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SINGAPORE *Revisited*

WINDOWS *into* History

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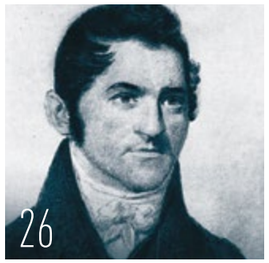

NL NOTES

Director's Note

The Italian philosopher George Santayana (1863–1952) underlined the value of memory when he wrote, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it". History is littered with enough examples of follies being repeated either due to ignorance or because mankind seems incapable of learning from history. By the same token, there are some things worth remembering (and reliving) because of the pleasant memories they recall.

This issue of *BiblioAsia* – aptly themed "Singapore Revisited" – remembers illustrious (and sometimes colourful) personalities as well as significant places and momentous events that have shaped the course of our history.

Many Singaporeans are familiar with Tan Tock Seng, whose legacy lives on in a hospital named after him, but few would know of the Danish missionary Claudius Henry Thomsen, who produced some of the earliest Malay-language publications in Singapore and Malaya. Sue-Ann Chia recounts the rags-to-riches story of her distinguished ancestor (she traces her lineage to Tan Tock Seng), while Bonny Tan documents the life of the Danish printer.

The dance hostesses from the cabarets of New World, Great World and Happy World amusement parks were more famous for their risqué stage shows than their works of charity. Adeline Foo tells us about the "lancing girls" who set up a free school for impoverished children in post-war Geylang.

Many of the stained glass windows that adorn churches in Singapore were produced in Belgium and France between 1885 and 1912. Recently discovered drawings, or "cartoons", in a Belgian archive help fill gaps in the history of stained glass windows in Singapore, according to Yeo Kang Shua and Swati Chandgadkar.

The former NCO Club and the Raffles Hotel on Beach Road are two iconic structures that were built for different purposes. The former – now conserved as part of the South Beach development – was once a favourite off-duty spot for soldiers, as Francis Dorai tells us. The fabled Raffles Hotel has hosted many lavish parties since its opening in 1887. Jessie Yak previews a selection of hotel menu cards that reside in the National Library's Rare Materials Collection.

Fashion journalists John de Souza, Cat Ong and Tom Rao describe Singapore's style scene in the 1960s, a time when bell bottoms, hot pants, maxi dresses and chunky platform shoes reigned, in this extract from a newly published book entitled *Fashion Most Wanted*.

In the 1970s, Singapore students had to learn the painstaking way of writing Chinese script in its proper form. Ho Phang Pow describes a textbook series from 1936 that has been preserved in the collections of the National Library.

Finally, as we mark the 75th anniversary of the Fall of Singapore on 15 February 2017, we remember those who perished during the dark days of the Japanese Occupation. Goh Sin Tub's short story "The Sook Ching" is a visceral first-hand account of how he escaped the mass executions that took place in the days following the British surrender.

Still on the subject of war, Michelle Heng reveals the touching story of two brother poets, Teo Kah Leng and Teo Poh Leng, whose literary works were only recently discovered. Poh Leng was killed in the Sook Ching massacres, while Kah Leng survived to pen a poignant poem in remembrance of his younger brother.

The Fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942 and the horrific events that followed in its wake are documented in the revamped "Syonan Gallery: War and its Legacies", which opens at the Former Ford Factory on 15 February 2017. The atrocities unleashed by the war is a painful reminder why such an event must never happen again.

On a much lighter note, do make time to visit the exhibition, "Script & Stage: Theatre in Singapore from the 50s to 80s", held at levels 7 and 8 of the National Library Building until 26 March 2017. Also ongoing is an exhibition on the renowned artist Tan Swie Hian in "Anatomy of a Free Mind: Tan Swie Hian's Notebooks and Creations" at level 10.

We hope you enjoy reading this edition of *BiblioAsia*.

Mrs Wai Yin Pryke
Director
National Library

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On the cover:
Stained glass windows found in the side chapels at the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (today repurposed as a commercial complex known as CHIJMES) at the corner of Victoria Street and Bras Basah Road. *Courtesy of Swati Chandgadkar.*

Errata:
In the article "Time-Honoured Temple Design", published in *BiblioAsia*, Vol. 12, Iss. 3, Oct–Dec 2016, we incorrectly stated that the temple's three-tiered *gopuram* (or tower) was erected in 1903. According to photographic records, the three-tiered tower existed as early as 1861. The online edition has been revised accordingly. We apologise for this error.

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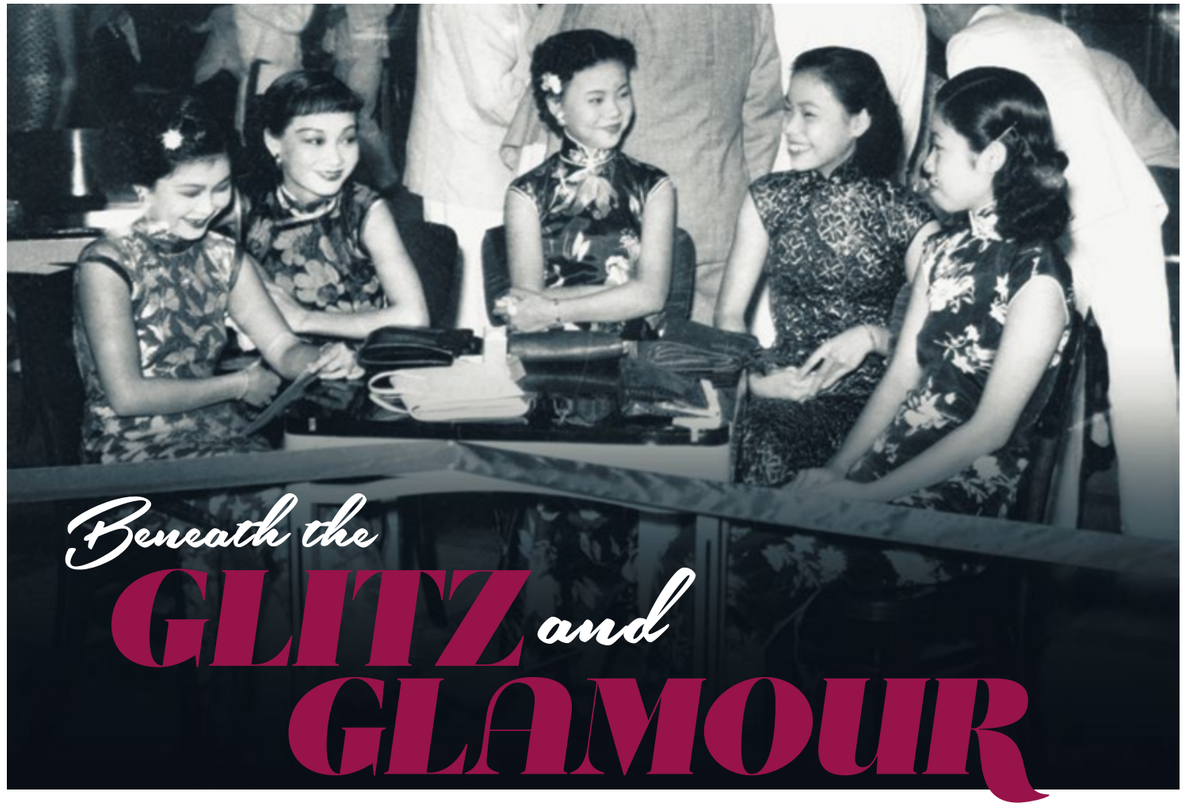

Beneath the GLITZ and GLAMOUR

THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE "LANCING" GIRLS

These cabaret girls were better known for their risqué stage shows, but some also donated generously to charity. **Adeline Foo** uncovers these women with hearts of gold.

Who were the so-called "lancing" girls of yesteryear?[1] They were the glamorous dance hostesses from the cabarets of the "Big Three" worlds of entertainment in Singapore – New World, Great World and Happy World (later renamed Gay World) – who made a living from "lancing", a local mispronunciation of "dancing".

From the 1920s to 60s, the "Big Three" amusement parks grew in tandem with Singapore's development, rising from humble wooden shacks and makeshift kiosks to sophisticated playgrounds offering restaurants, cinemas, cabarets, orchestras and carnival rides as well as entertainment such as Malay *bangsawan*, Chinese opera, boxing matches, circus acts and Western-style vaudeville shows. The parks were a huge part of people's lives, and offered something for everyone in the family. In its heyday, some 50,000 people could easily throng an amusement park in a single night.[2]

By the late 1960s, however, as television and other forms of entertainment such as shopping malls, cinemas and bowling alleys became more widespread in Singapore, these amusement parks went out of business. The New World site at Jalan Besar is occupied today by City Square Mall, while the Great World site along Kim Seng Road was redeveloped into the sprawling Great World City shopping mall and residences. The Gay World site in Geylang has been zoned for residential projects and is presently unoccupied.

Adeline Foo, an adjunct lecturer at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, is the author of *The Diary of Amos Lee* series of children's books. She is currently completing her first non-fiction book, tracing the lives of women who worked in the cabarets in Singapore between the 1930s and 60s. Her book titled *The 'Lancing Girls' of a Happy World*, published by Ethos Books, will be released in March 2017.

Dancers by Night, Benefactors by Day

People whom I spoke to about the cabaret life would mention how the "lancing girls" were the main draw for the men. For as little as a dollar for a set of three dance coupons, male customers could take the girl of their choice for a spin on the dance floor. But, invariably, the discussion would turn to the most famous "lancing" girl of all time: Rose Chan, a former beauty queen and striptease dancer who joined Happy World Cabaret in 1942. When asked what was it about Chan that was so memorable, many would say it was her audacity to strip completely on stage, or to shock audiences by wrestling with a live python in her acts.

Not many people were aware that Chan, like other "lancing" girls of that era, was involved in charity work. Perhaps it was an attempt to salvage some measure of self-respect or to assuage a sense of guilt, or maybe it was borne out of genuine sympathy for the destitute as many of the cabaret girls themselves came from poor or dysfunctional families. A pretty face and a comely figure was all that women like Chan could claim. But with the money they earned in the cabaret, they could make the lives of the downtrodden slightly better.

On 27 August 1953, *The Singapore Free Press* newspaper reported that the princely sum of $13,000 had been raised by the Singapore Dance Hostesses' Association in aid of the Nanyang University building fund.[3] This feat was achieved through several charity night performances that had been staged at various cabarets. Unbeknown to many, Chan was part of the efforts to help raise this money. She wasn't just the "Queen of Striptease" who titillated men on stage; she was equally generous in donating to various charities that cared for children, old folks, tuberculosis patients and the blind.

Rose Chan wasn't the only "charity queen" from the cabaret world. There were two other women from the Happy World cabaret who worked tirelessly to start a free school for children. These women became the founders of the Happy School in Geylang.

A Happy School for Children

In 1946, cabaret girls from Happy World answered the call by one of its "big sisters", Madam He Yan Na, to donate money to set up a Chinese medium school in Singapore. Madam He, the chairperson of the Happy World Dance Troupe (which later became the Happy Opera Society), was deeply troubled by the large number of idle children roaming the streets of Geylang. These were the unfortunate children who had their education interrupted by World War II.

Madam He roped in her fellow dance hostesses to set up the school. She became the chairperson of the school's board of governors, while another dancer, Madam Xu Qian Hong, took on the role of accounts head. Other girls from the Happy Opera Society became board members.

Determined that the children should receive a free education, Madam He insisted that no school fees would be collected from the families. Whatever books and stationery the children needed were also given free. The first enrolment in 1946 attracted about 90 students. Operating out of a rented shophouse at Lorong 14, Madam He named the school Happy Charity School, in an obvious nod to the most popular landmark in Geylang then – the Happy World amusement park.[4]

The first principal of the school was Wong Guo Liang, a well-known calligrapher. When Wong first met Madam He at the interview for the position, he remembered being struck by her charisma and generosity. Despite the irony of her situation, she advised him to set a good example as the principal and live up to the responsibility of being a role model for his charges. More importantly, he should never ever step into the Happy World Cabaret.

Madam He related how her impoverished past and the lost opportunity to be educated made her even more determined to help destitute children. She was unshakable in her view that a good education was the key to a better life.[5]

In an interview published in the Chinese daily *Nanyang Siang Pau*, Madam He was painfully aware of how society looked down on women like her: "The profession of dancing girls is seen as inferior. If society can abandon its prejudice and be rational, they would understand that they have misunderstood the art of dancing. They are being cruel to cabaret girls due to their ignorance. If dancing is corrupted, then this negative image comes not from

(Facing page) A photo of five dance hostesses taken inside a cabaret in the 1930s. The women are dressed in figure-hugging *cheongsams* with daring side slits that showed off their legs. They were an obvious attraction for men with their artfully applied makeup and coiffured hair-dos. *Courtesy of Mr and Mrs Lee Kip Lee.*
(Right) The most famous "lancing" girl of all time was Rose Chan, a former beauty queen and striptease dancer, who joined the Happy World Cabaret in 1942. She was known for her daring moves on stage that included wrestling with a slithering python. *All rights reserved, Rajendra, C. (2013). No Bed of Roses: The Rose Chan Story. Singapore Marshall Cavendish.*
(Below) Eurasian and Chinese dance hostesses of the New World Cabaret posing for this photo in the 1930s. *Courtesy of Mr and Mrs Lee Kip Lee.*

Students from The Happy School posing for this group photo taken in 1961. *All rights reserved, 潘星华.(主编).(2014).《消失的华校: 国家永远的资产》. 新加坡: 华校校友会联合会出版*

the dancers, but the vice that tarnishes the environment. To punish and shame the girls is ridiculous."[6]

The second founder of Happy Charity School, Madam Xu Qian Hong, was a classic Cantonese beauty with a heart of gold. An article in the *Nanyang Siang Pau*, dated 10 June 1947, described her as "enchanting" and "energetic" by turns. Madam Xu became a cabaret girl at 16, having been forced by circumstances to help her father support her younger siblings after her mother died. She only had two years of Chinese education before she joined the dancing profession. As a widely sought after cabaret girl, Madam Xu earned about $1,000 a month, and from out of her pocket she would donate about half of her salary each month to the school.[7]

What these two women and their comrades did to keep children off the streets and give them a shot at a better life was truly admirable. The shortage of schools in the post-World War II period was even more critical compared with the situation before the war. An article in *The Straits Times* on 23 November 1947 declared that "Singapore Needs More Schools".

The Japanese Occupation of Singapore between 15 February 1942 and 12 September 1945 had displaced education and many other essential services, and by 1947, there were approximately 90,000 children of school-going age.[8] There was serious overcrowding at schools, insufficient facilities and a severe shortage of teachers. While the situation in English schools was bad, it was even worse in Chinese medium schools.

During the Occupation, Chinese schoolteachers had been systematically targeted in the Sook Ching massacres,[9] and many were taken away and executed by Japanese soldiers. Chinese books were also not spared. It was estimated that some 200,000 books were destroyed by the Japanese during this period.[10]

In the face of this dire situation, Madam He and Madam Xu became actively involved in the running of Happy Charity School while juggling with their evening jobs at the cabaret. Faced with pressing challenges such as rising operational costs and the need to recruit more teachers. The school decided in January 1950 to impose a monthly school fee of between $2.50 and $3.50 per student. Following this move, the word "Charity" was dropped from the school's name to reflect its new status, and it was renamed The Happy School.[11]

The Happy School Runs its Course

For reasons that are not known, the two women founders subsequently left the school after 1950. The Happy School continued operating out of its Geylang location until 1979. The school relocated once in 1947, from No. 24 in Lorong 14 to Nos. 67 and 69, after it received financial help from George Lee, the owner of Happy World amusement park.

In 1946, The Happy School started with 90 students. By 1959, its enrolment had ballooned to about 600 students. Due to insufficient space at its Geylang premises, lessons were conducted out of two rented classrooms at the Mountbatten Community Centre.[12]

Unfortunately, in the 1960s and 70s, the school witnessed a similar trend seen across all Chinese medium schools in Singapore. As Singapore's economy shifted towards industralisation and English became recognised as the de facto working language, more and more parents decided to send their children to English stream schools. Dwindling student numbers at Chinese medium schools islandwide eventually sounded the death knell for the Happy School.

