, but was sent to Poi Lam Chinese School to be educated. He was then around 11-years old and this was his first proper education. Unfortunately, as you will see it did not last long. At the time Poi Lam School was on the second floor of the Perak Hokkien Association where it had been set up 1917 and formally established in 1925. It remained closed until the war ended in 1945. Today he is still an 'Old Boy' of the school which is now a new building, on an 11-acre plot of land, donated by Tan Sri Dato Li Lai Sheng in 1973.

But not long after Eng Keat's introduction to the school and while he was in Standard 2, in December 1941, disaster struck. The Japanese invaded Malaya, soon after all schools were closed and Eng Keat's education was disrupted. That was the last time he went to formal school. As the Japanese advanced towards the South and bombs started falling on Ipoh, the Boon family closed the Anderson Road shop and before the Japanese entered Ipoh, like many others, they fled the town. They were lucky that Eng Keat's uncle and aunt worked for the British General Manager of the Meru Tin mine in Jelapang, Perak and that the unfortunate General Manager had been captured by the Japanese. He was interned in one of their camps for the entire war. Consequently they were able to temporarily move into his bungalow, on a hill above the mine. Here, they stayed for a while and helped look after the bungalow and grounds. Life in Jelapang was tough and without sufficient food to eat, his uncle used to borrow a rifle from the Jelapang Police Station to hunt for food like wild boar or anything else that came too close. Eng Keat clearly remembers that for Chinese New Year 1942 his aunt made traditional rice flour balls dessert (Tang Yuan) for Chap Goh Mei 2, but rice flour was short and as the total occupancy of the bungalow had risen to more than 30, each member was only allowed one of these small tidbits to mark the end of Chinese New Year celebrations. While they were in Jelapang, the Japanese arrived at the house and, thinking it was a hotel, left it almost untouched, although they did take two decorative elephants legs with them as souvenirs. Fortunately, it was not too long before Ipoh settled down (albeit uncomfortably) under Japanese rule, allowing the family to return to Ipoh and the bicycle shop, while leaving his aunt to look after the bungalow, as she lived just below it, down the hill. Later the bungalow was looted by local robbers, rather than the Japanese.

*Note 2. Chap Goh Mei represents the fifteenth and final day of the Lunar New Year period as celebrated by Chinese migrant communities. The term is from the Hokkien dialect and literally means the fifteenth day of the first month.*





**80 Anderson Road Today**

Back in Ipoh and with nothing else to occupy him, he started to work in his father's shop under the watchful eye of first wife and her son. The Meru Tin Mine General Manager was released after the war had ended and returned to the company and also started his own, successful, tin mining operation close by. Sadly, during the Malaysian Emergency he was shot by the Communists while driving his car back to his bungalow 3 and although his dog ran to the bungalow, barked to raise the alarm and then led the staff back to the car, the manager was dead by the time they found him.

When the war ended Eng Keat had already celebrated his 17th birthday and was still working in the family bicycle shop in Anderson Road, but the war which had started in 1939, in Europe, had had a serious effect on the style and availability of transportation in Malaya and Ipoh was no different. There was less fuel for motor vehicles and from December 1941 generally only those confiscated by the Japanese were still on the road. In Ipoh there were very few cars anyway only those confiscated by the Japanese were still

on the road. In Ipoh there were very few cars anyway as the British had commandeered most of them to get to Singapore after the Japanese had landed in the North. The few that were left were then taken by the Japanese. There was also a rubber shortage and with no rubber products readily available like car or bicycle tyres, people had to adapt to what was available. One of those adaptations was the trishaw.

Before the war there were still plenty of locally manufactured rickshaws in all Malaya's towns. Indeed Eng Keat's mother had two and his sister one. These two-wheeled manually drawn vehicles had spoked wheels with solid rubber tires and double bow springs supporting the two-person carriage. There were also plenty of bicycles. Consequently it was not long before the two modes of transport were blended together and around 1940 the trishaw was born. The similarity between the two vehicles can clearly be seen in the pictures below. The first few were actually amalgamations of a bicycle and a rickshaw and therefore retained the springs, but the newly built version had no springs and solid tyres. Not the most comfortable vehicle to ride in! Pneumatic tyres on traditional bicycle wheels only took over, as they became available, well after the end of the war. Amazingly, this new form of transport took over the role of the rickshaw in only six months 4 or thereabouts and many of the rickshaw pullers had to find other employment, a number of course becoming trishaw drivers overnight.



