

ZB BZ

報·報志

女王的新衣 EASTERN POETRY



本地字号最老规模最大的家族经营
酒商“福同美”第三代掌门人
洪金传花钱谨慎，致力打破
“富不过三代”的魔咒。

Hock Tong Bee, the oldest
and largest family-run alcohol
business in Singapore, is operated
by the founder's grandson
Clinton Ang, who mixes modern
management with traditional
values

外洋内中的酒商

BUILT TO LAST

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跟本地字号最老规模最大的家族经营酒商“福同美”(Hock Tong Bee)第三代掌门人洪金传安排采访，他尽管忙碌，仍迅速定下日期。任何公文包括合同到他桌上，他只花一分钟就处理掉，桌面干净。

43岁的洪金传接受《早报报志》专访时说：“做生意等于打24小时七天工，我做决定很快，也很灵活，员工经常看我的决定多快，他们就动得多快。当你掌握所有资料数据，能做不能做，其实只需一分钟决定。”

“福同美”由洪金传祖父洪赐臣创办于1938年，福建话意思是“福气连同美丽”，批发白米与酒类。1950年代印度尼西亚动乱，华人商店遭砸坏，客户无法偿还入口商品费用，公司受波及几乎破产。

第二代洪坤华1970年接管业务时，受一名波尔多酿酒师启发，转而将业务焦点放在葡萄酒与烈酒。当年，多数同行早已在竞争剧烈的环境下退场，仅有“福同美”还撑着，并渐渐壮大。

1990年代以后，跨国酒类大集团（如LVMH、Pernord Ricard）在本地开设分公司，拿走不少品牌独家代理权，竞争愈发严峻，“福同美”靠什么力量至今屹立不倒？

洪金传认为，尽管这是家族生意，但以长远为目标，靠专业精神运营。“福同美”2006年搬进芽笼7层楼的康顿大厦（Cornerstone Building），这是公司买下的永久地契房产，省去租金压力，也是公司仓库、储藏设施及批发陈列室。

公司也坚持引进他们自己喜欢或会喝的酒品，追求的不是一天的生意，而是回头的订单。洪金传说：“我们不相信的酒品就不会卖，比如我们不卖没标上年份的威士忌。”

公司规模大并不代表最好，相反的，洪金传认为，公司规模不大，反而更灵活，他说：“有时输掉一些合同没关系，但重要的是赢回其他。”

他认为，跨国企业总用同一种方法应对所有市场，无法感受在地人的情感与想法，而“福同美”酒品外销28个市场，其中，马来西亚、泰国、香港、澳门、中国大陆和台湾采取本土策略，与当地人合作投资，更能适应融入，其余市场则为代理商。公



洪金传开发属于自己的葡萄酒品牌Cornerstone, 推广适合亚洲人喝的酒。

司进入中国十年, 业务稳定, 洪金传说, 尽管公司是占有51%份额的大股东, 分利润时只拿49%, 因为他爸爸常说: “做生意要照顾合作伙伴的利益, 宁可给他们多赚一点。他们多赚, 你也多赚, 不要因小失大。”

2012年, 洪金传有感波尔多投资酒价会下跌, 将手上“大拉菲”“小拉菲”等投资酒清掉, 别人笑他, 结果2013年酒价下跌七成, 不少酒商被套牢, 轮到慢慢买回。他也先于市场, 量购威士忌。这也是父亲的教诲在起作用, 他说: “如果能赚一块钱, 那赚六七毛钱就好, 让别人也赚些。很多时候, 危机出现在赚那一块钱。”

洪金传是在1997年父亲第二次中风后, 与本来从事银行业的二哥洪金山一起加入家族企业。他在2001年升任业务发展经理, 2003年成为董事经理。

洪金山后因宗教信仰只留在公司董事局, 加上大哥与姐姐对家业不感兴趣, “福同美”仅靠洪金传掌舵, 凭其视野与魄力, 让公司成为亚太区主要批发代理酒商, 并开发属于自己的葡萄酒品牌Cornerstone, 推广适合亚洲人喝的酒。

“老字号”的意思是拥有多达3万个顾客档案数据, 通过日常酒宴、品尝会等活动累积而成。公司业务以批发代理为主, 主打网站生意, 以薄利多销长远争取客群, 每月网站营业额从50万到100万元不等。去年, 公司国内外营业额达2800万新元。过去三四年酒业逐年萎缩, 公司每年却有增长, 比市场表现来得好。

洪金传说, 以前公司只代理法国有信誉的葡萄酒品牌, 现在了解市场需求, 也供应其他品牌, 为消费者提供一站式产品与服务。公司独家代理40个葡萄酒与烈酒品牌(包括法国香槟Pol