In 1979, Happy School announced its closure. By that time, the school had amassed some $400,000 in savings, which the board donated to 10 Chinese schools and grassroots organisations.[13] After 33 years, another chapter was closed in the history of free schools for children in Singapore.

The origins of the Happy Charity School may have been controversial – some parents may have frowned upon a school financed and run by cabaret girls – but the good intentions of these women cannot be denied. If not for Madam He and Madam Xu, many destitute children would not have received their primary school education in post-war Singapore.

Jobs for Women in the 1940s and 50s

In my research, I was curious about alternative employment opportunities available to women between the 1940s and 50s when cabaret work was seen as an attractive job. A quick search in the "Job Advertisements" page of local newspapers in 1948 listed several clerical positions available at the National Registration Office of the colonial government (the work entailed issuing paper identity cards to citizens).

Interestingly, a large number of women were also employed as barbers. A *Straits Times* article on 23 October 1949 reported that an estimated one-third of some 2,000 Chinese barbers in Singapore at the time were young women. It is likely that many women entered the trade because other jobs were hard to come by. Chinese men preferred to have their hair cut by women barbers because they were known to be careful and attentive.

A one-hour job that included a haircut, shampoo, shave and ear cleaning cost $2. The average salary for women barbers at these Chinese hairdressing saloons was $100 a month. In fact, women had been working as barbers even before the war.[14] One lady barber was reported as saying that "men like to be attended by girls because we are more gentle with them. We talk and entertain them while doing our work, and even make them laugh sometimes."[15]

The limited jobs for women in the 1950s included seamstresses, sales assistants, tour guides, cabaret singers and restaurant waitresses. Many also took to working privately as domestic servants and washerwomen. If a girl was educated, there were more options available to her, such as an office secretary or a private tutor. But many of these jobs didn't pay as well as that of a cabaret girl. So if a woman was good looking and money was a motivation, dancing in the cabarets provided a means to quick and easy money. A cabaret girl could earn anything between $200 and $1,000 a month. In comparison, a senior clerk working in the government back in 1952 would only earn $280 a month.[16] Clearly, some women chose to work in the cabaret as dancing girls because it paid well and few employment opportunities were open to them.

The Glitz and Glamour of "Lancing" Girls

Looking good and well-groomed was part and parcel of the job of a "lancing" girl. Advertisements and pictures from newspapers published during the heyday of these cabarets provide a peek into the fashion sense of the show girls.

The cabaret girls were probably influenced by fashion trends gleaned from entertainment magazines. Like most women in Singapore, they would naturally look towards Shanghai and Hong Kong for inspiration, as these cities were acknowledged as leading fashion capitals of the time.

What did Chinese women wear in the 1920s? The *samfoo* (or *samfu*) was the preferred casual attire, comprising a cotton short-sleeved blouse with a Mandarin collar and frog-buttons, and a matching pair of trousers in the same material. By the 1930s, however, wealthy Chinese women in the upper social classes had turned to the *cheongsam* (which means "long dress" in Cantonese), also known as *qipao* in Mandarin, as their preferred dress.

This adoption of the *cheongsam* soon cut across all segments of the Chinese population, with the elegant and form-fitting dress worn as a symbol of strong feminine expression. The cabaret girls were no different. In their figure-hugging *cheongsam* with daring side slits that showed off their legs, they were a sight to behold with their artfully applied makeup and coiffured hair-dos. After World War II, more women turned to wearing Western clothes, but there were those who remained faithful to the traditional *cheongsam*, and who now wore it with a tighter fit.

Were these attractive women working in the cabaret taken advantage of? Although there was an assumption of a seamier side to the cabaret business, most of the people I interviewed had mostly positive things to say about their experience. A former cabaret woman whom I interviewed, Madam Ong Swee Neo, shared: "I was 12 years old when my mother brought me into the cabaret. All I had to do was sit, chat and dance. I was big sized. No one could tell my real age. Customers were kind. They never forced me to drink hard liquor. I would only drink Green Spot or Red Lion orange crush."

Madam Ong eventually left the cabaret three years later to get married. I asked her if she missed the glitzy world, she said no: "We were poor, I had little education, my mother was also a cabaret girl. It was a good job that paid well. It was something I would never forget."[17]

Johnny Chia, in his 60s, a former singer at the Happy World Cabaret whom I interviewed, recalled the cabaret girls he had known and respected: "They were so beautiful in their *cheongsams*! Many of them were natural beauties who wore little makeup. They loved music and they loved dancing. It doesn't matter what I was singing, whether it was Western, Cantonese or Baba Malay songs, they would know the steps."[18]

From the late 1960s to 70s, the cabaret, or "nite clubs" that they had evolved into, was still the preferred place of entertainment for the affluent. Thomas Wong, a master tailor and owner of The Prestigious boutique (with shops in Boat Quay and Yishun today) started off as an apprentice at West End Tailors in High Street in 1963 when he was just 16 years old.

His tailoring career in the subsequent years saw him working at various upmarket

(Right) The cabarets at the amusement parks held popularity contests to attract the crowds. A book of four tickets for $1 entitled the purchaser to cast one vote. The cabaret girl who received the most number of votes was declared the winner. Lim Kim Geok (pictured here) was the winner of a popularity contest held at the Great World Cabaret in June 1937. *The Straits Times, 10 June 1937, p. 12.*

(Below) A New World Cabaret advertisement in the 28 September 1940 edition of *The Straits Times* announcing the arrival of cabaret girl Poh Seow Chan from Hong Kong's leading cabaret, Dance Palace. *The Straits Times, 28 September 1940, p. 2.*

Chinese "Taxi-Dancers" Most Popular.

Over $17,000 Spent On Voting Contest.

OVER $17,000 was spent on votes recorded in the taxi-dancer popularity contest at the Great World Cabaret.

That is an average of nearly $2,500 a night during the week in which voting took place. Each purchaser of a $1 book of four tickets was entitled to one vote.

Nine of the first 10 places in the competition went to Chinese dance hostesses.

The winner was Lim Kim Geok, No. 100, who had a big margin of votes over any of the other competitors. Next came Mimi Low, No. 128; Y. C. Loon, No. 106; Annie Sim, No. 109; Arnie Ang, No. 22; Tang Lai Lee, No. 104; Lum Wan Sow, No. 34; Joyce Price, No. 70; Lily Wong, No. 74; Ivy Tan, No. 55.

Besides her share from dance coupons, the winner will receive a valuable prize. Awards will also be made to other place-getters.

Where Fiction Mirrors Life

Singapore's quest towards modernity in the aftermath of World War II (1942–45) and its nation-building years was underpinned by a quick succession of steel-and-glass skyscrapers and fancy shopping malls. But scratch beneath the surface and a very different side of Singapore emerges – reflected in the lives and loves of several characters from fiction who struggled to make a living in the city's seamier entertainment spots. A selection of significant works in the National Library's collection tell an interesting tale of life in a bygone era.

Penned by the late Lim Chor Pee (1936–2006), the plays *Mimi Fan* (1962) and *A White Rose at Midnight* (1964) centre on highly-educated male protagonists entangled in relationships with nightclub ladies.[19] Set against the backdrop of a modernising Singapore, the plays explore an emerging Singaporean identity during the heady era of socio-political changes in the 1960s.

First staged in 1962 at the Cultural Centre (later renamed Drama Centre), *Mimi Fan*, in particular, broke new ground as it was uncommon then for non-expatriate-produced plays to be staged in Singapore.[20] Lim wanted his play to be as realistic as possible with colloquialisms that Singaporeans could identify with.[21] He highlighted the significance of breaking away from the mould of "Western drawing-room drama" in a 1964 article for *Tumasek* journal, declaring that, "...A national theatre cannot hope to survive if it keeps on staging foreign plays."[22]

The eponymous protagonist from *Mimi Fan*, a free-spirited and independent teenage bar girl, eventually leaves her lover, Chan Fei-Loong, an overseas English-educated Singaporean who has returned home to work, at a time when most women were expected to find value and meaning through their roles as wives and mothers.

Another memorable character who existed on the periphery of polite society is Lucy, the Singaporean bar girl who has an affair with the protagonist Kwang Meng in the late pioneer writer Goh Poh Seng's novel *If We Dream Too Long* (1972).[23]

Writer and literary critic Kirpal Singh notes that Singapore's first post-independence English novel[24] was written "around the time Singapore was starting to get – and assert – a sense of itself as a nation" and projected an unnerving anxiety especially as "... Merger with Malaysia had come and gone and left in its wake a stark reality which many were trying to analyse, understand and even project."[25] Amidst this gnawing unease, the struggling protagonist found some degree of solace, albeit shortlived, in the arms of his paramour, Lucy, who earns a living entertaining men at Paradise Bar.

Mimi Fan, a seductive quest for love, escapism and courage, was a trail-blazer in 1960s Singapore at a time when Western "drawing room dramas" took precedence over homegrown productions. Pictured here are Chan Fei-Loong, played by Lim Teong Quee, and Mimi Fan, played by then second-year law student Annie Chin. *All rights reserved, Lim, C.P. (2012). Mimi Fan. Singapore: Epigram.*

But like the proverbial fallen woman with a heart-of-gold, Lucy chooses to leave Kwang Meng despite a keen affection for him as she fears the judgment of a less-than-forgiving society. In a poignant scene where Lucy rebuffs Kwang Meng's offer of marriage, she echoes the social mores of a largely conservative society when she exclaims "...I know you men. You will never forget about my past. You say you can, but I know that you can never forget. You will always blame me. Deep, deep inside."

These seminal works – Lim's two plays are widely seen as the first conscious attempts to create a Singaporean theatre in English, and Goh's debut novel was also a first in post-independence Singapore – reflect the plight of working-class women who were plying their trade in shady nightspots. Were these women a collective reflection of the "quietly desperate" lives plagued by restless anxiety and uncertainty in a nation that was at the time treading a rocky path to true independence?

Michelle Heng is a Literary Arts Librarian at the National Library, Singapore. She is a regular contributor to *BiblioAsia* and has edited publications including *Edwin Thumboo – Time-travelling: A Selected Annotated Bibliography* (2012) and *Selected Poems of Goh Poh Seng* (2013).

shops. He recalls clients from Malaysia and Indonesia, which included businessmen as well as members of the political elite, who would come to him to have their suits tailored. For after-dinner entertainment, his customers would frequent two popular haunts, the Flamingo Nite Club at Great World amusement park and the Golden Million Nite Club at Peninsula Hotel. "It was all respectable dancing. Everyone was out to have fun and relaxation. The women were in dresses, and my customers in suit and tie."[26]

The Cabaret is Enshrined as a Musical

The cabaret isn't just something only older Singaporeans remember. Younger Singaporeans were given a peek into the scene when *Beauty World*, Singapore's first English musical, was staged as part of the Singapore Arts Festival in 1988. Writer Michael Chiang, songwriter Dick Lee, choreographer Mohd Najip Ali and director Ong Keng Sen would continue to headline the local performing arts scene for several decades afterwards. The cast featured actors such as Claire Wong, Ivan Heng and Jacinta Abisheganaden, who would all become familiar names in Singapore's theatre fraternity.

Set in the 1960s, *Beauty World* tells the story of a small-town Malaysian girl, Ivy Chan Poh Choo from Batu Pahat, who travels to Singapore to uncover the mystery of her parentage. Her only clue to finding her father is a jade locket inscribed with the words "Beauty World", which leads her to join the seedy cabaret where most of the action unveils. Within the complex world of scheming cabaret girls and lascivious men, Ivy has to find her feet and still remain true to her boyfriend Frankie.

The cabaret inspiration for the musical was replete with music and lyrics reminiscent of the *cha-cha-cha* dance era. When asked why he set the story in a cabaret, Michael Chiang explained that the cabaret was "something nostalgic that was also unique to Singapore." Ong Keng Sen in a commentary published in *Private Parts and Other Play Things: A Collection of Popular Singapore Comedies* said, "... Michael's plays are charged with a raw community energy and pride which reverberates in the theatre. His work crosses language and racial boundaries by celebrating our Singaporeanness rather than by dividing us."[27]

The cabaret of yesteryear Singapore is indeed a celebration of our unique history and identity. The cabaret was a product of its time, and its indelible "Singaporeanness" was evident from the lives of the women whom I was able to research and interview. All of my interviewees spoke of the past with a certain whimsical longing; even the former cabaret women whose lives had been scarred by pain and struggle had shared their bittersweet stories with quiet pride.

When asked if there was anything in their past they wished they had done differently, all the replies were negative. If these "lancing" girls had a chance to relive their lives all over again, they wouldn't change a thing. In spite of the underlying exploitation of women's bodies and the seamier side of cabaret life, theirs were inspiring stories of faith, hope and, as we now know, charity. ♦

A TheatreWorks production of Beauty World directed by Ong Keng Sen. It was first staged by TheatreWorks in 1988 and toured Japan in 1992. *Courtesy of TheatreWorks (S) Ltd.*

Adeline Foo was awarded the National Library's Lee Kong Chian Research Fellowship in February 2016. This article is the condensed version of her research paper submitted as part of the fellowship.

Notes

1 Foo, A. (2016, April 30). The 'lancing' girls from a glitzy world. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from Factiva.
2 Pleasure domes of the past. (1987, July 8). *The Straits Times*, p. 2. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
3 Club aids cabaret girls. (1953, August 27). *The Singapore Free Press*, p. 5. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
4 王振春. (1990).《根的系列之二》(p. 153). 新加坡: 胜友书局. Call no.: Chinese RCLOS 959.57 WZC.
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6 舞国的一朵青春何燕娜. (1947, January 25).《南洋商报》[*Nanyang Siang Pau*], p. 12. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
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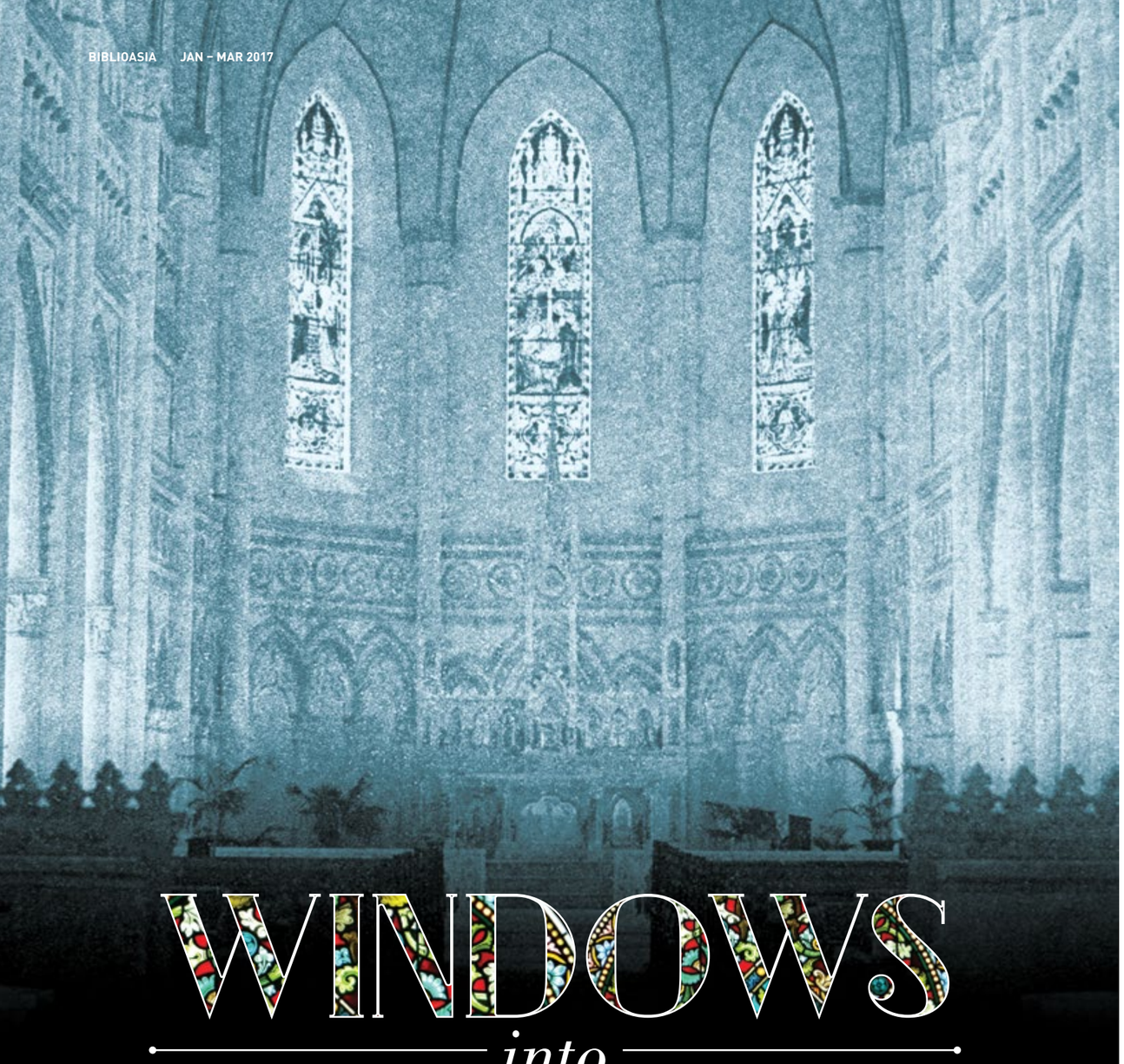


WINDOWS *into* History

Drawings discovered in a Belgian archive help fill gaps in the history of stained glass windows in Singapore. **Yeo Kang Shua** and **Swati Chandgadkar** reveal their findings.

