



Hon's photo of cyclists at Qinghai Lake found in his book *Searching for Light*.



Hon (left) looking at photos of former presidents of the NSCMH at the landing of the hospital staircase.

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A CHILD walks two kilometres barefoot to school daily.

His teacher helps wash his feet and change into his uniform before classes start at school.

He is among the Penan children who walk the extra mile to school.

The Penan are the only nomadic people in Malaysia living in rainforests in Sarawak's remote parts for generations.

They are now either permanent or semi-permanent settlers in the rainforests, wrote Datuk Hon Choon Kim in his book *The Penan: Through the Lens* (2016).

The book, with 118 photos and short write-ups, provides glimpses of the Penan's life in the rainforests – their paradise.

But not all is well. Hon took a photo of a river that had turned muddy, where fish are no longer in abundance due to logging activities nearby.

Even wild herbs used for treating snake bites are hard to come by.

An elderly couple obtained medicine from

## Life depicted in images

### Politician turned photographer finds special meaning in places less travelled, compiles photos in books

a government hospital but did not know how to consume it.

And this is life in the rainforests which Hon discovered nine years ago. The former deputy education minister keeps going back there.

Hon has chalked up some 20 trips to the Penan villages since his first one in 2010.

"The journey to the interior is an eight-hour ride in a four-wheel drive on timber track," he said, adding that certain stretches had improved over the years.

Looking back, he said his first trip there was supposed to be just a four-day photography trip.

While capturing the Penan's photos, they captured his heart.

"If living harmoniously in a quiet, peaceful place brings happiness, then the Penan should be the happiest people in the world.

"They live without a worry in the jungles until the forests began to vanish," wrote Hon.

Fascination aside, he foresaw that the Penan have to be prepared for change – change that must come from within.

"Young Penans must be equipped – get tertiary education and exposure – to lead the change," said Hon, who has kept in touch with them and encouraged them via financial and moral support over the years.

He helps provide transport for the Penan students.

This, he added, had been made possible with the help of Tan Wei Kheng, an artist in Miri who made all the necessary arrangements.

Penan children are slowly but surely going for tertiary education.

A visibly proud Hon said one girl was attending teacher's training in Kuching while another boy was pursuing agriculture engineering in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) in Serdang.

A veterinarian, Dr Ling Tung King, had been very supportive of the UPM student, he added.

Hon's passion for photography is certainly more than capturing the beauty of the wonders in life.

During an interview at the NSCMH Medical Centre in Seremban, Hon who is its vice-president, told the story of his keen interest in the Penan.

He also proudly introduced the 80-year-old hospital, via photos, from its founder to the current president Datuk Lee Tian Hock. Photos of decades of community leaders

who set up the hospital are exhibited at the hospital staircase landing. The hospital was known as Negri Sembilan Chinese Maternity Hospital.

Back then, the hospital specialised in maternity care, but today it has evolved to meet various medical needs of the community, he said.

"Public hospitals tend to be crowded while private ones can be expensive, and this hospital gives people an alternative," Hon said, adding that he also chaired the hospital's welfare fund to help the needy.

"We want to help anyone who comes to us."

Hon, who has a degree in Social Science (Economics) from Universiti Sains Malaysia, started indulging in photography only after retiring from politics in 2008.

He also published a book titled *Searching For Light* in 2013 – a collection of the photos he took in China since 2008.

The photos with write-ups to introduce several places in China – Danba, Four sisters mountain, Qinghai Lake, Hongtudi, Yuanyang, Xinjiang, Yading, Badan Jilin Desert, Ejina and Dongbei – during different seasons, tell compelling stories on the wonders of nature, the people and history; just like a storybook.

A picture is worth a thousand words, and Hon's photography certainly lives up to this phrase.

He also compiled a book on photographs of Seremban – his home town – over the decades titled *Enchanting Seremban*.

It is a collection of photos contributed by the members of the Photographic Society of Negri Sembilan and several professional photographers.

Besides providing glimpses of how Seremban has evolved, Hon said the book was also a way to remember the people.

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A photo of Jalan Tun Dr Ismail, Seremban in the old days taken by Lee Guang Liang is part of the collection of photos in the *Enchanting Seremban* book.