Roger、意大利Antinori、新西兰Saint Clair), 在网站则销售2000多种酒品。

获羽毛球体育奖学金留学美国的洪金传予人美派洋式作风, 人人以为他是“香蕉”, 但他坦言, 他骨子里其实蛮传统的。他谨记外婆教诲, 不管是家庭还是集团, 一根筷子容易折断, 多筷难折, 团结一致很关键。

对于家族企业“富不过三代”的说法, 他也研究出怎样才能富过三代。答案是: 节俭。他从不买新车只买旧车, 出国乘经济舱, 酒店选四星。他说, 年轻一代没吃过苦, 不知道赚一块钱很辛苦, 赚一块, 花两块; 只要自我纪律, 做得正, 有责任感, 就不会滥用职权。他脚踏实地, 花每一分钱都很谨慎, 不外乎希望这盘家族生意能够代代相传。

家中最小的洪金传透露, 当初外婆替兄弟姐妹取华文名, 每人最后一个字连起来为“江山宝传”, 提醒他得饮水思源, 每天工作这么努力拼搏, 是为下一代留下更好的明天!

有想过三岁女儿洪醇佩将来继承家业吗? 洪金传说: “有孩子继承, 与孩子有能力继承是两件事, 能力不够, 孩子会扼杀家业。做生意是24小时七天的事情, 无法逃离的付出与承诺。我上班时是以职员身份来想, 然后才是董事经理、董事局主席、公司最大股东、家族成员。家族拥有的企业并非一定要家族成员来经营。”

他认为, 最成功的企业是董事经理“失业”, 平时授权下属让他们去决定经营事项, 不用事事征求上司意见。

若有得选, 洪金传会加入酒业吗? 答案是: “不会。这一行竞争太激烈, 营运成本不断上涨, 人手难请, 利润太薄了, 压力太大, 太辛苦了! 做消费者比较好。”

For someone who runs a \$28-million-a-year business, making an appointment with Clinton Ang was surprisingly easy. The man is famously efficient: Any document that lands on his desk – from media queries to contracts – is tackled in seconds.

Not long after our call, I found myself sitting in his office in his seven-storey Geylang warehouse. The place feels spare in contrast to the public image of Ang, who is a popular face at society gatherings as well as the third-generation helmsman of Hock Tong Bee, the oldest and largest family-run alcohol business in Singapore.

“To run a business is to work 24/7,” Ang explains of his working style. “I make decisions quickly and act swiftly, with a great deal of flexibility. When you have all the information and data on hand, you only need a minute to decide if something is worth doing or not.”

Hock Tong Bee, which means “good fortune and beauty” in Hokkien, was founded in 1938 by Ang’s grandfather Ang Soo Seng as a wholesaler of produce such as rice and alcohol. In the 1950s, with unrest in Indonesia and damage wrought to Chinese-owned shops, the business was pushed to the brink of bankruptcy as clients were unable to make good on their import purchases.

When his eldest son Aloysius Ang took over the business in 1970, he was inspired by a Bordeaux winemaker to shift the focus of the business to wine and liquor. By that time, a dozen or so of its industry peers had already disappeared from the scene. However, Hock Tong Bee managed to not just survive, but even thrive.

In the 1980s and 1990s, however, other local alcohol dealers began to appear on the scene and, in the post-1990s, with the opening of the local subsidiaries of multinational companies like LVMH and Pernod Ricard, many local dealers lost exclusive distributorships and competition grew intense. Yet Hock Tong Bee managed to hang on to its leadership position in the industry throughout.

Clinton Ang, the youngest of four children, thinks the secret of its success lies in how his forebears never ran Hock Tong Bee like a family business — a practice that he is bent on continuing. Merit, practicality and professionalism supercede blood ties and the kind of decision-making it brings; the company's vision is also crafted with long-term goals in mind.

At the same time, the Angs believe in selling only what they would drink themselves — no point pushing for flash sales and quick profits, because relationships are what they want to cultivate. "We do not sell products that we do not believe in. For instance, we do not sell whiskies with no age label," says Clinton Ang, on how whiskies with age statements offer better quality.

In 2006, Hock Tong Bee moved into the Cornerstone Building in Geylang. It was a freehold property purchased by the company, which relieved the firm of rental cost pressures. The building also serves as the company warehouse, storage facility, office and wholesale showroom, and there are no plans at the moment to expand.

The scale of a company can sometimes be its drawback, leading to a loss of agility. Conversely, Clinton Ang, 43, believes that a smaller company can react and adapt more quickly. He says: "It is all right to lose a couple of contracts sometimes; the important thing is to win the other contracts back."