Dr Yeo Kang Shua is an Assistant Professor at the Singapore University of Technology and Design, and holds the inaugural Hokkien Foundation Career Professorship in Architectural Conservation.

Swati Chandgadkar is a stained glass conservator from Mumbai, India. She currently resides in Singapore.

Light can be soft, quiet, or at times dramatic, depending on the time of the day and year. Since time immemorial, builders have used architecture to modulate natural light and create emotional – and even spiritual – experiences for people.

The use of coloured glass in building facades is a particularly powerful architectural tool. Originating in the Gothic churches of Medieval Europe, stained glass windows continue to be used in contemporary times by architects, often with striking results.

Ecclesiastical stained glass, in addition to its aesthetic quality, served another function: to narrate Christian stories. During the Middle Ages, these figurative windows were a means to teach the largely illiterate congregations about the Bible and the lives of saints. Stained glass windows tell other stories too by shedding light on social histories and patterns of patronage. The history of stained glass windows is thus rooted in Christianity as well as in architecture.

Stained Glass in Singapore

It is no accident that many of Singapore's early churches and Christian institutions were clustered near the city centre. Located close to the "Ground Reserved by Government" and "European Town and Principal Mercantile Establishments" as seen in the 1823 "Plan of the Town of Singapore" by Lieutenant Philip Jackson, these structures served the religious and educational needs of the Christian communities.[1]

The Armenian Church of St Gregory the Illuminator on Armenian Street, St Andrew's Cathedral on St Andrew's Road, the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd, the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (CHIJ, today a commercial complex known as CHIJMES) and St Joseph's Institution (now Singapore Art Museum) along Bras Basah Road, St Joseph's Church on Victoria Street and the Church of Saints Peter and Paul on Queen Street are some of Singapore's most historically significant Christian sites. (The chapels at the former CHIJ and St Joseph's Institution have been deconsecrated and are no longer used as places of worship today.)

All are Catholic institutions except the Armenian Church and St Andrew's Cathedral, which are Oriental Orthodox and Anglican respectively. With the exception of the Armenian Church, all are embellished with stained glass windows.

The stained glass windows in this historic cluster provide more than just architectural interest. Many windows in these churches were "memorial panels" bearing names of their donors in the parish, and a number of these are stylistically similar. This observation has prompted several questions: Who made these windows? Who commissioned them? Were they made locally or imported?

Upon closer examination, the names of the donors are evident in many panels. Some windows also bear the signatures of the artisans or studios that produced them, as well as the year in which they were made. Many of these windows were made in Belgium and France, and date between 1885 and 1912, although some windows of later vintage can be found in these buildings too.

Three studio signatures are frequently inscribed on these window panels: "Vitrail St Georges, Lyon, France" and "J. Dobbelaere, Bruges, Belgium" in the CHIJ chapel; "J. Dobbelaere, Bruges, Belgium" in St Joseph's Church; and "Martin Peintre, Angers, France" in the Church of Saints Peter and Paul. The windows in St Andrew's Cathedral and the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd are unsigned, while the altar window in St Joseph's Institution – believed to have been taken down during the Japanese Occupation (1942–45) – is now regarded as lost.[2]

Most of the windows at the CHIJ chapel and St Joseph's Church were commissioned from the studio of Jules Dobbelaere. The Dobbelaere studio was established by Henri Dobbelaere in Walplaats, Bruges, in Belgium in 1860. Under his son, Jules Dobbelaere, the workshop

(Facing Page) Interior view of the chapel at the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (CHIJ) located at the corner of Bras Basah Road and Victoria Street. Designed by Father Charles-Bénédict Nain, the chapel was completed in 1903 and consecrated on 11 June 1904. Photo taken in the early 1900s. *Arshak C. Galstaun Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

Jules Dobbelaere Studio: A Timeline

Henri Dobbelaere
***fl. 1860–85**

The Dobbelaere studio was established by Henri Dobbelaere of Bruges, Belgium (b. 1822, d. 1885) in 1860.

Jules Dobbelaere
fl. 1885–1916

Jules Dobbelaere (b. 1859, d. 1916) took over the workshop when his father Henri passed away in February 1885. Under his watch, the workshop reached new heights in stained glass production and acquired international fame. The windows at St Joseph's and CHIJ were commissioned during this time.

Justin Peene-Delodder
fl. 1919–29

Jules passed away in 1916 without a male heir. In 1919, the workshop passed on to Justin Peene, a distant cousin of Jules' daughters. He worked under the name Justin Peene-Delodder.

Weduwe Peene-Delodder
fl. 1929–38

Justin's wife, Alice Delodder, continued the workshop after his death in 1929, producing windows under the name Weduwe Peene-Delodder until 1938.

Andre Delodder-Peene
fl. 1938–53

Andre Delodder, originally a cabinet maker, married Alice's youngest daughter, Simonne Peene. He began working with his mother-in-law in 1936, and took on the family name two years later. His work appears under the name Andre Delodder-Peene.

Guy Delodder & son
fl. 1953–91

Andre's eldest son Guy Delodder took over the workshop in 1953. The sudden death of Guy Delodder's successor (one of his four sons) in 1991 ended a tradition that had endured for five generations.

* fl.=flourished
Above information from the University of Leuven's Documentation and Research Center on Religion and Society.

reached new heights in stained glass production and found fame beyond the shores of Belgium.

Thus far, information on Dobbelaere's work in Singapore has been scant. As part of our research, we located the online archives of the Dobbelaere workshop in 2009, which rest with the Documentation and Research Center on Religion and Society at the University of Leuven in Flanders, Belgium (hereafter "Leuven archives"). As the archiving and digitisation of these materials have progressed significantly, more information has since appeared online.

In early 2016, a formal request was made to the university to access the archives, which include drawings – known as "cartoons" in stained glass work – of the windows.

Relatively little is known about the studio of Martin Peintre in Angers, France, at this point. More information may surface in the future as historic materials are increasingly being made available online for research, as with the case of the Dobbelaere studio.

Of the three studios, Vitrail St Georges is by far the youngest. Founded by Joël Mône in 1979, the French studio claims its lineage from the studio of Jean-Baptiste Barrelon in Grigny, Lyon, which was established in 1852. Since 2010, the studio has been headed by Joël's son, Jean.[3] This was the studio that undertook the stained glass restoration when the CHIJ complex underwent extensive restoration between 1991 and 1996 and reopened as CHIJMES. The project was jointly overseen by the French architect Didier Repellin, and Ong and Ong Architects of Singapore.[4]

The Importance of "Cartoons"

We all know of cartoons as animated films or humorous comic strips found in print. But in the art industry, a cartoon is a preliminary design made by an artist for a painting or other types of artwork such as a fresco, tapestry or stained glass window or panel. In stained glass windows, a cartoon delineates the theme of the window, the exact drawing (sometimes in colour), lead lines and all the stylistic details of the painting. In short, it is a blueprint for the stained glass window, prepared by the glass artist for the client's approval, and used by the glazier who creates the actual window.

Cartoons are typically prepared by the stained glass artist; the glazier often advises where lead lines should be added to ensure the panel's structural integrity. The cartoon is then copied onto tracing paper in full scale to create a working drawing or "tracing".

Studios will usually keep cartoons and tracings for a pragmatic reason as it allows them to reuse these materials to create windows for other clients, making minor alterations where needed. Some of the older and more well-managed studios meticulously catalogue their glass work. This approach was adopted by many European studios and workshops in the 19th and early 20th centuries when markets opened up and glass makers began exporting their stained glass overseas, especially to the colonies.

Cartoons, therefore, address many crucial questions: where a window was made, for whom, by whom, how, in what social setting, in what style, and so on. A cartoon is literally a window into a window's history.

Fortunately for us, the cartoons by the Dobbelaere studio have been preserved in the Leuven archives. By comparing these cartoons with the stained glass windows in Singapore's historic buildings, we are better able to understand the history of these structures in relation to the stained glass panels as well as the communities who used these buildings as places of worship.

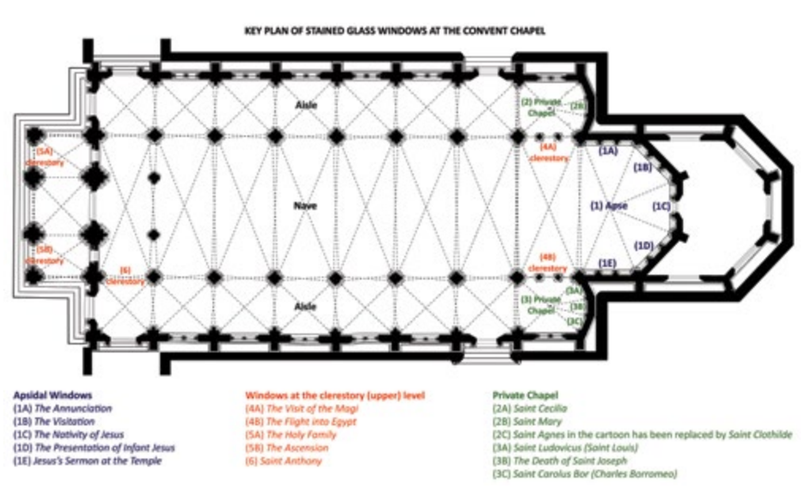
St Joseph's Church

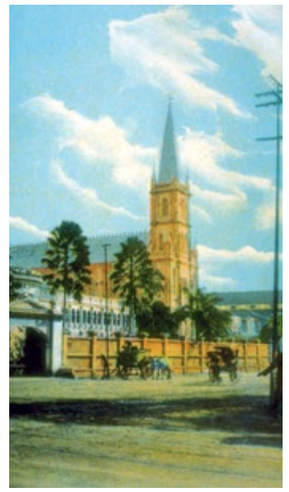
The five-sided apse (see text box on pages 12–13 for an explanation of these architectural terms) of St Joseph's Church on Victoria Street has beautiful ornamental and figurative stained glass windows, while two female saints are depicted in the transept windows. An article in the *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* in 1912 mentions that "the picture glass is by J. Dobbelaere of Bruges" but does not provide further details.[5]

With the exception of the "Sacr. Cor. Jesus" (Sacred Heart of Jesus) window in the centre of the apse, signed "J. Dobbelaere, Bruges, Belgium 1912", none of the other figurative apsidal windows bear the studio's signature. The other windows depicting "S. John Berchmans" (St John Berchmans), "S. Franc. Xav." (St Francis Xavier), "Sta Maria" (St Mary), "Ste Joseph" (St Joseph), "S. Antoni" (St Anthony) and "Sancta Agnes" (St Agnes) are all unsigned.

In the Leuven archives, we were excited to find a Dobbelaere cartoon of the triptych window dedicated to "S. Antonius". The cartoon clearly delineates the figure of St Anthony in the middle, with ornamental windows on either side.

Comparing this drawing with the extant window, it is clear that the design has been faithfully executed. The main ornamental elements, details of the drapery and the depiction of the Infant Jesus with St Anthony, are all in place. The extant window's only departure from the cartoon is in the name plaque. It reads "S. ANTONI ORA P.N." ("St Anthony, pray for us" in Latin), rather than "S. ANTONIUS" as in the cartoon. Although the window does not carry the studio's signature, the cartoon is proof that the window was made in Jules Dobbelaere's studio.





(Above) Floor plan of the stained glass in the chapel of the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus. *Courtesy of Yeo Kang Shua.*
(Right) Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (CHIJ) was a girls' school established at the corner of Bras Basah Road and Victoria Street in 1854 by French Catholic nuns. The Neo-Gothic chapel was completed in 1903 and consecrated on 11 June 1904. The complex underwent extensive restoration works and reopened in 1996 as a commercial complex known as CHIJMES. Photo taken in the early 1900s. *Lim Kheng Chye Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

The transept window depicting "Sancta Catharina" (St Catherine) is unsigned, while the "Sancta Cecilia" (St Cecilia) window carries the signature and date: "J. Dobbelaere, Bruges, Belgium 1912". The cartoon of the St Cecilia window is also kept in the archives, and the stained glass on site is a faithful rendition of the drawing, which includes decorative elements and the dedication "EX VOTO W.F. MOSBERGEN" ("An offering from W.F. Mosbergen"), presumably the donor.

It was not uncommon for studios or artists to sign just one window in a cluster of windows. Even today, most studios put their stamp on just one window even if their contribution consists of several panels. Minor elements outlined in cartoons are sometimes omitted in the final work. This happens for a number of reasons, one of which is lack of space during the execution.

Researchers must therefore undertake a comparative study of stained glass windows within the same building by examining the painting style, glazing technique, types of leads used, and the composition of the windows. These details help ascertain the studio or artist behind the windows.

Looking at the style of the various apsidal windows, as well as the two transept windows, and armed with further evidence from the Dobbelaere cartoons, we can safely conclude that all the windows of St Joseph's Church were produced by the workshop of Jules Dobbelaere.

CHIJ Chapel in CHIJMES

Many publications cite Father Charles-Bénédict Nain, a French priest of the Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP) order, as the designer of the CHIJ chapel, with stained glass windows produced in Bruges, Belgium, by Jules Dobbelaere.[6] Father Nain had been appointed as the assistant parish priest at the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd in 1898.

However, there is no indication which of the windows at the CHIJ chapel were produced by the Dobbelaere studio. Despite the large number of stained glass windows in the chapel, only two bear the signature "J. Dobbelaere, Bruges, Belgium". Neither of these are dated.

A closer examination of the stained glass windows (see floor plan above) complicates the story further. Several windows bear the signature "Vitrail St Georges, Lyon, France", and are dated "1994" – almost a full century after the chapel's consecration. We know stained glass windows were already in place when the chapel was consecrated in 1904. A newspaper account dated 10 June 1904 described the windows as "most artistic".[7] How then do we explain the origins of these other windows, which bear a different signature and date?

A few sets of cartoons from the Leuven archives can be linked in terms of theme and composition with the existing windows on site: (1) one set of five cartoons for the apse; (2) one set of three cartoons for the private chapel to the left of the apse; (3) one set of three cartoons for the private chapel to the right of the apse; (4) one set of two cartoons for the clerestory on either side of the apse; (5) one set of two cartoons for the windows flanking a circular window in the gallery; and (6) one cartoon for the quatrefoil (four-cusped panel) in the gallery.

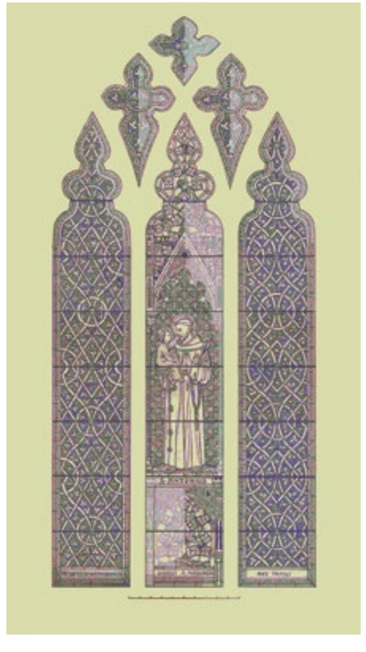
Comparing these cartoons with the chapel windows provides some insights.

