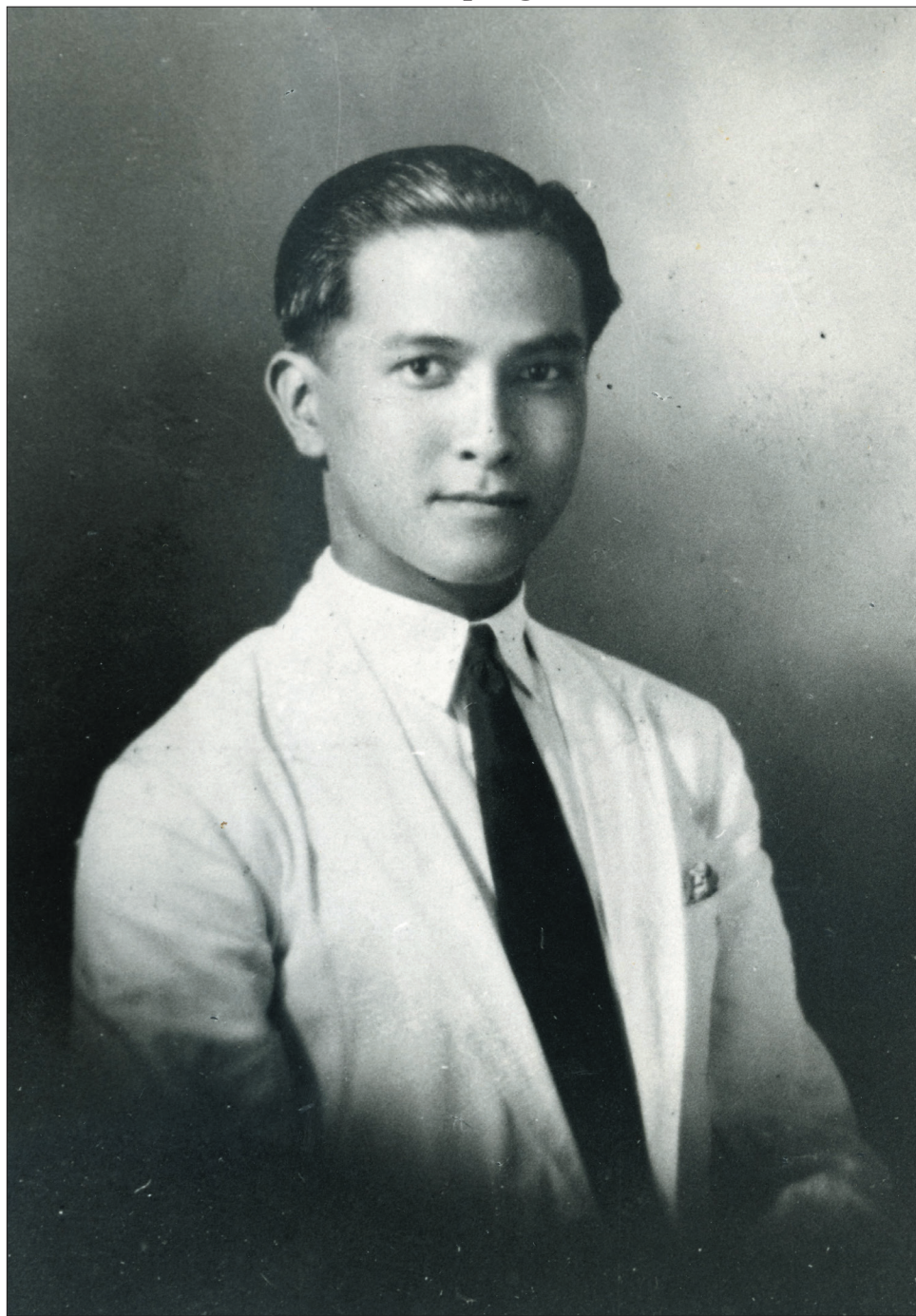


## The Kampung Kid



This is the earliest known portrait of Dr Wee Kim Wee, taken around the time he joined the *Straits Times* as a circulation clerk in January 1930. He was fourteen years old then.