**Top - Rickshaw Tyre solid X-section**

*Note 3. It is recorded by R Thambipillay in his book 'God's Little Acre – 1948-1998' (ISBN 983-99419-0-9) that John Edwin Olgivie, General Manager of Meru Tin Mine was killed on the 5th August 1948, in an ambush, mounted by a gang of eight Communist Terrorists (CT's), waiting on a high bank on a double bend on the Chemor to Jelapang road. He was driving alone. He was buried in grave number 391, in the Batu Gajah cemetery, known as 'God's Little Acre'. A remembrance service for all who gave their lives in the Malaysian Emergency, arranged by the Malaysian Palm Oil Association, Perak, takes place there on the second Saturday in June each year.*

*Note 4. One reason that is often given for the quick takeover of the trishaw from the rickshaw is that it was by order of the Japanese Command who believed that being a rickshaw puller was demeaning as it equated man to a beast of burden, like a horse or donkey. Eng Keat was specifically asked about this, but denies that it was Japanese inspired, but came about to simply replace the cars which were no longer able to be driven as there was a shortage of fuel, spares and particularly rubber tyres.*

Strangely enough, this two-pronged development must have been happening separately, but in parallel, in Malaya for in the South the bicycle was mounted to the side of the trishaw carriage whereas in the North it was always behind. In Melaka and Penang, where today these vehicles mainly serve the tourists, this distinction remains.



**Ipoh's Last Rickshaw.  
Now in Port Dickson Hotel**



**A Semi-retired Trishaw,  
Resting in Ipoh New Town**

Teenager Eng Keat, soon became familiar with this new mode of transport, and at the age of 19 found employment in a Hale Street trishaw shop in Ipoh Old Town called Sin Seng Huat (one of the shops demolished to make way for the large Maybank building). Here he became skilled at making and repairing trishaws for which his pay could total 100 dollars maximum a month if he worked hard. He remained with this same company for 23 years. Meanwhile the family cycle shop was still running in Anderson Road, now managed by the eldest son of first wife who had come with her from Sumatra. The shop is still there at the time of writing and appears to be almost unchanged from its pre-war state. However, it is standing empty and is believed to be available for lease, like many other shophouses in Ipoh.

But how did a young single man entertain himself in his off time in the late 1940's and early 50's,



**Teenager Boon Eng Keat  
in the BRCS**

for 100 dollars a month was a lot in those days and there was plenty to spend it on in Ipoh. Well, Eng Keat had always been a serious young man who was not attracted to the Chinese Theatre, Shaw Brothers latest cinema offerings or even to Jubilee Park and the taxi dancers. He preferred to follow more useful and productive pursuits in his spare time. Consequently, after the war he made a point of taking evening tuition in both English and Mandarin at his old school Poi Lam in an effort to try and make up for some of his lost schooling. At the same time joined the Chin Voo Association to learn martial arts and joined the Kuomintang Chinese Chong Ching (Youth of China) choir. The choir gave many performances locally including one to China's Ambassador to Malaya. Interested in First Aid he also enrolled in the British Red Cross Society (BRCS) Perak Chinese Detachment No. 3. The latter Society is of course now known as the Red Crescent Society in Malaysia.