Glass in the apse

In the apse, all five extant lancet windows are based on themes outlined in the Dobbelaere cartoons of these windows.

Three of the five apsidal windows are direct adaptations of the Dobbelaere cartoons: *The Nativity of Jesus* (1C) "Presented by The Pupils of the Convent"; *The Presentation of Infant Jesus* (1D) "Presented by Benefactors of Manila"; and *Jesus's Sermon at the Temple* (1E) "Presented by A.G. Pertille". None of these windows is signed or dated, but the

(Below) An exterior view of St Joseph's Church at Victoria Street, c.1912. The church was originally built by the Portuguese Mission in 1853 to serve the Portuguese and Eurasian Catholics in Singapore. Then in 1912, it was reconstructed in the neo-Gothic style and reopened. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*
(Right) Cartoon depicting St Anthony with the Infant Jesus – one of the windows on the apse-side of St Joseph's Church where the sanctuary is located – designed by the studio of Jules Dobbelaere. *Courtesy of KADOC – KU Leuven.*



cartoons confirm that Jules Dobbelaere is their creator.

The other two apsidal stained glass windows located to the left of the apse when facing it – *The Annunciation* (1A) and *The Visitation* (1B) – are signed "Vitrail St Georges, 1994, Lyon, France". Although these two windows bear the signature of another studio and a more recent date, it is obvious that the theme and composition are based on the original cartoons by Dobbelaere. The only difference is in the donor panels. These now read as "Presented by a Benefactor", whereas the cartoons bear the inscriptions "Presented by P.S.R. Pasoual" and "Presented by the Ossorio Family" respectively.

Glass in the two private chapels

In the private chapel to the left of the apse, we begin to see discrepancies in the triptych window.

The Dobbelaere cartoon shows three female saints: "S. Cæcilia" (St Cecilia, left); Saint Mary (not named in the panel, centre); and "S. Agnes" (St Agnes, right). The stained glass windows on site follow the cartoons in the placement of St Cecilia (2A) and St Mary (2B). But the cartoon's St Agnes has been replaced by "S. Clothilde" (St Clothilde, 2C) on site.

The drapery of the St Cecilia and St Mary windows also differ from the cartoons, as does the position of St Mary's hand. There are also fewer angels in the St Mary panel than in the cartoon.

All three windows now read "Presented by a Benefactor", while the cartoons clearly bear the donors' names: "Presented by D. De Souza", "Presented by M.C.F. De Souza", and "Presented by G. De Souza" respectively.

The Dobbelaere signature is absent in this stained glass triptych. Instead, both the St Cecilia and St Clothilde windows are signed "Vitrail St Georges, 1994, Lyon, France". The St Mary window is unsigned.

In the private chapel to the right of the apse, the triptych window is a faithful realisation of the Dobbelaere cartoons without revisions: "S. Ludovicus" (St Louis, 3A) "Presented by A. De Souza"; *The Death of St Joseph* (3B) "Presented by E. De Souza"; and "S. Carolus Bor." (St Charles Borromeo, 3C) "Presented by O.K.". The latter bears the signature "J. Dobbelaere, Bruges, Belgium". The cartoons allow us to confidently attribute these windows to the Dobbelaere studio.

Glass in the clerestories

The cartoons for the two stained glass windows situated above the chancel at clerestory level shows two lancets: one depicting *The Flight into Egypt*, and the other *The Visit of the Magi*.

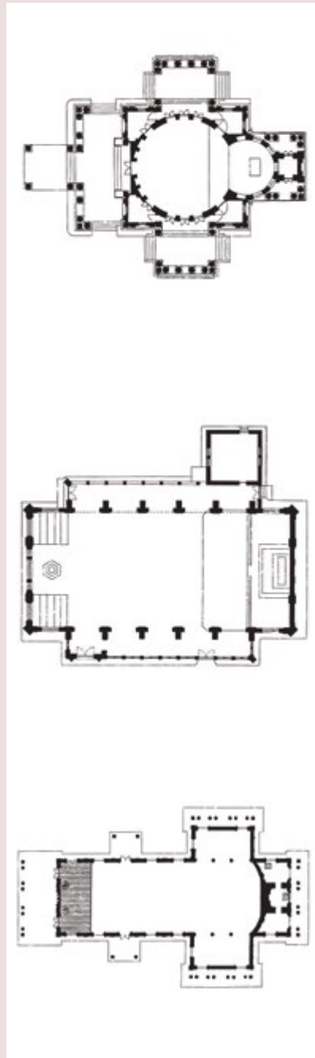
Each window, however, comprises a pair of lancet panels crowned by a roundel and three small insets to form a tracery. The cartoon's themes remain, but the theme of each window is now spread over two lancet panels. *The Visit of the Magi* (4A) is on the left of the apse, and *The Flight into Egypt* (4B) on the right. This change may have been the result of revisions to the architectural design of the chapel, with the windows redesigned to adapt to the modified openings.

While neither cartoon indicates a donor's name, *The Visit of the Magi* window now reads "Presented by a Benefactor", while *The Flight into Egypt* is inscribed "Presented by Cheoug Quee Tiam".[8]

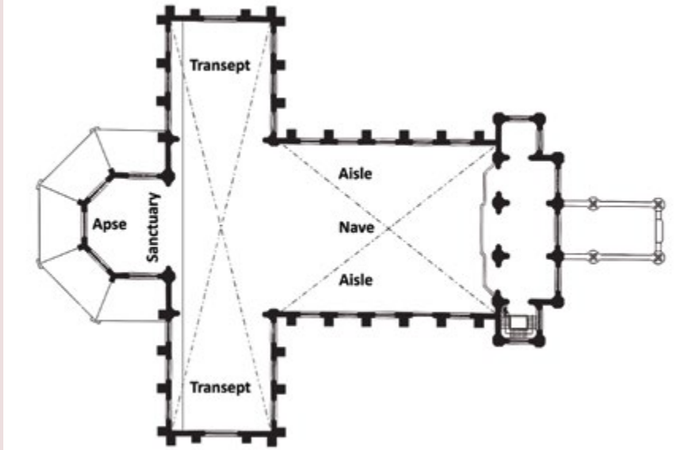
Triptych windows found in the side chapels at the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus. From left to right: St Cecilia, St Mary and St Clothilde (left chapel); and St Louis, *The Death of Saint Joseph,* and St Charles Borromeo (right chapel). *Courtesy of Swati Chandgadkar.*

Understanding Church Architecture

The footprint of a church is typically laid out in a rectangle, Greek-cross – a square central mass with four projecting arms of equal length – or Latin-cross cruciform plan. From these basic forms, an apse, which is a semicircular recess, may be attached behind the altar to provide a visual focus.



(From top to bottom) Greek cross plan of Armenian Church, rectangular plan of St George's Church (at Minden Road) and Latin cross plan of Cathedral of the Good Shepherd.



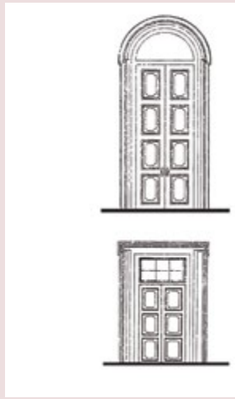
The main body of the church, which is known as the nave, is the area where the congregation takes part in worship (called a mass in Catholic churches or service in the Protestant tradition).

A passageway to either side of the nave that is separated by a colonnade of columns or rows of pews is known as the aisle. A transept is the space that is perpendicular to the nave on either side of a cruciform.

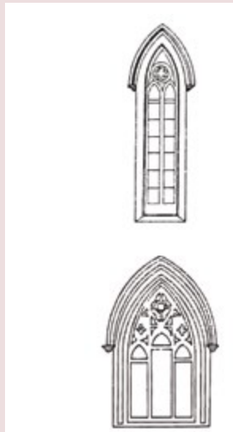
Beyond the nave typically lies the sanctuary, usually separated from the nave by a step or altar rail, within which only the priests and their attendants are allowed. In Singapore, there are no churches with chancels – the space between the nave and the sanctuary that contain choir stalls or seats for the clergy.

In the case of St Andrew's Cathedral, the choir stalls are positioned behind the altar. In Catholic churches, the tabernacle where the Eucharist[9] is stored, is located behind the altar. In most cases, an apse is the recess behind the sanctuary.

The clerestory denotes an upper level of the nave where the walls rise above the rooflines of the lower aisles and are punctuated with windows. Windows located in this area are also known as clerestory windows.



A fanlight or "lunette" is a semicircular window over a door or window. It is also sometimes known as a transom window, especially when it is rectangular in shape.



The stained glass windows located at the apse are also referred to as apsidal windows.

A lancet window (top image) is a tall, narrow window with a pointed arch at its top. Such windows are typical of Gothic and neo-Gothic architecture.

A triptych is typically a work of art that is divided into three sections. A triptych window (bottom) likewise has a set of three window panels.

Readers who are interested in reading more about church architecture may refer to How to Read Churches: A Crash Course in Ecclesiastical Architecture *by Denis Robert McNamara available at the library@orchard.*[10]

(Left) The clerestory at the chapel of the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus: *The Flight into Egypt* (left) and *The Visit of the Magi* (right). The original cartoons by Dobbelaere depict each of these scenes in a single lancet composition. The windows on site, however, are executed as a pair of lancets, with a small roundel and three small glass insets forming a tracery. *Photograph courtesy of Carolyn Lim; cartoon courtesy of KADOC – KU Leuven.*
(Middle) Quatrefoil window in the chapel of the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus: Full-colour cartoon (left) and the window on site (right), depicting St Anthony with the Infant Jesus. This window is found on the left side of the gallery facing the entrance. *Cartoon courtesy of KADOC – KU Leuven; photograph courtesy of Swati Chandgadkar.*
(Bottom) Madonna and Child depicted on a glass window of the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd. The authorship of this window cannot yet be ascertained. This photo was taken in December 2010, when the window was taken down for safekeeping by the authors with the assistance of Lawrence Chin and Wee Sheau Theng. It has since been restored by Swati Chandgadkar and was reinstated in late 2016. *Courtesy of Yeo Kang Shua.*

Glass in the gallery

Two sets of stained glass windows, each composed of a pair of lancet panels crowned by a roundel and three small insets to form a tracery, flank the circular window in the gallery. They are based on Dobbelaere's cartoons, and have been reproduced faithfully without revisions. The window on the left is *The Ascension* (5B), with *The Dove as Holy Spirit* represented in the roundel. The lancets are inscribed "Presented by a Benefactor". The window on the right is *The Holy Family* (5A), with *Our Lord in Glory* represented in the roundel. These lancets read "Presented by L. Scheerder". *The Ascension* window is one of just two windows in the chapel that bears the signature "J. Dobbelaere, Bruges, Belgium".

St Anthony is the subject of the quatrefoil on the left side of the gallery. The window is a perfect rendition of the original drawing in glass, faithfully following a beautifully coloured cartoon by Dobbelaere. The panel includes the name of the donors "Presented by Mr Nash Family". Interestingly, this quatrefoil was catalogued in the archives as a window for the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd. This is likely to be a cataloguing error, we think, as the cartoon is undoubtedly for a window at the convent chapel.

Events that had taken place during CHIJ's long but illustrious history provide further clues about these stained glass windows. One such event occurred on 15 February 1942 when Japanese forces invaded Singapore. During an air raid, several bombs fell within the vicinity of the convent, one of which damaged a number of windows.[11] Accounts of the bombings do not mention which windows were damaged, nor do they record the extent of the damage. It is also unknown if any repairs were carried out after the war.

Tunneling works carried out for the construction of the Mass Rapid Transit system in the 1980s also had an impact on the chapel. Newspapers record mitigation works undertaken to protect the fragile windows, which were "boarded with wooden frames and covered in netting on both sides to try and protect them from damage."[12]

CHIJ's stained glass windows were eventually restored in the early 1990s when the convent building, including the chapel, underwent restoration. The restoration of the stained glass windows was carried out by Vitrail St Georges of France.

As noted earlier, there are a number of discrepancies between the cartoons and the extant windows, particularly in the side chapel to the left. Some of these windows now bear the signature of Vitrail St Georges. It is possible that these windows were badly damaged by the 1990s and required extensive reconstruction. It is unknown at this point if Vitrail St Georges had access to the Dobbelaere cartoons while undertaking the restoration, or whether its work was based on what remained of these windows.

Cathedral of the Good Shepherd

The Cathedral of the Good Shepherd has 14 stained glass fanlight windows or "lunettes" along the aisles and two figurative windows at the transepts. The fanlights are of two design typologies, while the figurative windows depict the *Madonna and Child* and *St Joseph*. All 16 windows are unsigned, with neither studio signature, date nor donor names inscribed on the panels.

(Left) Cartoons for the fanlights or "lunettes" in the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd (left) and two of the windows as executed (right). *Cartoons courtesy of KADOC – KU Leuven; photographs courtesy of Swati Chandgadkar.*
(Right) Cartoon from the Dobbelaere studio (left) and a historic photograph of the altar window at the chapel of St Joseph's Institution (right). This cartoon is significant because prior to its discovery, the design of the window was unfortunately not documented in any form. The cartoon therefore provides a better understanding of what the lost window looked like. *Cartoon courtesy of KADOC – KU Leuven; photograph courtesy of St Joseph's Institution.*

There are few written references to the cathedral's stained glass windows. One mention is found in a 1904 *Straits Times* article: "The Committee records with gratification, the beautiful gift of a set of stained glass for the Church windows by Bishop Bourdon."[13] The windows are not described further, making it difficult to ascertain if the bishop's gift comprised solely of the fanlights, or if the gift included the two figurative windows too.

In the Leuven archives, we found Dobbelaere cartoons for the two different fanlight designs. One of the cartoons is a colour reference for the two designs. Comparing these cartoons with the fanlights in place today, there is little doubt that these windows were made by the Dobbelaere studio. The foliated design, composition, colour scheme and other painting elements seen in the stained glass windows are an exact reproduction of the cartoons.

More importantly, one of the cartoons is dated 1904, thereby confirming that the fanlights were gifts from the bishop, as mentioned in the newspaper article. As the cartoons for the two figurative windows were not found in the archives, their provenance remains indeterminate.

St Joseph's Institution

St Joseph's Institution today houses the Singapore Art Museum. The chapel of this former school building was completed in September 1912. However, owing to a delay in the delivery of the stained glass window, the chapel – which now bears few traces of its ecclesiastical history – was dedicated only on 20 November that year.[14]

A modern glass and steel sculpture now sits in the opening where the stained glass window would have been located. With the exception of an old photograph of the chapel, which shows a faint silhouette of the stained glass window at the end of the nave,[15] very little is known about the provenance or design of this historic window. A cartoon we found in the Leuven archives helps further our understanding of this window. The cartoon depicts St Jean-Baptiste de La Salle surrounded by pupils and members of the laity, with Mary and Jesus appearing on the mantle. The cartoon also bears the inscription "Presented by Joseph Chan Teck Hee".

The Dobbelaere cartoon fits the form and thematic outline with what we can see in the old photograph. It is therefore reasonable to infer that the cartoon is of the historic stained glass window of the school chapel, and more importantly, that it was executed by the studio of Jules Dobbelaere.

The discovery of the Dobbelaere cartoons in Leuven has provided valuable insights into the lineage of Singapore's historic stained glass windows and sheds new light on their provenance. ♦

The authors would like to acknowledge Wee Sheau Theng, Carolyn Lim, Soon-Tzu Speechley and Martina Yeo for their invaluable help in the course of this research.