Source: Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.



This is the only available portrait of Wee Choong Lay, Kim Wee's father. Choong Lay, a ship's purser, was an educated man. Stern but kind, he put all his four sons through school. Tragically, he went completely blind in his forties after a botched eye surgery in Bandung, Indonesia. He died of throat cancer in 1923, at the age of fifty-one.

*Source:* Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.

Kim Wee's resemblance to his beloved mother Chua Hay Luan was uncanny. He called her his "god" because of her boundless love, determination and sacrifice to bring her children up well despite penury after her husband's early death.

*Source:* Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.







This is a portrait of Koh Sok Hiong, Kim Wee's wife of sixty-nine years, when she was a top scorer at Nanyang Girls' School. She had hoped to teach thereafter but her maternal grandmother arranged for her to marry Kim Wee instead.

*Source:* Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.





Kim Wee and Sok Hiong on their wedding day on 12 April 1936. Although the bride and groom were in Western garb, their marriage ceremony was conducted entirely in Chinese, a language Kim Wee barely understood.

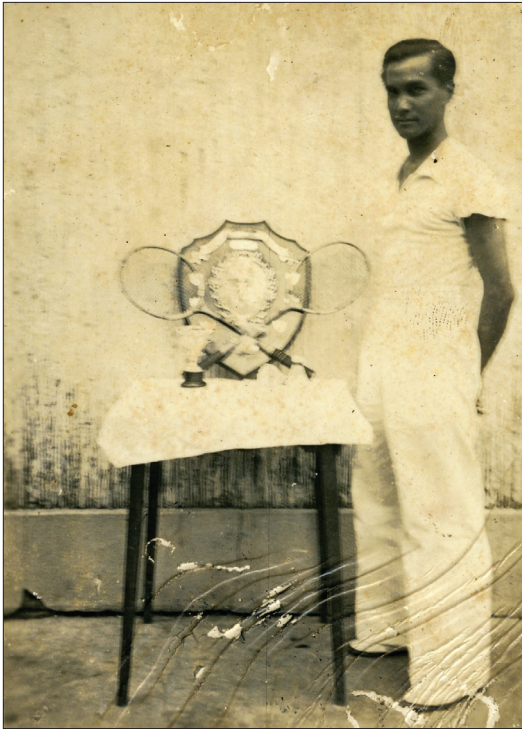
*Source:* Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.





Kim Wee and Sok Hiong with their seven beloved children. In the back row are (L-R) Cindy Kim Tee, Rosamond Hock Neo, Sok Hiong, Kim Wee and Bill Hock Kee. In the front row are (L-R) Alice Kheng Hua, Maureen Bee Neo, Hong Neo and Eng Hwa.

*Source:* Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.



Kim Wee with the Men's National Junior Singles badminton championship shield. He won it on 21 August 1938, bouncing back from a nervous breakdown at work. He did much to coach and otherwise help fellow shuttlers in Malaya and Singapore become world champions.  
*Source:* Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.

The British journalist Harold Guard, who gave Kim Wee a life-changing leg-up by hiring him to help set up the Singapore bureau of the American news agency the United Press Associations (UPA) in 1940.  
*Source:* Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.







Kim Wee, seen here running UPA's Southeast Asian bureau in the 1950s, was a pioneering Asian journalist who helped the world understand his region better in relatable ways. He also drummed up much business for UPA despite being overworked and underpaid, by selling its business intelligence to a wider market.

*Source:* Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.



Kim Wee accepting the Warrant of Appointment from President Yusof Ishak as a Justice of the Peace (JP) on 27 October 1966. As a JP, Kim Wee's duties included safeguarding the welfare of prisoners. He was not above stepping into their jail cells and sitting on their beds to enquire after their welfare.  
*Source:* Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.