*Post Interview Note. The Rickshaw pictured above was rescued from Port Dickson and exhibited in the 2006 ipohWorld exhibition in Ipoh. It remains ipohWorld's property.*





**Poi Lam Night School June 1947**



**Kuomintang Chinese Youth Choir Christmas 1947**



**English Night School August 1948**



**The Boon Family**

**Surrounding 1st wife (centre right) and 5th wife, the family has grown since it came to Malaya. Boon Eng Keat is in the back row on the right and next to him is 1st wife's son and then his other two half-brothers from his father's other wives. Eng Keat's wife, Ma Sau Chen is at the extreme left of the second row. Their children, Boon Poh Kam and Boon Kip Seong are standing directly in front of her. 1st wife's daughter stands by her left shoulder and the remaining members are wives and children of Eng Keat's half-brothers.**

Despite being a very hard-working and studious young man, Eng Keat did still manage to find some time for girls and in 1953, at 25 years old, he married Ma Sau Chen. It was not too long before the happy couple was blessed with the birth of a daughter, Boon Poh Kam. But these were not the only changes taking place in the family that had come from Sumatra some 20 years before. His father had passed away and his three half brothers had all got married as well and had children of their own, as this family group, taken in the late 1950's, shows. By the time this picture was taken, Boon and his wife had also had a son, Boon Kip Seong, and later they had two more daughters. Today they also have nine grandchildren.

In 1954, while employed at the Sin Seng Huat trishaw shop, Eng Keat was introduced to a group who were forming the new Kinta Trishaw Drivers' Association and although not a driver, he knew

many of them and volunteered to become the part-time Treasurer to the Association. The Association was based at Yau Tet Shin Road and Eng Keat he remained their Treasurer for 26 years. However, when the President, Wang Wen Zhen, passed away there was a lot of internal Association bickering, which led to Eng Keat resigning his position as Treasurer. Wang Wen Zhen himself was an interesting man as he was a simple Tau Foo 5 seller who had only come to know the trishaw drivers by playing Mah-Jong with them. Recognised by the drivers as an honest and hard-working man he was well liked by them and was therefore elected as the Association's President. After Eng Keat resigned from the Treasurer's post, the Association continued under a new President and Treasurer until its 33rd anniversary in 1987. However, not long afterwards the Association went into a state of hibernation from which it never awoke, as with the severely reduced numbers of trishaws and drivers, which by then was down to about 100, not all of whom belonged to the Association, the need to continue was no longer there.

During the early years of the trishaw in Ipoh there were many disputes between Perak Trishaw Association, led by the Seenivasagam brothers, founders of the Peoples Progressive Party (PPP) and the Kinta Trishaw Drivers Association, backed by the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA). The trishaw manufacturers and drivers were all squabbling amongst themselves, the political parties were trying to attract workers and drivers to change sides and generally there was a lot of confusion in the trishaw business. These squabbles were purely political as both MCA and PPP needed the drivers' votes in elections, and of course, their support transporting voters to the polling stations. These problems were

*Note 5. Soya bean curd. A product of soya beans made by extracting soya milk from soaked soya bean and then cooking and adding a coagulating agent.*



only actually overcome when the Perak Trishaw Association was dissolved just three years after its formation and the Kinta Association became the sole trishaw organisation in Ipoh. A smaller association was also formed by the few Malay trishaw drivers who operated in Teluk Intan, but this was never very active and had no ties with Ipoh.

In the later years, many trishaw drivers were ex tin mine workers who, as the tin trade declined, moved to this new occupation, but they were really too late as the trishaw trade in Ipoh was already on its way out. During the 1990's trishaw drivers' numbers dropped to about 30. These were all over 50 years of age and some were well into their 70's or 80's. They were mainly running around the Central Market area delivering goods and the occasional elderly passenger. Stories are told about one very elderly lady who continued to go to the market every day by trishaw and refused any other form of transport until the day she died. Now, in 2005 there are still trishaws on the streets of Ipoh, but only two and they may be found around the Central Market very early in the morning, delivering fresh meat and vegetables to local restaurants.