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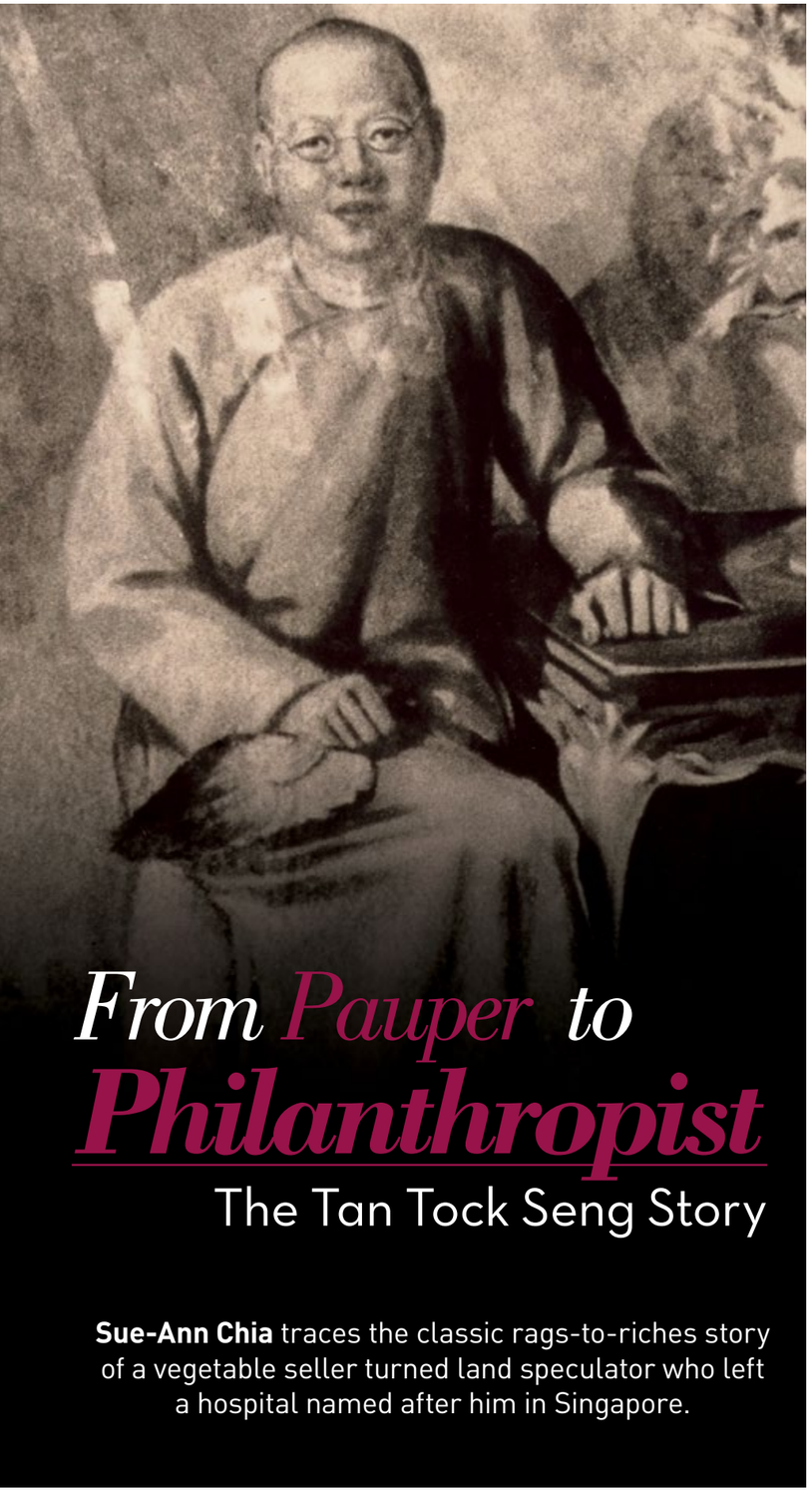


From *Pauper* to *Philanthropist*

The Tan Tock Seng Story

Sue-Ann Chia traces the classic rags-to-riches story of a vegetable seller turned land speculator who left a hospital named after him in Singapore.

Sue-Ann Chia is a seventh-generation descendant of Tan Tock Seng. She is a journalist with over 15 years of experience at *The Straits Times* and *Today* newspapers. She is presently Director at The Nutgraf, a boutique writing and communications consultancy.

In 1989, a large and elaborate grave on the grassy slopes of Outram Hill was "discovered" by Geraldine Lowe, a well-known Singaporean tour guide. Overgrown with a tangle of weeds and covered in dirt, the decrepit tomb appeared abandoned.

This was the resting place of Tan Tock Seng, who bears the distinction of having one of Singapore's largest hospitals named after him. Unfortunately, that is the only detail that most people know about the noted philanthropist – a forgotten pioneer, much like his grave.

Lowe, who stumbled upon the grave during a heritage hunt, said in an interview, "It's a shame that nobody is taking care of the tomb. It is on an almost inaccesible slope in Tiong Bahru. Something should be done about it."[1]

Since the rediscovery of the grave, Tan's descendants have been tending to his tomb and a major sprucing up of the site was carried out in 2009, according to a heritage report on Tiong Bahru.[2]

The pioneer's great-great-grandson Roney Tan dismissed claims that his forefather's grave was ever neglected. "Tan Tock Seng's grave was never lost," the company director said in an interview in 2013. "The truth is, my family and I always knew where it was. Growing up, my dad used to bring me to the gravesite at Outram Hill once or twice a year." He explained, "It was simply not possible to adequately maintain a grave just once a year, adding "Which is why I called a meeting of the family some years back and said, "Let's maintain it regularly, not just at Qing Ming. So now, there is a fund to maintain the gravesite."[3]

Tan Tock Seng, who had six children – three sons and three daughters – with wife Lee Seo Neo, has a remarkable genealogy that spans over eight generations with more than 2,500 descendents scattered across the globe.[4]

From Vegetable Seller to Philanthropist

Tan Tock Seng was born in Malacca in 1798, the third son of an immigrant father from Fujian province in China and a local Peranakan (Straits-born Chinese) mother. When he was 21, Tan boarded a ship that sailed south to Singapore in search of the proverbial fame and fortune. He arrived in 1819, shortly after Stamford Raffles had established a British trading outpost on the swamp-filled island.[5]

Tan was one of the earliest immigrants in Singapore, and in a matter of a few years rose to become one of the most wealthy residents and a pioneer community leader of the Chinese population. But his story is quite unlike those of his successful contemporaries.

In her book, *A History of Singapore 1819–1988*, historian Constance Mary Turnbull wrote: "Most of the influential early settlers were already prosperous when they arrived [in Singapore] and did not fit the popular rags-to-riches success stories of penniless youths rising by hard work and acument to wealth and eminence. The Hokkien Tan Tock Seng was an exception."[6]

It is not known what Tan's father did for a living in Malacca. Even though most Peranakans were wealthy, Tan's family was said to be "not rich". "Tan Tock Seng must have been a poor youth, doing perhaps odd jobs or even selling fruit, vegetables and poultry in the market in Malacca to help augment his father's income to support the family. His mother would not have undertaken any employment as most *nonyas* [Straits Chinese ladies] were housewives," wrote author Dhoraisingham S. Samuel in a biography of Tan.[7]

Tan's elder brother Oo Long eventually joined him in Singapore. The fate of his two other brothers remain unknown; all we know is that one of them went to China. What is certain is that Tan arrived in Singapore "with no worldly goods, his only capital being industry and economy", reported *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* newspaper in March 1850.[8]

But good fortune favoured the enterprising and those who were willing to work hard in the fledgling port city that was teeming with opportunities. Soon after his arrival, Tan set up a roadside stall selling vegetables, fruits and poultry, bringing produce from the countryside to the city. Within a matter of eight years, by 1827, he had saved up enough to open up a shop at Boat Quay, where the Chinese community originally settled. Tan's big break came when he met J.H. Whitehead, a partner in the British trading firm of Shaw, Whitehead & Co. Through a combination of sheer luck and an astute joint venture in land speculation, Tan became a very wealthy businessman and landowner.[9]

Tan's impressive land bank included 50 acres of prime space where the railway station at Tanjong Pagar was located as well as swathes of land stretching from the Padang all the way to High Street and Tank Road. He also owned a row of shophouses at Ellenborough Building. Together with his brother Oo Long, Tan also owned a nutmeg plantation and an orchard. The 14-acre fruit plantation was located opposite the old St Andrew's Mission Hospital in Tanjong Pagar.[10]

Tan's great-grandson Tan Hoon Siang, a rubber tycoon, said his ancestor could speak English – which made it easier for him to hobnob with the elite British community and expand his business contacts, but it is not known if he could write in English. Tan's letters, penned in cursive English to the British Governor, were always signed in Chinese and accompanied by his Chinese seal. It is very likely that he employed a secretary to write his letters in English.[11]

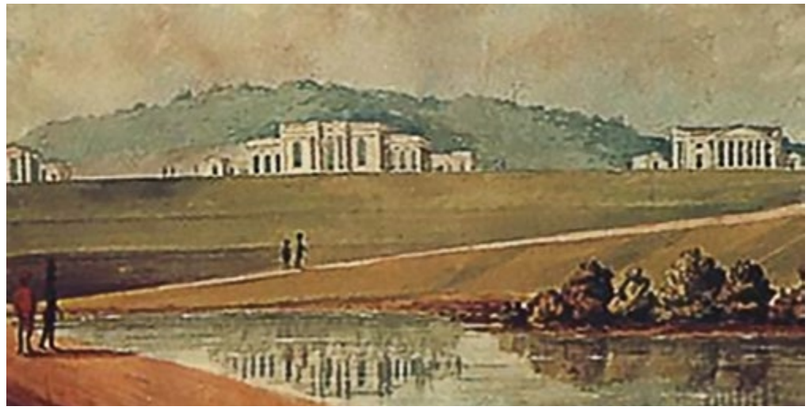
As Tan grew in stature and influence, he was asked to help settle disputes between Chinese migrants. This earned him the title of "Captain of the Chinese", and he became the first Asian to be appointed Justice of the Peace by then Governor William John Butterworth.[12]

According to *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* in March 1850: "Much of his time was engrossed in acting as arbitrator in disputes between his countrymen, and many a case which would otherwise have afforded a rich harvest to the lawyers, was through his intervention and mediation nipped in the bud."[13]

Locking Horns with the British

The year was 1844. Singapore "was a merchant's delight" with "huge profits to be made in commercial ventures", "but the streets of the island also reeked with diseased and suffering people", according to the *New Nation* in September 1974.

This prompted a sharply worded editorial by Wiliam Napier, editor of *The Singapore Free Press*: "A number of diseased Chinese, lepers and others frequent almost every street in town, presenting a spectacle which is rarely to be met with even in towns with a pagan government, and which is truly disgraceful in a civilised and Christian country, especially under the government of Englishmen."[14]



(Facing page) Portrait of Tan Tock Seng, c.1840. *Margaret Tan Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*
(Above) The first Tan Tock Seng Hospital, then called "The Chinese Pauper Hospital", was built on Pearl's Hill in 1846. This 1848 watercolour painting by John Turnbull Thomson shows its location between the Surgery and the Seamen's Hospital on Pearl's Hill. *All rights reserved. Liu, G. (1999). Singapore: A Pictorial History, 1819-2000. Singapore: Archipelago Press and National Heritage Board.*
(Above right) This tablet was erected by the Committee of Management in 1854 to acknowledge the donations by Tan Tock Seng and his son, Tan Kim Ching, towards the building of the Tan Tock Seng Hospital. The tablet was installed on the hospital gate at Pearl's Hill. *All rights reserved, Lee, S.H. (1994). 150 Years of Caring: The Legacy of Tan Tock Seng Hospital. Singapore: Tan Tock Seng Hospital.*

Something had to be done and soon. For several years, demands had been made on the British to devote more resources to help the sick and destitute in Singapore, but it was largely ignored.[15] Finally, in 1834, the government relented and imposed a tax on the sale of pork, using the proceeds to build a Chinese Poor House. However, when the British later needed more space to house the rising convict population, it decided to convert the poor house into a jail.[16]

Meanwhile, attracted by the opportunities in Singapore, Chinese immigrants began to arrive in large numbers, turning the island, especially the Chinatown enclave, into a cesspool of diseases, including malaria, cholera, smallpox, leprosy and tubercolosis. George Francis Train, an American visiting Singapore in the mid-19th century, described the desperate situation of the new migrants:

"Captain Hays says the examination of passengers on board the junks that take them off to the ship is too revolting for description. All men over 35 years, or who, after they have been stripped stark naked, show the least sign of disease upon their persons are rejected, and these poor creatures brought a long way from the interior of China by 'crimps' of their own nation – who get $10 for bringing down all of what they term healthy cattle – are turned ashore to perish of starvation or die a lingering death by exposure."[17]

As health conditions deteriorated on the island, the saving hand came from the Chinese community. A kind-hearted merchant by the name of Cham Chan Sang started a fund for a hospital by bequeathing a sum of 2,000 Spanish dollars – the currency of the time – when he died in January 1844. To make the hospital a reality, Tan topped it up with another 5,000 Spanish dollars from his own pocket.[18]

This initiative, however, likely embarrassed the British government in Bengal, India.[19] They accused the Chinese community of having an agenda, going so far as to suggest that a new tax be levied to construct the hospital instead of graciously accepting the donation.[20]

In response, Tan rallied a group of prominent residents, including Europeans, who sent a petition to the government, outlining the sentiments of the community. The petition raised several key points.

First, the Chinese community was anxious to build this "Pauper Hospital", not to please their European masters but to ease the suffering of their clansmen. Second, while it was "absolutely necessary" to build this hospital, there was no need for the British to profit from its construction by the imposition of taxes. Third, the government should ensure that there is no further importation of sick and destitute people into the colony. And, finally, the government should "afford their countenance and support" the cause.[21]

In his book, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore* (1902), Charles Burton Buckley commented: "The Government had been slow to recognise the necessity of providing a hospital and... it was... left to generous-minded individuals to do what they could to alleviate the necessities of the sick poor."[22]

Tan's tenacity in building this hospital not just for the Chinese, but for all races, was clear. Nothing was going to stop him, not even the government.

On 25 May 1844, the foundation stone for the hospital, then called "The Chinese Pauper Hospital", was laid at its original location at Pearl's Hill. Tan was the founder and financier of the hospital, affectionately nicknamed "Tocksing's Hospital". Although the building was completed in 1846, it only operated as a hospital from 1849 onwards as the government used it as a temporary convict jail in the intervening years.[23]

Lineage and Legacy

A year later, on 26 February 1850, Tan died of an unknown disease. He was only 52. His fortune was rumoured to be a princely sum of 500,000 Spanish dollars, which was shared between his widow, three sons and three daughters.[24]

The 19 March 1850 edition of *The Straits Times* reported that "his remains were removed to the place of burial, with much pomp and pageantry, followed by a large concourse of mourners and spectators, including many of the European community, who enjoyed his friendship while alive and paid the last tribute of respect by following his remains to the place of interment".[25]

There was no mention of where Tan was originally buried, but his grave was eventually moved to the current site on Outram Hill, a plot of land bought by his eldest son Tan Kim Ching (sometimes spelt Tan Kim Cheng). The latter followed in his father's philanthropic footsteps and has a road named after him in Tiong Bahru.[26]

This younger Tan, who took over his father's business and expanded it to include rice mills in Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) and Siam (Thailand), was instrumental in expanding and moving "Tocksing's Hospital" to Balestier Plain in 1860. The hospital, bearing his father's name, eventually shifted to its current site on Moulmein Road in 1909.[27]

Apart from financing and building the hospital, Tan Tock Seng was also a founding leader of the Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan clan association, which was set up in 1840 and still exists today. It provided assistance in securing accommodations, jobs and burial services for early Chinese immigrants to Singapore.[28]

Around the same time, Tan also contributed funds towards the building of Thian Hock Keng Temple at Telok Ayer Street. Singapore's oldest Hokkien temple, the centre of worship for the Hokkien community, was gazetted as a national monument on 28 June 1973.[29]

Tan's illustrious descendents, such as the aforementioned son Tan Kim Ching, grandson Tan Chay Yan (who also has a road named after him in Tiong Bahru) and great-grandsons Tan Boo Liat and Tan Hoon Siang, carried on his legacy as prominent merchants and philanthropists in the community.