## The Splendid Gentleman



Kim Wee's first test as Singapore's High Commissioner to Malaysia was to oversee arrangements for Tun Abdul Razak Hussein's state visit to Singapore in November 1973. This official trip was the first by a Malaysian prime minister since Singapore and Malaysia parted ways in August 1965.  
*Source:* The Straits Times © SPH Media Limited. Reprinted with permission.



Singapore's founding prime minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew and his wife Madam Kwa Geok Choo with Kim Wee and Sok Hiong at a diplomatic function in Kuala Lumpur in the late 1970s.  
*Source:* Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.



In this rare shot from the 1970s are four of Singapore's five pioneering High Commissioners to Malaysia, taken when ties with KL were still fraught. (L-R) Kim Wee, Dr Chiang Hai Ding, Dr Maurice Baker and Mr Lien Ying Chow. Singapore's very first High Commissioner to Malaysia, Mr Ko Teck Kin, had died in 1966.

*Source:* Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.





Kim Wee and Malaysia's founding prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj. They had first met at a press conference in Singapore in 1961 and were soon bosom buddies until the Tunku's death in December 1990.

*Source:* Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.



Malaysian prime minister Tun Abdul Razak (seen here holding court on his state visit to Singapore in November 1973) granted Kim Wee the rare privilege of direct access to him. Kim Wee never took him up on it as he respected the protocols long established between Singaporean and Malaysian officials.

*Source:* The Straits Times © SPH Media Limited. Reprinted with permission.



Kim Wee with Tun Hussein Onn, Malaysia's third prime minister. The two gentlemen had similar personalities and shared the same values, which fostered a warm friendship that made Kim Wee's second term as Singapore's High Commissioner to Malaysia one of the calmest in the history of bilateral ties between both countries.

*Source:* Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.





This is Singapore's embassy in Japan, in the Tokyo ward of Minato-ku. Kim Wee and Sok Hiong had three and a half blissful years there from 1980 till 1984.

*Source:* Indra Bahadur Gurung.



Kim Wee and Sok Hiong hosted most of their social dos at the Singapore embassy in Tokyo. Their hugely popular evening soirees featured lavish buffets of satay, *mee siam*, chicken rice and other Singapore dishes cooked by Sok Hiong. Here she is preparing the food with her many helpers who, besides the embassy's staff included her Japanese friends and even wives of fellow diplomats.

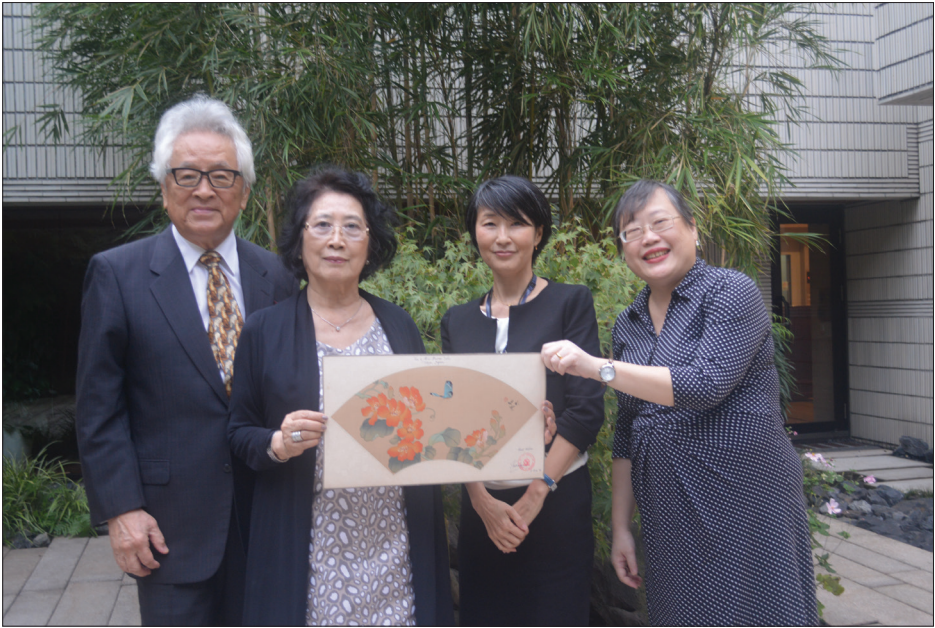
*Source:* Courtesy of Mrs Hiroko Ishii/The Ishii Family Album.





