



# Man jailed 4½ years for \$1.8m bank fraud

Fugitive had turned himself in after 20 years on the run

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CHAN Kwee Seng, 58, on the run from the law for 20 years, was tired of it all – tired of trying to eke out a living in Thailand under an assumed Thai name.

The man, who – with two accomplices – swindled a bank here of \$1.8 million in 1988, turned himself in last month. He did it on the advice of monks in a Thai temple, who told him to do it to clear his conscience.

Yesterday, he was packed off to jail for 4½ years. He had pleaded guilty to two charges of scheming with Teo Joo Huat, Wong Tham Sang and others unknown to cheat Mitsui Bank in Raffles Quay between July 20 and 23, 1988.

The group deceived a bank employee into releasing a cheque book linked to JVC Electronics' account in the bank, by presenting a false cheque book requisition slip.

With the cheque book, they withdrew two amounts – one for \$868,328 and the other, for \$938,238 – from JVC's account. The charge involving the bigger sum was considered during sentencing. Of Chan's accomplices, Wong has been dealt with, while Teo died in 2001.

Investigations showed that Chan and Teo devised the plan to cheat the bank in May 1988. Wong was roped in to register a company and open a current account with a bank.

Assistant Public Prosecutor Evelyn Jasmine Lee said Teo issued a cheque for \$868,328 to Chan for banking into the account Wong set up.

Of the \$1.8 million, Chan took \$300,000 and Wong, \$450,000. Teo kept the remaining lion's share.

Wong and Chan fled to Malaysia in July that year.

Chan's lawyer Choo Si Sen said his client subsequently lost half his money in a botched business deal in Hatyai. With what was left, he set up a hawker stall on the streets, selling bak kut teh, Hokkien noodles and curry.

Mr Choo added that his client had contracted tuberculosis and a bad case of diabetes and missed his family, especially his aged mother.

When he decided last July to come home for good, he took a bus to Johor Baru but fainted at the checkpoint. He was admitted into a hospital there, where his left leg was amputated.

Upon his discharge, he was moved to a welfare home in the southern Malaysian state, where he stayed until he was extradited here.

While at the home, he contacted one of the monks he met in the Thai temple. The Singaporean reverend, whose real name is Tan Tee Tee, was doing a stint as a monk when they met.

Mr Tan, a 56-year-old taxi driver here, made arrangements for Chan's surrender.

Mr Tan, who was in court yesterday, told reporters that Chan turned up at the temple last year and confided in him, whereupon he encouraged the fugitive to face up to his mistake and change.

He added: "I believe if you make a mistake, you have to own up. That is what I told him. You have to pay for it. You cannot run away and escape for the rest of your life."

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Chan, 58, who had his left leg amputated last year due to diabetes, surrendered after monks from a Thai temple advised him to do so. PHOTO: LIANHE WANBAO