Tan Kim Ching was made the first Siamese Consul in Singapore by King Mongkut in 1863, and later in 1885, King Chulalongkorn elevated his title to that of Consul-General. He was the Hokkien Huay Kuan's first chairman and donated generously to improve health and education in Singapore. Tan Chay Yan, the first rubber planter in Malaya, also funded the constructions of schools and medical facilities.[31]

Tan Chay Yan's son, Tan Hoon Siang, who took over his father's business, contributed to charity as well as to botany by producing a new hybrid orchid.[32] Hoon Siang's cousin, Tan Boo Liat, a strong supporter of Chinese revolutionary leader Sun Yat Sen and president of the Singapore Kuomintang, initiated the setting up of the Singapore Chinese Girls' School. Both Kim Ching and Boo Liat are buried at the Bukit Brown Cemetery.[33]

Beyond these few famous names, little else is known about Tan Tock Seng's lineage. At a ceremony to launch the commemorative book of Tan Tock Seng Hospital's 150th anniversary in 1994, some of his descendants were present.

Great-great-grandson John Tan (grandson of Tan Chay Yan), who runs several family companies, told *The Straits Times*: "The first thing people ask when they find out that you are a descendant of Tan Tock Seng is, 'Oh, he must have left you billions of dollars, where is it?'"[34]

"That's not true. Over the years, the descendants mismanaged and squandered the wealth, the war took its toll, and so by the time it came to our generation, we had to make it on our own." Beyond what has been recorded publicly, "very little by way of documentation or material belongings has passed down the family", he added.

In May 2016, news of the sale of a bungalow at 9 Cuscaden Road, home of the late Tan Hoon Siang, made the headlines – an indication perhaps that not all the wealth had been fritttered away. The house and its 25,741 sq-ft plot of land was sold for a whopping $145 million in May – one of the highest ever paid for a private property in Singapore.[35]

Great-grandson Tan Hoon Siang, who headed several rubber companies in Malaysia, was also a chairman and director of Bukit Sembawang Estates until his death in May 1991. He was a keen botanist, and a misthouse at the Singapore Botanic Gardens was named after him.[36]

With this sale – the house will be demolished and the land zoned for hotel redevelopment – commercialisation seems to have swallowed the humanitarian spirit of Tan Tock Seng. The only visible sign of his altruism is the hospital bearing his name.

Like many other philathropists of his time, Tan and his peers gave generously to causes that would benefit society through education and healthcare. But unlike other pioneers who had roads named after them, Tan was special in that he was the only one to leave behind a hospital named after him – ensuring that his legacy will be remembered not only by his descendants but also by future generations of Singaporeans.

Unfortunately, it is a heritage that is becoming increasingly brittle. Given Singapore's penchant for acronyms – most people know Tan Tock Seng Hospital today as TTSH – one fears that future generations could become even less familiar with the forgotten pioneer and his legacy to Singapore's history. ♦

Decorations made by patients were used to brighten up the wards at Tan Tock Seng Hospital during the Christmas of 1949. *All rights reserved, Lee, S.H. (1994). 150 Years of Caring: The Legacy of Tan Tock Seng Hospital. Singapore: Tan Tock Seng Hospital.*

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1960s FASHION

THE LEGACY OF MADE-TO-MEASURE

The changing face of fashion in Singapore is the subject of a new book called *Fashion Most Wanted*. This extract recalls how the advent of TV impacted new fashion trends in the 1960s.

A model wearing a creation from Janilaine, one of Singapore's most prominent made-to-measure clothing shops in the1960s. *Courtesy of Singapore Press Holdings.*

Fashion Most Wanted: Singapore's Top Insider Secrets from the Past Five Decades was written by **John de Souza**, **Cat Ong** and **Tom Rao**. All three authors cut their teeth on Singapore's fashion scene in the 1980s as writers and editors for *The Straits Times* as well as leading fashion and beauty magazines such as *Her World*, *Elle* and *Marie Claire*. They continue to keep a pulse on the ever evolving fashion scene today.

The neighbourhood dressmaker who relied on paper patterns and her pedal-powered Singer sewing machine, the exacting Shanghainese tailor who draped the body and crafted by hand, the Indian tailor – immaculate in a crisp white shirt and spotless *dhoti* – who arrived at your doorstep to take your measurements. These were the "magicians of style" in Singapore half a century ago.

Says retired personal assistant Carol de Souza: "They only needed to see a photo from *Vogue* or another magazine in order to turn out a dress that looked exactly like the photo."

She ought to know. From her teenage years until store-bought fashion became readily available in the 1970s, de Souza had to rely on tailors for all her sartorial needs, from career clothes to her wedding trousseau. And they never let her down. When she took all her Singapore-tailored outfits with her to Houston, Texas, where she had moved to in 1981, "the cheongsams from Mode-O-Day were always a hit with the guys!"

In the early 1950s, when the local retail scene was still undeveloped, the various ethnic groups would don their own cultural garb, while the Eurasians and British, Australian and New Zealand expat wives would be dressed in foreign fashion imports. These were only available from a handful of boutiques in Singapore.

Fashion entrepreneur Judith Chung, who was a fashion reporter for *The Sunday Times* in the 1960s, still remembers one owner of such an exclusive establishment: the arresting Doris Geddes, an Australian who ran The Little Shop at the Raffles Hotel from 1947 for 30 years. According to the 1967 *Olson's Orient Guide*, her speciality was "high fashion with an exotic touch" as she was a dressmaker as well as a retailer of "fine imports" from Asian craft to European couture dresses.

Geddes' shop had upped the ante for Singapore tremendously in 1957 when Elizabeth Taylor, who was visiting Singapore with her third husband, film producer Mike Todd, wore a fitted strapless dress of Geddes' own design to a Raffles Hotel dinner. According to a report in famoushotels.org, Taylor was overhead screaming at Geddes the day after because the dress had split at the seams in the middle of dinner. Not one to lose her cool, Geddes had reportedly retorted: "You should not have insisted on this dress, it was too small for you, I told you so!"

Tailor-made

For most Singapore-born ingenues and their society matron mums, like Carol de Souza and her mother, made-to-measure was the name of the game in the local fashion stakes. Their clothes-shopping routine would entail trooping to the grande dame of department stores in Singapore – Robinsons at Raffles Place – for its McCall's and Butterick paper patterns.

A trip to a bookshop or an Indian-run five-foot-way (pedestrian walkway) magazine stand could also arm one with magazines such as *Burda*, *Lana Lobell*, *So-en*, *Vogue* or *Women's Weekly*, just to name a few, with the best pictures of the new trends.

Following that, the next stop would be High Street to dig through bales of materials at Aurora, Metro, Modern Silk Store and S.A. Majeed. If you still could not find the right fabric, there was also Chotirmalls or Peking Silk Store on adjacent North Bridge Road. And People's Park in Chinatown, as well as night markets all over Singapore, where de Souza recalls that she and her mother would always end up buying "bags and bags of fabric – more than what we went looking for".

As a 10-year-old accompanying his 29-year-old *tai tai* mother Elizabeth Lee on her shopping trips in 1966, Dick Lee can still vividly recall that "the old Metro (High Street) had fabric counters in front, and cosmetics counters behind them. Each fabric shop had long tables with bales of fabric".

Colour and prints galore! This must explain why the polymath creative director still exhibits a fondness for riotous prints and colours in his dapper personal style.

According to Metro's Executive Chairman, Wong Sioe Hong, her father Ong Tjoe Kim thought it would be a smart move to be the only fashion retail shop surrounded by a row of wholesale fabric stores when he founded his single-unit store on High Street in 1957. He called it Metro, after his first store in Indonesia, and he was proven right when he had to expand to the unit next door to capitalise on his booming business.

Wong recalls: "He was literally a one-man show – owner, buyer, operator. It was a small store – only 8,000 sq ft. Metro was the first department store to import fabrics from the US. My father was the first to bring in lace from France and silk from Italy."

In the 1960s, tailoring shops abounded in central Singapore, from Tiong Bahru to Tiverton Lane off Killiney Road. But many an enterprising home-based dressmaker could also be found in the new HDB flats springing up in Queenstown and Toa Payoh, as well as in landed properties in private estates all over Singapore.

Standard tailoring charges then were $6 for a dress without lining, $12 with lining and $20 and above for tailoring with expensive materials like chiffon, lace, satin, silk and voile, as well as for long gowns.

A Singer or an Elna sewing machine was not only indispensable to every household; it was also regarded as a prized family heirloom – to be passed down the generations. Just like the one Gloria Barker – wife of Singapore's first Law Minister, the late E.W. Barker – inherited from her mother, according to her interior decorator son, Brandon.

Brandon Barker was a part-time model in the 1960s so his mother taught him how to cut and sew his own clothes. Thanks to this, he was able to make Oxford bags, those loosely fitted trousers with wide legs, for himself, when he found that those made by professional tailors "never quite fit right". Barker got so good at dressmaking, he could even sew gored skirts – a popular fashion item back then – for his younger sister, Gillian, also a part-time model.

(Right) Metro founder Ong Tjoe Kim at his Metro High Street office in the mid-1960s. *Courtesy of Singapore Press Holdings.*
(Below) The hustle and bustle of Christmas shopping at Metro High Street in 1962. *Courtesy of Metro.*

London Calling

Paris might have been the fashion capital that used to dictate clothing trends to an adult audience, but musician and former disc jockey Vernon Cornelius says that London became the 1960s youth capital of fashion. He remembers young people dressing up "according to what was going on and the music of the time".

It signalled "the start of style consciousness for Singaporeans". Everyone wanted to imitate the hairstyles and look of musicians from Cliff Richard and The Shadows (neatly combed back hair, skinny suits) to The Beatles (heavy fringes, Flower Power caftans with beads) and The Rolling Stones (longish hair, psychedelic styles).

Youths became what he calls "free-form and individualist in their dress, aping [the West] in a sense, but not copying exactly. We took ideas, sort of improvised something and made them our own". But as times were still tough in the days of a newly independent Singapore, he adds that most young people like himself had to save for weeks or months to array themselves in mod looks as a "sincere form of expressing our own identity".

The Swinging Sixties was indeed a time of youthful exuberance and experimentation, thanks to a flourishing world economy and unimaginable breakthroughs – from the first man walking on the moon to the invention of the Concorde and the world's first successful heart transplants. Television was launched in Singapore in 1963, and the first person to appear on screen was Minister for Culture S. Rajaratnam, who declared: "Tonight might well mark the start of a social and cultural revolution in our lives". Indeed.

One of the first types of programmes televised that evening was a variety show into which fashion and lifestyle elements would eventually be incorporated. Featured would be the young nation's first generation of homegrown fashion stars.

Freelance hairstylist Francis Raquiza who had trained under Roland Chow, Singapore's most celebrated hairstylist-cum-fashion designer of that era, can never forget that as there was only black-and-white television then: "It was strange when (Roland) demonstrated and talked about what lipstick colour would match what colour dress – and everything on the screen was black and white!"

In 1967, it was reported that 50 percent of British women's fashion sold was to the 15 to 19 age group. Carnaby Street, in London's Soho district, was identified as the epicentre of the global youth-quake. So it was no wonder that the grooviest of 1960s fashion boutiques – including the "mini skirt" creator, Mary Quant's flagship shop – were congregated there.

In 1966, Carnaby Street was splashed on the cover of *Time* magazine, sealing London's credibility as the capital of cool. Among the many Singaporeans who noted *Time*'s report and were quick to flock there was Alice Fu, who later became the first head buyer of Tangs (formerly C K Tang) from 1982 to 1996. In the late 1960s, as a secretary at a travel agency, she could get discounted air tickets to London. "So I took my mum to London. We told ourselves we had to see Carnaby Street, and we bought Mary Quant halter tops, chunky platform shoes, high boots, and maxi dresses," she recalls.

Fu was inspired by her Carnaby Street experience of affordable fun fashion but was put off in Singapore, having to visit men's tailors like Kingsmen to make bell bottoms, Khemco's for shirts and other assorted tailors for mod dresses, mini-skirts and hot pants. She told herself, why not open a shop with like-minded friends? So, together with two partners, Tan Beng Yan, who later founded the Tyan fashion group, and a girlfriend named Joanna, they launched the Saturday's Child fashion label.

"It was meant to emulate the ready-to-wear London look and we had to 'design' all our own clothes – hipster pants, halter tops, mini dresses – based on what we saw in magazines. I remember we had the tailor from Trend moonlighting for us. Her name was Ah Geok," she says.

(Left) Roland Chow demonstrating his hair creation "Incroyable", a new short hair-do to go with shorter hemlines, October 1958. *Courtesy of Singapore Press Holdings.*
(Below) Two outfits from Roland Chow's summer collection, May 1966. *Courtesy of Singapore Press Holdings.*

The Ibrahim sisters (from left) Fatimah, Rabiah, Carol and Faith preparing for a lunchtime fashion show at the Island Ballroom of Hyatt Hotel in the late 1960s. *Courtesy of Singapore Press Holdings.*

Rabiah and Her Sisters

If Ah Geok made "magic" creating Singapore's earliest off-the-peg kaleidoscopic 1960s styles from magazine pictures, no one else was better at modelling and marketing such free-wheeling looks as the decade's most iconic pin-up girl, Rabiah Ibrahim. That is unless, of course, they were her equally fashionable and famous sisters and partners, Carol, Fatimah and Faith.

Faith Ibrahim put Singapore's name on the international modelling scene when she became Pierre Cardin's house model and was known as Anak in the late 1960s. After marrying the 13th Duke of Bedford, she became the respectable London-based Lady Russell.

According to Rabiah Ibrahim, whose father was a doctor, her siblings and herself "had travelled more than most of her peers, and never wanted to follow the crowd". This was not confined to only their dress sense. After becoming a mother of three sons, she still found the time and energy to run her flourishing fashion empire of Trend boutiques for more than 20 years, guided by her sense of "adventure, creativity, glamour and fun", as she put it, in the 1991 annual edition of *Her World* magazine.

At its most successful, there were also Trend shops in San Francisco and Hong Kong. By the 1980s, when she migrated to Perth to become a Bible teacher and sold her Trend business to fellow fashion entrepreneur Chan Kheng Lin, it had become a 23-store, multi-million-dollar business.

Fashion Pioneer

The Ibrahim sisters were not the only fashion beacons in a Singapore that was experiencing a cultural awakening with a fervency to modernise, driven as it was by a rapidly evolving socio-political climate.

In a 2015 *Straits Times* report, architect Tan Cheng Siong, who designed the iconic conservation Pearl Bank Apartments in 1976, said that even as a youth in the 1960s he had the awareness that Singapore had "always wanted very badly to be modern".

Modern would certainly have described a young Phila Mae Wong when she was about to set off to the US for her university studies in 1961. In her teens, she had already become a competitive bowler, balance beam gymnast and one of Singapore's champion water skiers. As a little girl, encouraged by her mother, she would re-design all her dolls' clothes so that they would look more modern.

Before Wong could graduate from university, she became an associate buyer for her mother's fashion imports shop named Vanity Fair at Raffles Place, and even started her own boutique, The Look, within her mother's store, promoting affordable sportswear-inspired American brands as well as London's youthful Carnaby Street style. In 1963, she explained to *Her World* reporter Doreen Chee that "Paris fashion can be the very epitome of elegance but it is for the elite upper strata of society. American fashion is more practical and more saleable".

If Phila Mae Wong was ahead of her time, it was because she had been trained by the best – her mother, none other than the indomitable Eunice Wong, who was not only one of Singapore's successful Grand Prix drivers of the 1960s, but also an unstoppable one-woman entrepreneurial machine. In the 1950s, Phila Mae's grandfather opened the Lee & Fletcher trading company along Orchard Road (where the Concorde Hotel Singapore now stands).

Emulating her father, and always reflecting her impeccable taste and grasp of the changing life and times, Eunice Wong was to open her own chain of retail shops as soon as she came of age. Perhaps to help promote her father's Elna sewing machines, she first opened two ready-made and custom-tailored fashion boutiques in Shaw Centre and at Fitzpatrick's supermarket (where the new wing of Paragon now stands) and named them Elna Boutique. As hairstyles changed from bouffant "helmets" to sleek swingy, geometric styles, she also opened two hairdressing salons at High Street and in Cathay Building.