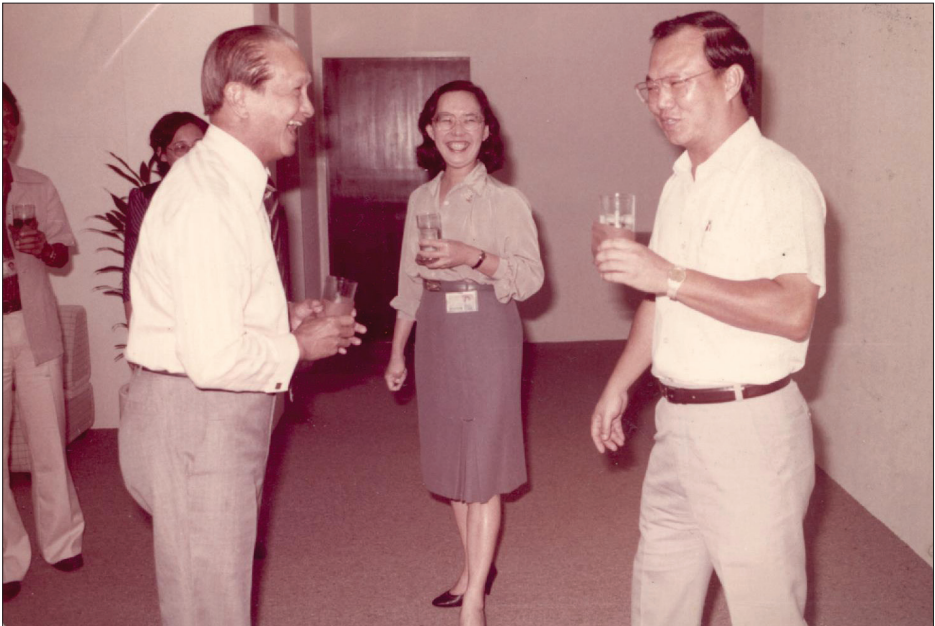
Kim Wee pounding mochi, or *mochi-tsuki*, in the Japanese ceremony held yearly on the cusp of each new year. He and Sok Hiong immersed themselves so wholeheartedly in the culture of Japan that they made lifelong friends of Japanese royals and salarypersons alike.

*Source:* Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.



Dr Masaru Ishii and his wife Hiroko in the grounds of Singapore's embassy in Tokyo with embassy translator Asako Harasawa and this book's author Cheong Suk-Wai, holding a fan that Kim Wee had gifted the Ishiis.

*Source: Indra Bahadur Gurung.*



Mrs Wong-Lee Siok Tin, the beloved deputy general manager and long-time Head of Broadcasting at the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC), got on like a house on fire with Kim Wee after he became chairman of SBC in May 1984. Here she is sharing a laugh with him and Mr Tan Chin Tiong, a former ambassador and Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as the Ministry of Home Affairs.

*Source: Ambassador Tan Chin Tiong.*



## The People's President



President and Mrs Wee in their living room at 25 Siglap Plain, which is still chock-a-block with family photographs, travel souvenirs and curios. They declined to move into the Istana because they prized home comforts and Kim Wee was, in any case, never one for the trappings of fame.

*Source:* Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.