Also, because multinational companies tend to use the same approach with all markets, they tend to connect less effectively with the local consumer, he says. On the other hand, Hock Tong Bee, which distributes in 28 overseas markets, has localised operations in markets such as Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Macau, China and Taiwan by forming joint ventures with local partners, which leads to better relationship-building and integration with each of these markets, he adds.

In the 10 years that Hock Tong Bee has been in the China market, it has seen steady business. According to him, although the company is a 51 per cent majority stakeholder in the Chinese venture, it takes only 49 per cent of the profit dividends as his father had often advised: "When we do business, we must take care of our partners' interests. It's better for them to take a bigger slice of the profit, because when they make more, you make more too. Do not be penny wise, pound foolish."

In 2012, Clinton Ang sensed that there would be a dip in the value of Bordeaux wine and began to liquidate the company's investments in wines such

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as the Chateau Lafite Rothschild and the Carruades de Lafite, in a move that left his competitors puzzled. A year later, wine prices fell by 70 per cent and Hock Tong Bee bought the wines back but not at rock-bottom prices. Once again, he was heeding his father's words: "If you can earn a dollar, earning 60 or 70 cents would be enough. Allow others to make some money too."

Clinton Ang joined the family business with his second brother Norman after his father suffered a second stroke in 1997. He was promoted to business development manager in 2001 and managing director in 2003.

Norman Ang later left the business for a religious calling while remaining on the board of directors. As his eldest brother and sister did not have an interest in the business, Clinton Ang was left to manage Hock Tong Bee. Thanks to his vision and energy, the company has become a major wine distributor in the Asia-Pacific and has also developed its own brand of wine, Cornerstone, a range developed to suit the Asian palate.

This heritage brand continues to practise the business strategy of its founder, believing in thin margins and high volumes. It has a database of over 30,000 customer files collected mostly at wine tastings and dinners. The company focuses on the wholesale and distribution business and retails through its e-commerce site, which has monthly turnover of between \$500,000 and \$1 million. Last year, the company's combined revenue from its Singapore and overseas businesses reached \$28 million. Over the last three to four years, the alcohol market has been shrinking, yet Hock Tong Bee has outperformed the market with its growing numbers.

According to Clinton Ang, the company used to deal only in top-end French wines but has since extended its range to less pricey options in response to customer demand. The company is the exclusive dealer of 40 wine and liquor brands (including French champagne brand Pol Roger, Antinori from Italy and Saint Clair from New Zealand), offering over 2,000 products on its website.

Clinton Ang, a former Anglo-Chinese School boy who was so good at badminton, he won a sports scholarship to study in Arizona State University in the United States, comes across as the idiomatic "banana" — yellow (Chinese) on the outside but white (Western) at the core — but he begs to differ. Many of his values are highly traditional, he says, including a lesson his late maternal grandmother had taught him: A single chopstick can be easily broken into two while it would be far harder to do the same with a bunch of chopsticks. The moral of the story? Unity is key, whether at home

or when doing business.

As for the common Chinese saying that wealth cannot endure beyond three generations in a family, he has also looked into how to get past this "curse", as he calls it. His answer? Thrift. He buys only second-hand cars, flies economy when he travels and stays in four-star hotels. According to him, the saying exists because people who benefit from the hard work of their elders do not know just how hard making money can be and end up being unbridled in their extravagance. He figured out very early in life that self-discipline, integrity and a sense of responsibility are necessary to ensure that there is no abuse of power and wealth in the family.

He reveals that when his maternal grandmother came up with Chinese names for him and his three siblings, she had chosen the phrase "jiangshan baochuan" (may the family assets and treasures be preserved and passed down the generations) for use in the last characters of each of their names. The purpose was to remind them to be mindful of the source of their fortune and that the objective of working hard every day is to create an even better future for the family. Ang's character is the fourth in the chain — "chuan" — the one dictating that the fortunes be handed down smoothly.

Could we infer then, that his three-year-old daughter Cora will be groomed to take over the family business one day? No, he insists in his down-to-earth manner. "To have a family successor and to have a capable family successor are two different things. An incapable successor will only tank the family business. Doing business is a 24/7 affair, a commitment and price that one cannot escape from. When I come to work, I think from the perspective of an employee, and then in the shoes of the managing director, board chairman, major shareholder and family member. A family-owned business does not necessarily have to be run by a family member."

Although his sales team is now making three to four times more than what they used to five years ago, he feels the enterprise still needs more work on his part. A firm is successful when its managing director is "unemployed", that is, when his subordinates are empowered enough to make everyday management decisions without having to check in with him every step of the way.

Given a choice, would he join the alcohol business? "No," he replies with certainty. "This line is too competitive and costs are constantly on the rise while the margins are just too thin. It's just too stressful and difficult. It's better to be a consumer."