By 1965, realising that jeans were on the cusp of becoming ubiquitous for the younger generation, Eunice Wong ventured into a unisex Jeans East West shop at 104 Orchard Road (near the Lee & Fletcher head office at the Concorde Hotel) with her son, Phila Mae's brother, Vincent. He used to make his own tie-dye T-shirts to sell with the California West brand of jeans that they stocked. "All his girlfriends were slaves," Eunice Wong recounts, "they'd do tie-dye T-shirts for his shop. Their target market

The word "modern" aptly describes these cover girls, who were ahead of their time in the 1960s. From top: Sybil Schwencke, who went from being a flight hostess to a beauty guru; Phila Mae Wong, who inherited her love for fashion from her entrepreneurial mother; and Chan See Foon, who was arguably Singapore's first supermodel. *All magazine covers courtesy of Singapore Press Holdings.*

was rich kids who could afford to pay $30 for jeans at that time, it was a lot of money".

Still fresh with ideas, Eunice Wong opened not one but two eponymous lifestyle and gift shops in Orchard Road. A final home furnishings shop on Orchard Road – sandwiched between C K Tang and Fitzpatrick's, where the new Glamourette designer boutique was opened by Siauw Mie Sioe (more popularly known as Mrs Choong) in 1958 – helped to transform Orchard Road from a laidback street of sprawling cemeteries and fruit plantations into Singapore's premier shopping haunt over the course of the 1960s.

Named after its fruit tree plantations and nurseries, Orchard Road was bordered by monsoon drains that invariably overflowed into the roadways. This caused decades of flooding every Christmas, which coincided with the year-end monsoon rains, until its glitziest makeover in the noughties transformed it into the modern retail wonderland, with wide pedestrian boulevards, that it is today.

Back then, from Orange Grove Road to Scotts Road, impressive expatriate homesteads used to alternate on both sides of the road. Facing the new three-storey C K Tang store – that had been constructed in 1948 on a former nutmeg plantation – was the Tai Shan Ting Cemetery (where Ngee Ann City and Wisma Atria now stand).

After C K Tang was up and running, fashion boutiques such as Antoinette and Buttons and Bows, stocking imports from England and Europe, opened on Orchard Road too. Steadily thereafter, such retail and lifestyle "action" continued to sprout between Scotts Road and Killiney Road.

Equatorial Singapore obviously had enough numbers of the glamorous jet set living on its shores to have its own furrier shop Ali Joo, which used to be located in the original Heeren Building at the corner of Orchard and Cairnhill roads. Cozy Corner Cafe nearby was where dating couples went for Western meals. The defunct Prince's Hotel Garni, just after Bideford Road, held afternoon tea dances for young people to rock and roll, jive and cha-cha-cha the afternoon away.

At the spot where The Centrepoint stands today was the popular Magnolia Milk Bar, where the baby boomers in Singapore were weaned on milkshakes, ice-cream sundaes and banana splits. The current site of Orchard Central was once an open-air carpark that transformed nightly into a kerosene-lit hawker centre with some of the most delicious local food fare. In 1978, it was closed down by the government due to hygiene concerns.

In the Mood for Cheongsam

The fashion revolution of the 1960s would all but wipe out the appearance of traditional garments such as the *sari* and *sarong kebaya* at events other than weddings. But it was a completely different story with the *cheongsam*.

Phila Mae Wong's thrice-married aunt, the late Christina Lee – voted by *Vogue* magazine as one of the most beautiful women in the world in 1965 – had a part to play in this. She was the youngest of the four beautiful daughters from the illustrious Lee family while Phila Mae's mother, Eunice, was her eldest sister. At the time when her looks were celebrated by *Vogue*, Christina Lee was married to cinema magnate Loke Wan Tho and the celebrity couple was often captured in the headlines – he in a sharply-tailored Western suit, she in a gorgeous cheongsam.

The 1960 hit Hollywood movie, *The World of Suzie Wong*, starred Nancy Kwan wearing a series of *cheongsams* with thigh-high slits. The movie turned the actress into an international pin-up girl, who quickly became known as the "Chinese Bardot", in reference to the 1960s French screen siren Bridgette Bardot.

Together, the Asian cinema mogul's stunningly beautiful wife and the Hollywood movie star-turned-sex symbol gave a fillip to the *cheongsam*, which has made it much coveted by the stylish set, Western or Asian, ever since.

With the advent of air-conditioning in Singapore, Christina Lee started to design her own Western-style coats, jackets and stoles to complement her *cheongsams*. Taking her cue from the sensational mini-skirt of the 1960s, and Roland Chow, who had also designed a mini *cheongsam*, the hemlines of her own were fashionably cropped at thigh level.

As for designer Thomas Wee, learning how to make exquisite *cheongsams* from his Shanghai-trained tailor mother at the age of 14 may have been his entry into the world of dressmaking, but it was a wedding gown that Thomas had created for his then supervisor's wedding that led to his serendipitous switch from working as a pharmacy dispenser to becoming a fashion boutique assistant. His first retail posting was at Flair Boutique along Tanglin Road (where the St Regis is now).

That was, Thomas points out, Singapore's original fashion street before it was overtaken by Orchard Road in the 1980s. A few doors away from Flair were House of Hilda and Mode-O-Day; the latter is still operating today within Tanglin Shopping Centre, making wedding and evening

(Right) Tangs cashiers at the start of their shift in the late 1960s. *Photo: Courtesy of Tangs.*
(Below right) Former Grand Prix champion driver and fashion pioneer Eunice Wong and her favourite Triumph sports car, late 1950s. *Courtesy of Phila Mae Wong.*

gowns as well as *cheongsams* for a new generation of society ladies such as Paige Parker. She told *The Straits Times* that she had two *cheongsams* tailored at Mode-O-Day in 2015: a red lace *cheongsam* for her 40th birthday and a customised pink lace one for the Chinese Women's Association's 100th Anniversary Charity Gala.

For young career girls and the trendy young scions of well-to-do Singapore families, the holy grail of 1960s fashion were Biba and Mary Quant of London. Quant is immortalised today as the originator of the miniskirt, while Barbara Hulanicki's Biba fashion emporium on Kensington High Street was dubbed the sexiest shop in the world by London's *Daily Mail* newspaper. Today, Biba's signature style would be described as being a blend of Mary Quant's mod look with Laura Ashley's floral fashion and Topshop's edgy style.

Choong and Sons

An appetite for modern 1960s fashion not only spread among the women throughout Singapore, but to the men as well. Even *kampung* boys dressed like peacocks in colourful fashion, with collarless jackets and pants that flared over boots with high heels, just like the girls. Shirts or ties became vividly printed and lapels got more exaggerated as trouser legs widened.

Clothing became increasingly "unisex" as men and women shopped at the same boutiques for similar-looking items or had them made by the same tailors. This is why when Siauw Mie Sioe's husband Francis Choong received a parcel of "flower power" ties from his eldest son K C, who was studying in London in the 1960s, he decided to try and sell them in his Caprice men's shop in Ngee Ann Building on Orchard Road.

When they sold out, it was the sign that he and his wife needed to change their business from traditional tailoring to retailing off-the-peg fashion imports from leading European brands of the day. In 1958, Mr and Mrs Choong – as the husband and wife team were better known as – had been prescient enough to close their Seasons Shanghai tailoring shop in Middle Road to open Glamourette, the first luxury multi-brand boutique in Singapore, at Fitzpatrick's. They already had an inkling that Orchard Road would become fashion's most happening street in Singapore, and were catching on to the next big thing – the trend for ready-to-wear clothing.

Before long, Mr Choong was retailing jersey-knit men's shirts from the Parisian Montagut label at Caprice and Mrs Choong had brought in Biba, Bill Gibbs, Jean Muir and Mary Quant to Glamourette. However, their younger son Jacob K.H. recalls that it was when designers experimented with shiny new waterproof materials with a futuristic look using PVC and Perspex to create "Wet Look" fashion that his parents found they had hit upon their bestsellers of the 1960s. ♦

Fashion Most Wanted: Singapore's Top Insider Secrets from the Past Five Decades is published by Straits Times Press. The 160-page illustrated book retails for $35 (excluding GST) and is available at major bookshops and online bookshops such as www.stpressbooks.com.sg and Amazon. The book is also available for reference and loan at Lee Kong Chian Reference Library and branches of all public libraries (Call no.: RSING 746.92095957 DES and 746.92095957 DES).

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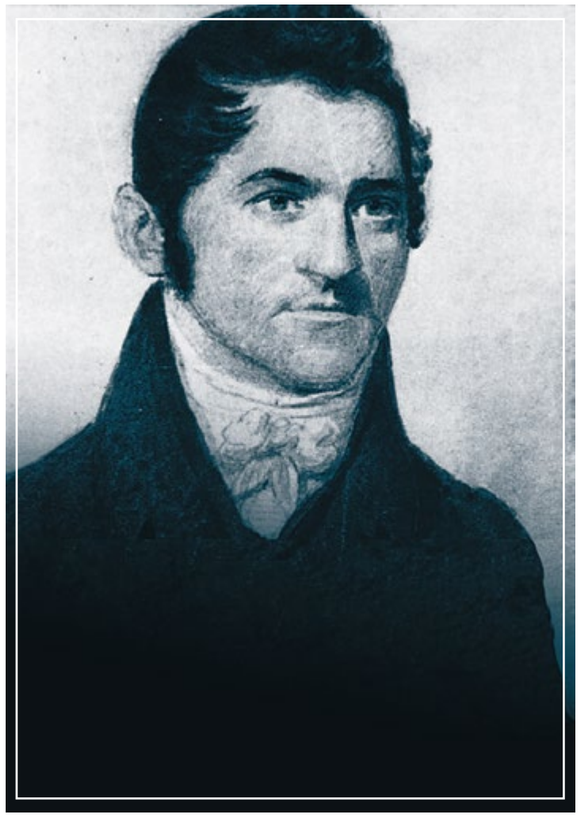

CLAUDIUS HENRY THOMSEN

A Pioneer in Malay Printing

Danish missionary Claudius Henry Thomsen produced some of the earliest Malay-language publications in Singapore and the Malay Peninsula. **Bonny Tan** sheds light on this pioneer printer.

In the flickering light of the candles, the men relentlessly worked the press. Their bodies slicked with perspiration, and staving off hunger and sleep, they continued tirelessly through the night. As the handpress could not cope with the demands of printing this massive work, Munshi Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, the learned Malay teacher and translator, had worked non-stop over two days to cast additional Malay font types to complete the job. The item in press was believed to be Stamford Raffles' Proclamation of 1 January 1823, likely the earliest publication printed in Singapore.[1]

Munshi Abdullah, with the assistance of a young Eurasian called Michael, printed 50 copies of the work in English and 50 in Malay. It was three in the morning by the time the documents were ready and these were distributed around town as instructed by Raffles. The founder of Singapore had insisted that the settlement's laws be published by that morning, the first day of the New Year.[2]

Likely working alongside these men that same night was the Danish missionary, Reverend Claudius Henry Thomsen, who is credited with bringing Singapore's first press with him when he arrived in the settlement on 19 May 1822. Besides printing Singapore's earliest known English works, Thomsen would forge the path as a pioneer printer of Malay and Bugis translated works in the Malay Peninsula, long before better known missionary printers of publications in Malay, such as William G. Shellabear and Reverend Benjamin Keasberry, arrived on the scene.

Preparations for the East

Thomsen was originally from Holstein, Lower Saxony,[3] and trained at the Gosport Seminary in England in 1811 where he mastered the study of classical languages and subjects such as geography and astronomy. Knowing that he was going to be posted to the newly established mission station in Malacca, Thomsen began learning Malay[4] and Dutch, with the expectation that Malacca would revert to Dutch rule in time to come.[5]

Recently married, Thomsen set sail with his wife for the East in April 1815 under the auspices of the London Missionary Society (LMS) – a non-denominational Protestant society founded in 1795 in England – arriving in Malacca five months later on 27 September.

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The Chinese missions in Malacca had opened that same year[6] with the objective of becoming the LMS base for missionary work in China. At the time, China was closed to foreign trade and was antagonistic towards Christian missionary work. Robert Morrison, a pioneer missionary in China, had earlier sent his colleague William Milne to head the Malacca mission station. Before long, a few schools and a Chinese printing press had been established in Malacca. In formulating his plans for the station in the Malay Archipelago, Morrison envisioned that there be "... that powerful engine, the Press."[7]

Upon his arrival in Malacca, Thomsen was introduced to Munshi Abdullah who helped guide him in his understanding of the Malay language. It is through Abdullah's autobiography, *Hikayat Abdullah (Stories of Abdullah)*, that the earliest picture of Thomsen was formed.[8] Thomsen spent his early months in Malacca mastering the language, beginning with the translation of the Gospel of Matthew based on the Batavia-Dutch edition of 1758.

Printing in Malacca

In November 1816, more than a year after Thomsen first set foot in Malacca, the press and font types for English and Arabic text arrived from Serampore, West Bengal, which was then the main type foundry for the region. Six trained printers came along to operate the press, four more workers than requested, thereby inflating the monthly expenditure of the Malacca station.

Upon seeing the press from Serampore, Munshi Abdullah noted: "The Malay letter-types... the likes of these as well as other printing apparatus I have never seen in my life before. When I saw them I was amazed to think how the inventiveness and ingenuity of man have produced machines to do such work."[9]

Academic Ibrahim Ismail notes that the new press was used for all Malay publications produced in Malacca "except for title pages with large Jawi letters, which were printed from woodcuts". The Jawi calligraphy was likely the work of Munshi Abdullah, while the engraving of the title on wood was done by experienced Chinese typecutters from the Chinese printing press in Malacca.[10]

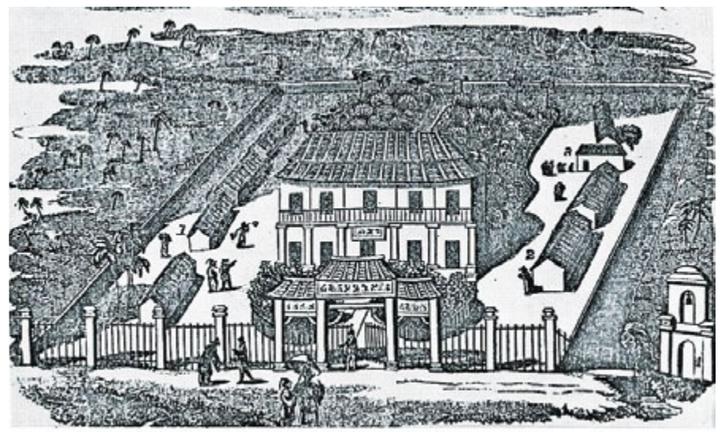
Unfortunately, Thomsen did not see the arrival of this press as his wife's illness led to his sudden departure for England on 12 September 1816. However, he left behind two Malay manuscripts that were ready for printing. In the meantime, Munshi Abdullah was taught by the English Protestant missionary, Walter Henry Medhurst, who arrived in Malacca in June 1817,[11] to set the types and operate the printing press.