**VIP Line-up for the 33rd Anniversary Celebration.  
Ma Sau Chen (Eng Keat's Wife) is 4th from the left**

In his keynote speech at the 33rd anniversary celebrations (1987) the then Honourable Chairman of the Kinta Trishaw Drivers' Association, Yeah Qing Yan, expressed his disappointment with those



**The Demonstration Indian  
Motorised Trishaw**

members of government who had been responsible for, but not followed up on, their project to introduce the motorised trishaw to Ipoh and proposed that that the Government should do so now, in order to improve the working conditions of the trishaw drivers and catch up with the demands of modern society. This was referring to the Government's earlier survey (in 1979) where they had sent out three officers to interview trishaw drivers in both Ipoh and Kuala Terengganu. This exercise was intended to survey the working conditions, social welfare and economic situation of the trishaw drivers in these two towns and to consider whether modifying the trishaw to a motorised version, by replacing the bicycle with a motorcycle, (a similar idea to Bangkok's famous 'Tuk Tuk' introduced to that city in 1960) would be a practical and popular solution. As part of this survey, Kinta Trishaw Drivers Association held a forum for its drivers where the three officers briefed the members and displayed the then current model of a fully motorised trishaw, not dissimilar to those still in use today in both Thailand and India.

Subsequently, as reported in the national press, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz stated that Parliament would discuss the introduction of motorised trishaws in July and as they were not included in the 1985 Transport Regulations these would need to be amended to include them under the same grading as Taxi. It was also reported that an entrepreneur and former worker with KTM was planning to import 100, 170cc, Indian manufactured, motor trishaws which cost about six thousand dollars each excluding maintenance fees. However for reasons unknown, the motor trishaw project never came to fruition.

After his 23 years with Sin Seng Huat, Eng Keat decided to go into business for himself as a trishaw manufacturer and renter, while remaining with the Kinta Trishaw Drivers Association as Secretary. He was now in his early 40's and the year was 1970.

However, before we look more at Boon Eng Keat in his new role as businessman, let us consider the role of the Trishaw Associations over those years. The associations were formed as welfare societies, to solve problems that the drivers faced and these were many and varied. First of all, the drivers themselves were of a very mixed background and age. Many of the older ones had no proper homes and because of their advancing years were unable to earn sufficient money to live on. The associations would therefore arrange for them to stay in Old People's homes or with other trishaw drivers' families or friends. Some of the drivers were educated, but most were not. The majority were from 'low-class' families who, not being well educated, were lured by the old problem of gambling and regularly lost all they had earned and more. These needed regular help. Also there were those drivers who had been hurt in an accident, either through inexperience, carelessness or through the fault of others. Trishaws are not easy to drive and can very easily 'jackknife' trapping the drivers leg or worse still turn over and crush both driver and passengers. So frequent were these accidents that the local Chinese drivers took an old Chinese idiom used to record someone falling down, "Four legs facing the sky" and turned it into, "Three wheels facing the sky" to represent the upturned trishaw. Then there were the part-time 'white-collar' drivers who had regular daytime jobs as clerks or shop staff, but worked in the evening for the extra money and were unpopular with the full-time drivers. Many of these part-timers were also Malay Civil Servants subsidising their government income. Finally there were the unemployed who, when they could, would substitute for another driver. All of these were overseen and helped where possible by the associations, led, not by trishaw drivers, but by trishaw manufacturers and other businessmen (like their Tau Foo selling President) elected by the drivers themselves. Apart from arranging for homes for the elderly and counseling the gamblers, the associations also took the welfare of their drivers seriously, providing 100 dollar donations for the families of the deceased, medical benefits, food and condensed milk for the sick and generally acting as a support for those drivers in need, as well as solving disputes and other problems. To give an idea of the size of this voluntary task, in 1967 there were some 600 to 700 trishaw drivers working in Ipoh Town alone, of which some 80% were Chinese, although all the other races were represented, but not all joined the associations.



**The 25th Merdeka Anniversary Parade,  
Ipoh '1982**

Also traditionally, throughout the trishaw era, the drivers had always been very active in raising funds for worthwhile causes, particularly those involving education for young people, even though many of them had little or no education themselves. Tungku Abdul Rahman College, private Universities, Private Secondary Schools and even the Nanyang University in Singapore all benefited from the Ipoh drivers generosity. These same trishaw drivers also regularly supported National events and celebrations and Eng Keat fondly remembers the 25th Merdeka Anniversary Parade, in 1982, led by his last remaining rickshaw and 10 of his trishaws.