President Wee at work in his office at the Istana. His private secretary Sng Boh Khim said his boss mastered his presidential duties within six months of being sworn in as Singapore's fourth head of state on 2 September 1985. To top it all, Kim Wee took it upon himself to write every speech he was to make.

*Source:* Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.





Kim Wee greeting Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong at the Istana in 1999. As President of Singapore, Kim Wee had enjoyed a warm and close working relationship with Mr Goh, who admired Kim Wee and Sok Hiong and paid a heartfelt tribute to them in Parliament in August 1993.

*Source:* Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) Collection, National Archives of Singapore (NAS). Reprinted with permission.



Singaporeans were awestruck at how dignified Kim Wee was on 7 March 1989 when his Taiwanese counterpart, President Lee Teng-hui, called on him at the Singapore General Hospital. Kim Wee was recovering there at the time after enduring major surgery twice within forty days.

*Source:* The Straits Times © SPH Media Limited. Reprinted with permission.



Kim Wee welcoming President Suharto to the Istana on 6 February 1987, some twenty years after they first met on 1 May 1966. In that maiden meeting, Mr Suharto had given Kim Wee the global scoop of Indonesia wanting to end *Konfrontasi*, or its three-year-long guerrilla war with Singapore and Malaysia.

Source: Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) Collection, National Archives of Singapore (NAS). Reprinted with permission.



Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Britain's longest-reigning monarch, and her consort, His Royal Highness Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, hosting President and Mrs Wee aboard her yacht the *Brittania*. On this same state visit to Singapore in October 1989, the Queen conferred on Kim Wee the rare honour of the Knight Grand Cross of the Honourable Order of the Bath.

Source: Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.





Kim Wee, who had been to every continent except Antarctica and South America, met Pope John Paul II three times, twice at the Vatican and once when, as President of Singapore, he invited the pontiff to the Istana in November 1986.

*Source:* Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) Collection, National Archives of Singapore (NAS). Reprinted with permission.



Kim Wee introduced to the presidency such official souvenirs as golf balls, beer mugs and coffee cups with the President of Singapore's signature on it. Here is one such souvenir, sporting Kim Wee's signature, which he gifted to his golf-mad pal Dr Masaru Ishii.

*Source:* Indra Bahadur Gurung.



Kim Wee's good friend Dr Masaru Ishii with another presidential souvenir from Kim Wee, a coffee mug which Dr Ishii still drinks from every morning.

*Source: Indra Bahadur Gurung.*



In August 1991, President and Mrs Wee were delighted to welcome Masaru and Hiroko Ishii, and their son Yasuhisa to the Istana. On this visit, Kim Wee made Yasuhisa promise to become a doctor like his father, a promise which the young man kept.

*Source: Dr Masaru Ishii/The Ishii Family Album.*





George H.W. Bush, the forty-first President of the United States of America, and his wife Barbara were guests of President and Mrs Wee in early January 1992. President Bush was the first sitting US president to make a state visit to Singapore.

*Source:* Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) Collection, National Archives of Singapore (NAS). Reprinted with permission.



Kim Wee in Beijing with Jiang Zemin, then President of the People's Republic of China, moments before Mr Jiang asked him for advice on a personal matter. This state visit by President Wee in October 1992 was the first by a Singapore head of state since the Communist Party of China took power in 1949.

*Source:* Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.



An elderly woman is seen here bantering with President Wee at Senior Citizens' Week, one of the many causes that he championed tirelessly during his presidency and well into his dotage. Kim Wee was a fund-raiser extraordinaire whom charity workers dubbed "the nation's No. 1 volunteer".  
*Source:* Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) Collection, National Archives of Singapore (NAS).  
 Reprinted with permission.



President and Mrs Wee riding Singapore's Mass Rapid Transport System (MRT) for the first time on 31 October 1989. The ground-breaking MRT was Singapore's first islandwide public train circuit.  
*Source:* Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) Collection, National Archives of Singapore (NAS).  
 Reprinted with permission.





