

**ADDRESS  
BY  
HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS  
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**AT THE BOOK LAUNCH  
“I, KKK – THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A HISTORIAN”**

**DATE: 12 APRIL 2017 (WEDNESDAY); TIME: 10.30 AM  
VENUE: MEMORIAL TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN,  
KUALA LUMPUR.**

1. In 1982, a monograph was published by the Historical Association of Perak, on the history of Teluk Anson (now Teluk Intan), a town set on the banks of the Perak River. Its author was the historian, Khoo Kay Kim, a former native of that town. The monograph formed part of an initiative proposed at the time by Emeritus Professor Khoo Kay Kim, to write a series of comprehensive histories of the smaller towns that make up the nation of Malaysia. This initiative was very much in keeping with the historian’s unflinching belief that the heart of a nation rests in its social history.

2. Soon after, he completed a similar monograph about the town of Taiping. A planned monograph on Kuala Kangsar was never realised however, and I am reassured to learn that several decades later, Khoo

Kay Kim is now completing a comprehensive history of the town of his youth, Ipoh.

3. Many historians are masters in the art of biography, or the study of the role of individuals in the shaping of historical events. Khoo Kay Kim was himself the official biographer of my late father, HRH Sultan Azlan Muhibuddin Shah. Autobiography, on the other hand, is not as much in keeping with the historian's temperament, although the autobiographies of other people are often among their formative sources, along with biographies. In this way, they serve as instruments for the historian.

4. This tendency is acknowledged by Khoo Kay Kim himself. In the opening pages of I, *KKK – The Autobiography of a Historian*, he candidly confesses that, "Truth be told, autobiographical reflection goes against all the cultivated instincts of the trained historian."

5. Khoo Kay Kim is not only known *formally*, but also *fondly*, as the country's National Historian. Through his regular and ceaseless engagement with the country's *rakyat*, he has come to be known as "a walking encyclopedia of Malaysian history." Born in Kampar, Perak at the beginning of the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, he was among the first generation of local, university-trained scholars who sought to devise new and novel approaches to the study of their country's history.

6. His Masters' thesis on '*The Western Malay States*', was published in 1972 by Oxford University Press as part of its prestigious East Asia Monograph Series. It has come to be regarded as a seminal study in Malaysian historiography. Khoo Kay Kim was responsible for delivering the paper on National History at the National Cultural Congress of 1971, held at the University of Malaya under the aegis of the country's second Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak. In his public life, he served on the Committee that formulated the *Rukunegara*, the country's National Principles.

7. There is little of such details and events in this autobiographical reflection, however. I have been informed that a second accompanying volume, entitled '*Primary Sources*', will be published towards the end of the year, which does cover in detail the public and intellectual life of this historian. *I, KKK* is, instead, a love song – a poetic reflection of the country's history composed in fragments and vignettes. It is the historian breaking the historian's oath of "intellectual distance" and "empirical evidence." It is, indeed, an exploration of his intimate self.

8. *I, KKK* is also the nation's history, told through the prism of one individual history – that of a young boy in Kampar witnessing the arrival on foot of Japanese soldiers; of a teenager trapped on a train during an exchange of fire between Gurkha soldiers and Communist insurgents. It is a history of university life in a Singapore on the cusp of radical political

change, with its cabarets seized by the rhythms of a new dance style called the *Joget Moden*; and of an inter-community marriage during a period of conservative community attitudes. Above all, it is an encapsulation of the aspirations, dreams and faith of a young historian contemplating the birth of a new nation.

9. The memoir is also a eulogy - to his teachers, including his first great influence at the University of Malaya (Singapore), the historian K.G. Treggoning,; and the figure who would serve as one of the most formative influences in the young historian's vocation, "the gentle and generous Professor Wang Gungwu". And throughout, it is an expression of his devotion to the society and landscape to which he has always returned, both intellectually and in memory - his native state of Perak. His undying passion for football is also reflected everywhere in these recollections.

10. As we reach six decades in our life as a nation, it is important to recall what has been forgotten, and to embrace the voices of all those who have shaped our national narrative, particularly when it is related directly by them.

11. Two weeks ago, Emeritus Professor Tan Sri Dato' Dr. Khoo Kay Kim celebrated his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. *I, KKK* is the first in a series of bi-lingual publications of his writings in English and Malay that will be published over the course of the next few years. I look forward to the publication of the

accompanying volume of autobiography, '*Primary Sources*', and of the Collected Essays, entitled, '*Tanah Air|Water Land – Collected Essays in Malaysian History*'.

12. And I am now pleased to launch this book of recollections, *I, KKK – The Autobiography of a Historian*.