**The Ipoh Trishaw Drivers Raise Funds to Build TAR College,  
Supported by Datuk He Wen Han, Tan Sri Li Lai Sheng  
and Datuk Hew Sze Tong (July 1990).  
Photo Courtesy of Nanyang Siang Pau**

The Kinta Trishaw Drivers' association also started a tradition back in the 1950's where they donated gifts to Ipoh's Old Folks Homes during each Chinese New Year. Although there is no longer An Ipoh Trishaw Association, Boon Eng Keat still keeps up this tradition as an individual and regularly sends a donation to the Kampong Simee home. He has also designed and built some exercise aids for the aged which have met with much success among the residents of this home.

The 'Golden Age' of the trishaw in Ipoh was from the end of the war in 1945 until Merdeka (Independence) in 1957. This was the heyday for Ipoh's trishaw drivers, manufacturers and renters and during that period there were probably about 1000 trishaws in the town with 700 on the streets at one time and more than 10 trishaw repair shops in Old Town alone. The trishaw was known as 'King of the Road'. During the war the newly available trishaw was rarely used by the Japanese who would prefer to use their bicycles both on and off duty to get around the town, particularly to go to the many brothels, but if they did ride they were difficult passengers for the drivers who had to make sure that they bowed correctly to their Japanese masters, pedaled quickly and then often did not get paid. Visits to prostitutes during duty periods was a regular routine for many of the Japanese soldiers, but if the offending soldier was caught, he would be slapped and beaten by his officer in public. These were difficult situations for whoever was present and often resulted in them being beaten as well. One incident that Eng Keat remembers well is when he saw a drunken Japanese officer trying to board an old trishaw that was unsafe. Having picked up some Japanese words he tried to warn the officer in his own language, but was misunderstood and chased down the road by the officer with drawn sword. Fortunately he ran fast enough to be able to tell the tale.

The Japanese also became regular visitors to the Anderson Road shop for the majority of them had bicycles and used the shop for their repairs. Again, much bowing had to be done for fear of punishment and there was always the risk of not being paid or worse. This was a very convenient shop for the Japanese as many of the brothels were also in the same road! Eng Keat remembers the Japanese as a brutal race who, on one occasion, caught three local people stealing, beheaded them in DR Park and displayed the heads in Central Market as a warning to others. He says that these three are still buried in the park. He also remembers seeing other beheadings taking place and heads on show in several public places around the town.



A good condition trishaw could be rented out to a driver for about 70 cents to one dollar a day, while an old and worn machine could still command 50 cents. Trishaws were used mainly for passengers, particularly schoolchildren going to and from school, but with three sitting in the seat, one or two on a plank across the arms of the carriage with one or two more squatting on the front platform and one riding on the luggage carrier over the rear wheel; six or seven small children was about the most that a driver could manage as they were quite a load to pedal along. Mothers with pre-school young children also regularly used trishaws for going marketing or to the town shops. For economy these shoppers would often share with a neighbour or a friend with two adults in the seat and two or three children squatting in front. Some drivers would also deliver goods from companies to other companies or homes. Everybody except the very rich used trishaws then: cinemagoers, soldiers, civil servants, trades people, the British administrators, miners, plantation workers and managers and particularly the prostitutes. The fare was negotiable, but was generally 30 cents per person per trip and a hard working driver could earn 30 to 40 dollars a day giving a monthly income of 1000 dollars or more, a very large sum for those days.