President Wee inspects the Guard of Honour at the National Day Parade for the final time on 9 August 1993.

*Source:* Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.



This picture of Kim Wee waving to the crowd at his final National Day Parade as President of Singapore made the front pages of local newspapers when he stepped down from the presidency in 1993.

*Source:* Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.



President Wee bids a fond farewell to Singaporeans at the Istana on 1 September 1993. Looking on are the two prime ministers he advised, founding premier Mr Lee Kuan Yew and Mr Lee's successor Mr Goh Chok Tong.

*Source:* Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) Collection, National Archives of Singapore (NAS). Reprinted with permission.



Kim Wee (back to camera) welcoming Mr Lee Hsien Loong, Singapore's then Deputy Prime Minister and a grandnephew of Kim Wee's, and Mr Lee's wife Ho Ching, to the Wees' sixtieth wedding anniversary celebrations at the Shangri-La Hotel on 12 April 1996.

*Source:* Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.





Kim Wee and some stalwarts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at one of the many birthday gatherings that Kim Wee took care to organise every year for his good friend Mr S. Rajaratnam, Singapore's first foreign minister. Seated facing the camera (L-R) are Mr S.R. Nathan, Professor Tommy Koh, Mr Rajaratnam and Kim Wee. Seated with his back to the camera is Mr Chia Cheong Fook, a long-serving Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The two gentlemen who are standing behind them are Mr Teo Ban Hock and Dr V.K. Pillay.

*Source:* Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.



Vincent Wong was a former colleague of Kim Wee's at the Singapore embassy in Japan in the 1980s. He admired Kim Wee greatly, such that he volunteered his services as Kim Wee's general factotum from 1995 till 2005.

*Source:* Cheong Suk-Wai.



Kim Wee and Sok Hiong warmly welcoming their old friends Masahito, Prince Hitachi and his wife Hanako Tsugaru, Princess Hitachi, to a special reception for them at Raffles Hotel, Singapore. Prince Hitachi is the paternal uncle of Emperor Naruhito of Japan and his friendship with the Wees did much to ease them into Japan's tight social circles.

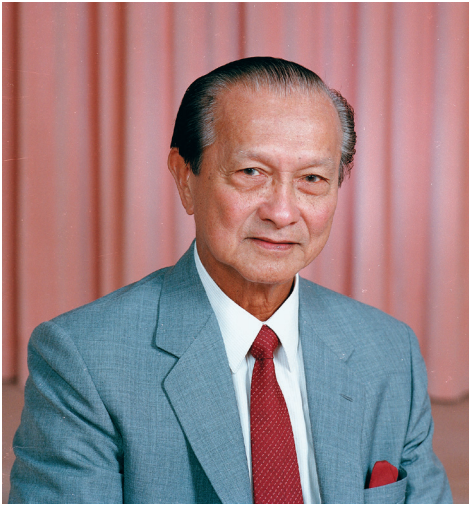
*Source:* Courtesy of Miss Wee Eng Hwa/The Wee Family Album.





This portrait of Kim Wee in his dotage is a Wee family favourite.

*Source:* The Straits Times © SPH Media Limited. Reprinted with permission.



These official portraits of Kim Wee and Sok Hiong were taken when he became the fourth President of the Republic of Singapore on 2 September 1985.

*Source:* Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) Collection, National Archives of Singapore (NAS). Reprinted with permission.





Kim Wee, with Sok Hiong at his side, in the presidential chair one last time on 2 September 1993.  
*Source:* Roger Syn.



After Sok Hiong died on 7 July 2018, her ashes were placed alongside her beloved husband's in Niche 0322 at Mandai Crematorium and Columbarium. Here they are, dancing cheek to cheek once more, flanked by two of Kim Wee's favourite sayings on the wisdom of contentment.

Source: Cheong Suk-Wai.