

# The guru of modern business

The founder of a huge corporation who started from a small grocery, as **Kwanchai Rungfapaisarn** writes, has groomed a generation of entrepreneurs

**D**r Tiam Chokwatana, founder of Saha Group, is widely recognised by most business people as the guru for his modern ethical management practices, and not just for establishing Thailand's largest trading and manufacturing conglomerate.

Tiam was responsible for creating successful businessmen in different fields. These include Pipat Paniangvait, director and president of Thai President Foods, Paiboon Damrongchaitham, chairman of GMM Grammy Plc, Boonyarith Mahamontri, managing director of Lion (Thailand) Ltd, and Santi Vilassakdanont, vice chairman of the Federation of Thai Industries (FTI).

Tiam was born in 1916 in Chakawat, Bangkok's traditional Chinese commercial area. Like other young Chinese in Thailand, Tiam helped his father run a small grocery called "Piew Ha" at Woeng Nakhon Kasem area.

He set up his own store "Hiap Seng Heng" in the Wat Koh area in Ratchawong in 1943. Tiam founded the Sahapathanapibul Co Ltd in 1953 from his Thon Buri-based shop "Hiap Seng Heng".

Sahapathanapibul has since grown from a small company with an annual sales of about Bt30 million and a staff of 50 to the big Saha Group which is now one of Thailand's largest business conglomerates with sales expected to reach nearly Bt100 billion this year, employing over 70,000 people.

Tiam passed away on June 29, 1991 at the age of 76.

Boonyarith Mahamontri, managing director of Lion (Thailand) Ltd, who worked with Tiam for almost 24 years said his marketing tomes were like Bibles constantly churned out by his boss.

He noted that one of them dealt with the challenge in surviving and thriving in consumer-product wars. It meant knowing how to adapt to a continually changing market environment and mastering the ever-evolving competitive dynamics.

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