The most fabulous time of all for the trishaw drivers was while the British soldiers were still in Malaya for the British loved the trishaw more than anyone. On the army payday, 30 to 40 trishaws would wait outside each army camp. The soldiers would rush for the trishaws and call out their destination, the pubs, the cabaret, Jubilee Park or wherever. Soldiers' trishaw races were also good for a driver's income as the soldiers would always pay five dollars or more to the winning driver and often preferred to pedal themselves with the driver riding in the carriage. Most of the drivers had picked up enough English to understand the soldiers requirements and when they called for girls they were happy to oblige. Many drivers became part-time pimps, charging the soldiers 30 to 50 dollars to arrange the girl and then only paying the prostitute 10 dollars. Unfortunately some of these drivers found the easy money too much of a draw and became permanent pimps, claiming their territories in front of certain hotels. Should a prostitute walk into the hotel without taking a lift from a trishaw, she still had to pay commission to the driver or risk getting hassled. This had quite a bad effect on the trishaw trade as single women became frightened to ride in trishaws in case they were accused of being prostitutes or threatened by the drivers. Ipoh's trishaw drivers missed the British when they had gone!

After the British had finally left, the Emergency was still in force, brought on by the Communists, but apart from a few difficulties in the streets now and again, this really did not disrupt the town too much as most of the problems took place around the mines and plantations. Hence the trishaw trade continued much as normal although as more cars and motorcycles took to the roads, there was less need for trishaws and their numbers diminished. However one general disruption was that on occasions the



**Lau Ek Ching Street Today**

authorities would order whole areas to be evacuated after the curfew was in force. These people were then taken to the Padang where informers were made to identify communist sympathisers who were arrested and taken away. An uncomfortable time for all.

But what of Boon Eng Keat who in 1970 had decided to branch out on his own? He had rented a corner of a covered car park built specially to house the cars of the rich men that lived with their families in Lau Ek Ching Street in Ipoh New Town. Here the drivers waited for their master's telephone call to (then) 'Ipoh 200', to bring the car around to their front door, while Eng Keat built trishaws and rented them out to drivers

and at the same time, managed the car car park for the owner. While he has never actually recorded how many trishaws he built, he guesses that it was around 100, but of one thing he is sure he used to have up tp 70 rented



**Boon Eng Keat in his Trishaw Workshop  
July 2005.**

out on a daily basis. During that period when still secretary of the Trishaw Association and probably the largest renter of trishaws at the time, he was known as 'The King of Trishaws'. He still manages that car park today at age 77, and also rents out his last two old trishaws to very elderly drivers on a daily basis. These drivers are old friends of his who have always rented from him and they still act as transportation for goods around the market, but today there are no more passenger trishaws in Ipoh. Although Eng Keat still has all the old tools and sewing machine in his workshop in the corner of the garage, he no longer builds trishaws. However he is still perfectly willing to make one to the old pattern if someone desperately needs a traditional Ipoh trishaw.

Another type of trishaw rental would also be required from time to time, that of wedding transport. One that sticks in Boon Eng Keat's memory was not in Ipoh, but well North in Chemor where Ms Zhong Yu Chang, who worked in Super Kinta Store, Ipoh, married Zheng Wong Meng, a building contractor from Lawan Kuda. It was a first of January celebration and the wedding convoy consisted of 15 Red Yamaha motorcycles as escorts (borrowed from friends) led by one bicycle (ridden by Zhou Jin Aun, wedding organiser and a good friend of the groom) and followed by three of Eng Keat's trishaws transported to Chemor for the occasion. The bride and groom took pride of place in the leading trishaw, with the best man and bridesmaid following close behind. The last trishaw carried that very important person, the 'Mistress of Ceremonies' or 'Good Luck Woman' who was hired by the bride's parents to make sure that all the old traditions were properly kept and that therefore the marriage would get off to an auspicious start.



**Zheng Wong Meng Marries Zhong Yu Chang**

But what happened to Eng Keat's trishaws when the requirement for them was no longer there? Well, some were sold off locally and several went overseas. Two particular customers, both British he remembers, were a College Professor in Kuala Lumpur and an engineer working locally in Ipoh. When the former was due to return to UK after his term of employment was over, his students asked him what he wanted as a gift and he chose a trishaw, saying that he owned practically everything else. The students took him at his word, bought a trishaw from Eng Keat and presented it to the professor who took it back to England. The engineer also took his back to England, but being mechanically minded he stripped it right down and packed it flat, presumably reassembling it later. Neither has been heard of since, but they may well still be rolling along English country lanes. Two more of his machines found their way to Spain and Thailand.

Another role for the retired trishaws (and drivers) in recent years has been to take part in charity functions, festivals and celebrations marking special events. Consequently, above his workshop door Eng Keat has four sets of framed photographs showing 10 decorated trishaws taking part in an international fund raising function organised by the Xim Phou Moon Welfare Society (a non-profit NGO), a trishaw



tourism promotion festival at Ipoh's Syen Hotel, the local Shanghai Nights Cabaret Grand Opening trishaw parade and a parade to mark the Joint Venture signed between the Excelsior Hotel and the local council (MBI).



**Xim Phou Moon Society Charity Parade**



**Celebrating MBI/Excelsior Hotel J V**



**Syen Hotel Tourism Promotion 1994**



**Shanghai Nights Cabaret Opening Night**

Sadly those days are gone for ever and trishaw parades are unlikely to be seen again in Ipoh!



Boon Eng Keat continues to live happily in Ipoh with his wife Ma Sau Chen only a few yards from that shop in Anderson Road. His eldest daughter also stays in the Ipoh area at Fair Park, but his other children have moved from Ipoh to other parts of Malaysia. With Ipoh's only two working trishaws still being rented from him, he remains Ipoh's 'King of Trishaws'.

The photograph left shows Cheong Kong, with one of the last two working Ipoh trishaws, on duty early in the morning in August 2005, at the Central Market.





An interesting postscript to this story of Boon Eng Keat is that the old Ipoh rickshaw, now in Port Dickson, is still in regular use in his sister's hotel as a wedding transport. The photograph shows one such wedding where the groom is between the shafts pulling his new bride along after the ceremony. One hopes that this demonstration of servility to his wife is only for fun and not a marker laid down for their future life together!

Boon Eng Keat has featured in many newspaper articles over the years, but sadly many of these old articles and pictures cannot be traced by the newspapers that published them and Eng Keat only has old photocopies. However the one article below has been included, courtesy of The *Guang Meng Daily* as it sums up, in Chinese, the majority of the earlier articles.

*Post Interview Note. The Rickshaw pictured here and a good example of one of Boon Eng Keat's trishaws have since found their way into the ipohWorld collection, destined (we hope) to be put on exhibition soon.*

**時光走廊** 56年維修生涯老手藝  
**三輪車沒他走不動**

▲ 报导 / 陈如发 摄影 / 刘剑英

**拜師及入門過程**  
自戰時期學修後，要學習修腳車。13歲時隨人入舖進入三輪車公會學習修理三輪車。直到42歲（1970年）才獨自一人出來開店營業。

當時從中國飄洋來的潮州人，大都以人拉車載客謀生。過後，他們在人拉車的乘客座位後面，加上腳踏車的零件，以腳踏方式取代人力推動。

**最考功夫的技术**  
1. 用針車縫制乘客座位上的半蓬，十分考手藝。  
2. 三輪車的零件雖然與腳車零件一樣，但修腳方式卻比較複雜及困難。

**難忘事件**  
1. 以半工讀的方式學習修理三輪車，上午在店內修理三輪車，晚上則到福建公會夜校。  
2. 曾為多間大學及學院籌募基金，如拉曼學院、南洋大學及雅中等等。

**前景**  
自戰時期過後，尚未出現摩多車及汽車等交通工具，怡保共有高達760余輛三輪車，散在怡保旧街場。就有10數間三輪車維修店；文英吉自己出來創業時，共購買70余輛三輪車及收取執照，以租賃方式營生。不過，隨著時代進步，目前只剩下3輛三輪車繼續在市內行駛。

**繼承人**  
儿女已有自己的事業，已屆退休年齡的文英吉獨自一人以业余方式經營。當有一天再也沒有人以三輪車載客時，此行業將正式画上句號。

▲ 文英吉是市內唯一的一輛三輪車維修店。

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