Thus, the first Malay books in the Malay Peninsula – *The Ten Commandments* with the Lord's Prayer appended and *Dr Watts' First Catechism* – were published in May 1817 during Thomsen's absence. The manuscripts were sent to "an excellent Malay scholar", Major J. McInnis of the 20th Regiment of the Bengal Native Infantry in Penang, for review before being published. Thomsen returned to Malacca on 29 December 1817, sadly bereft of his wife. While he was in England though, Thomsen pursued further training in printing, and returned with files and borers to make new font types, along with old English metal types that he recast into new fonts.[12]

Thomsen quickly immersed himself in the work of the missions, reopening the Malay school, starting a new school for Malabar Indians, distributing Christian tracts and running a very active printing press. Milne noted Thomsen's abilities in teaching youths and his natural delight in doing so. Later, Thomsen's contemporary Samuel Milton, who was also a missionary, would comment that Thomsen had "an excellent talent for composing in the English and Malay language, hymns, short prayers, lessons and other elementary books well adapted to the capacity of children".[13]

In fact, one of Thomsen's earliest publications[14] was *A Spelling Book* (1818), likely used in the schools and one of the earliest Malay textbooks to be printed in the Malay Peninsula. Another first in Malay printing was *Bustan Arifin* (1821–22), the first Malay

(Facing page) Danish missionary Reverend Claudius Henry Thomsen is credited with producing some of the earliest Malay-language publications in Singapore and the Malay Peninsula. *All rights reserved, Milner, A.C. (1980). A Missionary Source For a Biography of Munshi Abdullah. Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 53(1 (237)) 53, 111–119.*
(Below left) Munshi Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir was an accomplished Malay scholar and the "father of modern Malay literature". He helped guide Claudius Henry Thomsen in his understanding of the Malay language. Illustration by Harun Lat. *All rights reserved, Hadijah Rahmat. (1999). Antara Dua Kota. Singapore: Regional Training and Publishing Centre.*
(Below right) The Chinese and English printing offices in Malacca where Thomsen's printing press was likely co-located with the English press. Missionary Sketches XXVIII, January, 1825. *Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*



1. Chinese Printing Office 2. English Printing Office 3. Chinese School 4. Western Gate of Malacca

Some Key Publications by Claudius Henry Thomsen

Bustan Arifin: Malay Magazine
(1821–22)

This is the first Malay magazine to be published in the Malay Peninsula. A quarterly edition with about 30 pages per issue, it was written for a Malay readership and covers a wide range of subjects such as history, biography, philosophy and religion. It followed the framework set by an earlier periodical – the *Indo-Chinese Gleaner*. Missionaries Samuel Milton and Thomas Beighton regularly wrote columns for the magazine, the former on astronomy while the latter profiled heroes of history and the Christian faith. It became popular and was even read by the royal families in the Malay Peninsula. However, only six issues were published between January 1821 and April 1822 as Thomsen left for Singapore soon after.[15]

The Psalter, or Psalms of David, with the Order for Morning and Evening Prayer, Daily Throughout the Year
(Puji-pujian iaitu Segala Zabur Daud Terbahagi atas Jalan Seperti yang Dipakai oleh Sidang Perhimpunan dalam Gereja lagipun Beberapa Doa yang Dipakai Sehari-hari Pagi dan Petang) (1824)
[Call no.: RCLOS 221 PUJ]

Thomsen was recorded as the translator in this publication printed at the Institution Press in 1824. The homily and prayer book in Malay was used during Sunday services in Singapore, and is a translation of the one commonly used in Anglican church services. A sample of this published translation was given to Raffles who commended Thomsen for the quality of its translation.[16]

A Vocabulary of the English and Malayan Languages (1827)
[Call no.: RCLOS 428.1 VOC (photocopy of an incomplete version)]

The word-list of 2,000 words is one of the earliest collaborative works by Munshi Abdullah and Thomsen, compiled sometime between 1815 and 1816.[17] It was first published in Malacca in 1820 to aid visiting foreigners in communicating with the locals and used as a teaching tool by Thomsen at his Malay school. The second edition was published in Singapore in 1827, likely the first vocabulary guide printed in Singapore. It provides insights into how Malay was used in Malacca and Singapore in the early 19th century. The only known complete set is found at the National University of Singapore Library's Singapore/Malaysia Collection.

(Top) The *Sermon on the Mount* is the longest and one of the most often quoted teachings of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew in the Bible. The translation by Claudius Henry Thomsen is one of the earliest extant Malay publications printed in Singapore.
(Above) The National Library's copy of *The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in Malay.* Thomsen spent 12 to 15 months translating the New Testament into Malay, and printed 1,500 copies in June 1831.
(Bottom right) The National Library holds a copy of *A Code of Bugis Maritime Laws*, which was edited by Thomsen and published in 1832. The publication was subsequently translated into French, German and Dutch.

The third edition published in Singapore in 1833, entitled *A Vocabulary of the English, Bugis, and Malay Languages: Containing About 2000 Words*, is one of the last works Thomsen would print in Singapore. The Bugis manuscript had languished for several years until a donation of 30 Spanish dollars was made by a friend of Thomsen's to defray the printing cost.[18] An enlarged and improved edition was printed by Evans in Malacca and Penang in 1837,[19] with the profits used to raise 400 Spanish dollars for building a new wing for the Anglo-Chinese College in Malacca. The *Vocabulary* continued to be printed in Singapore as late as 1860.[20]

The Substance of our Saviour's Sermon on the Mount Contained in the 5th, 6th & c. 7th Chapters of the Gospel According to St Matthew (1829)
[Call no.: RRARE 226.9059923 SER; Microfilm no.: NL 21277]

This is a Malay translation of Jesus's core teachings as found in his *Sermon on the Mount* in the Gospel of Matthew. The booklet begins with a single-page orthography of the Malay language as used in the text and concludes with a non-biblical six-stanza poem on the means to salvation.

Thomsen is believed to be the translator of the booklet and author of the poem, having completed a translation of the Gospel of Matthew in 1821 while in Malacca.[21]

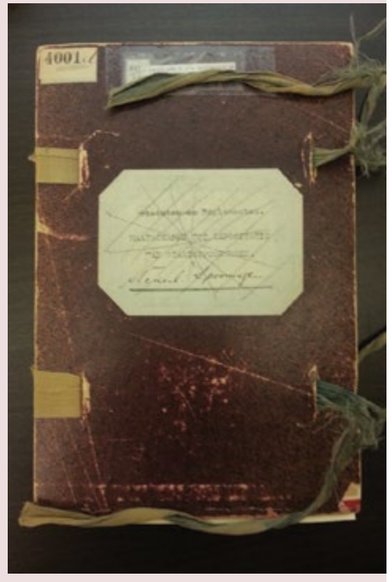
This booklet is the earliest extant Malay publication printed in Singapore and is found in the National Library, Singapore.

The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in Malay
(Kitab Al-Kudus, ia-itu, Injil Isa Al-Masihi atau Segala Surat Testament Bahru) (1831)
[Call no.: RRARE 225.59928 BIB; Microfilm no.: NL 27664, NL 9717]

Thomsen began work on translating the New Testament of the Bible into Malay when he realised that the stocks of his Calcutta edition was running low. He devoted 12 to 15 months of fulltime work to carry out the translation, and finally printed 1,500 copies in June 1831, noting that this event "will form an era in the Malay Mission". The British and Foreign Bible Society contributed 800 sicca Rupees for its publication.[22] The National Library, Singapore, has the first edition of this rare publication.

A Code of Bugis Maritime Laws
(1832)
[Call no.: RRARE 343.5984096 COD; Microfilm no.: NL 6400]

The National Library, Singapore, has a copy of this publication edited by Thomsen and published in 1832. It contains the Bugis maritime laws in the Bugis script with English translations as well as an appendix of vocabulary terms. Although Thomsen's translation was criticised as not being accurate, the publication was well received as far away as Bengal and was subsequently translated and published in French in 1845, German in 1854 and Dutch in 1856.[23]



A group of Bugis men posing for a photograph below their house built on wooden stilts, c.1890s. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

magazine published in the Peninsula and targeted at Malay youths. Other publications include *An Alphabet, Syllabrium and Praxis in the Malayan Language* (1818); *A Vocabulary of the English and Malayan Languages* (1820) as well as various religious tracts and textbooks.

By 1819, the Malay printing press was under the full charge of Thomsen who employed 12 youths – eight boys and four girls – to work as bookbinders, printers and illustrators.[24] The printing press was, however, a much smaller enterprise in terms of size and financial resources compared with the Chinese press. By 1820, Thomsen had married Mary Ann Browne.

Printing in Singapore

The LMS was established in Singapore in October 1819, a few months after the founding of the settlement. Samuel Milton was the first head of the Singapore mission.

Thomsen left Malacca for Singapore on 11 May 1822 and arrived on 19 May, although academic Anthony Haydock Hill (A.H. Hill) suggests that Thomsen and Munshi Abdullah had visited Singapore earlier, likely after June 1819. Thomsen immediately aligned himself with Raffles who commended the former's proficiency in Malay. Both men agreed to establish a press, with Raffles stating: "I look with great confidence to the influence of a well-conducted press in this part of the East".[25]

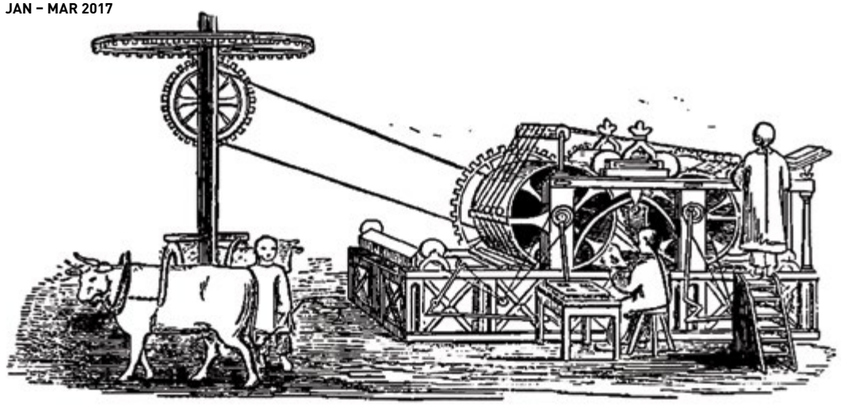
Between August and October 1822, Milton and Thomsen held discussions to obtain presses for the new settlement. On 8 December 1822, Milton travelled to Calcutta, India, to acquire printing presses and returned only in April the following year. As Raffles did not expect to remain long in Singapore, he instructed Thomsen to begin printing in Milton's absence, likely between December 1822 and January 1823, and possibly using the handpress that Thomsen had brought with him to Singapore.[26]

In February 1823, Thomsen proudly reported to the LMS that they were now "printing in English & Malay & have a small type-Foundery & are doing bookbinding. Government has been pleased to honour our little press… with the printing of all public documents both in English & Malay – one of the lads composes in English and one the Malay – one is Pressman – one does type cutting & another bookbinding… ".[27]

Some historians have implied this was the same press brought by Medhurst to Penang. Thomas Beighton, the missionary to the Malays in Penang, was new to the Malay language, and was likely unable to make use of the press for the community as efficiently as Thomsen could. Thomsen most probably took the press in 1821 when he visited Penang and brought it to Singapore the following year.[28]

The press was invented by well-known printer, Peter Perring Thoms of the East India Company, while he was stationed at Macau. Originally used for printing wood blocks, the small press had a board and roller, and cost no more than six Spanish dollars. The press was later modified by Thomsen so that it could operate metal types and work with adapted Malay fonts, allowing it to print at least eight pages, up from the original four.[29] It was this modified handpress that was most likely used to print some of Singapore's earliest publications. It was only after the press had begun operations that Thomsen made a formal request on 17 January 1823 to operate printing presses in Singapore. Approval was given by Raffles on 23 January.[30]

By mid-1823, there appeared to be two groups running different presses at the same



Likely the Chinese printing press used in Malacca in the early 19th century. Brightwell, C.L. (1874). So Great Love: Sketches of Missionary Life and Labour. London: John Snow and Co. *Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons*.

time. The one operated by Milton at his home began printing in June 1823 and served the Singapore Institution. It was much larger compared with the handpress run by Thomsen, who was printing for the LMS. Both presses also printed works for the government.[31]

Unfortunately, it was unsustainable to run two separate presses and when Milton left the mission in 1825, his printing press was handed over to Thomsen. Thomsen had three large buildings constructed at the junction of North Bridge Road and Bras Basah Road, on land owned by Anglican priest Revered Robert Burn, to house the printing press, its workmen and stores.[32]

First Publications in Singapore

The title and date of the first publication printed in Singapore cannot be ascertained. Milton mentioned an early attempt at printing a periodical and an exposition of the Book of Genesis in Chinese in a letter to George Burder, treasurer and secretary of the LMS, dated 23 September 1822. He also had plans to print pamphlets and later the New Testament in Siamese. However, no mention is subsequently made of these publications and so it is assumed that they were never completed.[33] Academic Leona O'Sullivan holds the view that printing in Singapore began with the publication of Raffles' Proclamation of 2 December 1822,[34] while Bastin records that it is Raffles' Proclamation of 1 January 1823.[35]

The Mission Press under Thomsen published not only government resources, but also various Christian tracts and bibles as well as school textbooks. While in Malacca, Thomsen had instructed Munshi Abdullah to create a Malay word list to which he would supply the English translations. Keen to learn English, Abdullah produced 2,000 words after a month's work. This wordlist was published as *A Vocabulary of the English and Malayan Languages* in Malacca in 1820, and it likely became the first published vocabulary in Singapore when reprinted by Thomsen in 1827.[36]

Thomsen used the publication as a teaching tool at the Malay school in Malacca as well as to help improve his own Malay vocabulary. Additionally, Thomsen used the vocabularly as a framework to expand his knowledge of the Bugis language, with the third edition incorporating Bugis translations of the Malay words. This was one of the last publications Thomsen produced in Singapore but the Malay word-list continued to be published as late as 1860, long after his death.[37]

Besides making initial inroads into Malay publishing, Thomsen stands as a forgotten pioneer of Bugis translated works. His interest in the Bugis language probably arose while he went onboard ships and boats to distribute Christian tracts during the trading season and noticed the influx of Bugis *prahu*, a small sailing boat used by the Bugis in the Malay Archipelago. Thomsen published his first Bugis tract in 1827 after having recruited a competent transcriber in Buginese for the publication of the material.[38] Although the Bugis tracts were not considered good translations and he never quite achieved his dream of translating the Bible into Buginese, his *English-Malay-Bugis Vocabulary* (1833) and *A Code of Bugis Maritime Laws* (1832) are some of the earliest works in the Bugis language.

Thomsen's "crowning achievement", however, as academic Ibrahim bin Ismail notes, was his translation of the *New Testament* into Malay based on the Calcutta edition. With the help of the Anglican padre Robert Burn, Thomsen devoted much of his time translating the work between 1830 and 1831. With funding from the British and Foreign Bible Society, he printed 1,500 copies of the publication in June 1831.[39]

Departure from Singapore

By the end of 1833, Thomsen was near exhaustion and could do nothing else except concentrate on printing. He had been the only missionary in town for some time and spent the past years distributing tracts on a daily basis, besides running the press and managing the school and other services. Missionary Jacob Tomlin described it thus:

> "I made several visits with Mr T to the ships, prahus, and junks and gave away several Portuguese Bibles and Testaments... While Mr T was busily engaged in distributing these in the cabin, I was surrounded by a crowd of Chinamen on deck, most of whom could read, and were very grateful for the books... My bundle was soon exhausted, for there were about fifty persons in all."[40]

Although weighed down by responsibility, Thomsen remained hospitable and welcoming to overseas visitors, as described by visiting missionary John Evans: "Our arrival being reported, the Rev Mr Thomsen immediately came out in a boat to meet us, and compelled us to leave the ship that night, it being then eight o'clock, and go with him. Mrs Thomsen received us with much pleasure ... ."[41]

Some academics, such as Ching Su, suggest that Thomsen left Singapore in ignominy, having sold off the Mission Press to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) without the permission of the LMS, and then resigning from the LMS soon after returning home to England.[42] In truth, Thomsen had offered to sell the press to the LMS at the Penang station but they were unable to pay a higher price than what the ABCFM could, all parties fully aware that the press was worth much more than the 1,500 Spanish dollars that the ABCFM had offered.[43] Thomsen left Singapore on 10 May 1834 on account of his wife's affliction with cancer. She died soon after their arrival in England in October, and the following month Thomsen resigned from the LMS.[44]

The ABCFM had ambitious plans for printing in the region, and thus their acquisition of Thomsen's Mission Press. In their report in the Missionary Register of 1835, the ABCFM outlined the unique position Singapore had as a printing centre:

> "... Printing establishments should be placed at the great central points of trade and intercourse, in order that they may become Manufactories of Books and Tracts, and Depots whence they may be issued and carried abroad to the myriads who are waiting to receive them. For such an establishment, Singapore presents peculiar advantages, in respect to climate, security and frequent intercourse with all the ports on that part of the continent and the islands of the Indian Archipelago."[45]

Thomsen had set the foundations for a printing press in Singapore, producing works in the local languages at a time when many of his contemporaries had switched their attention to China. His grammar books, vocabulary guides, Bugis-language works and Malay scriptural translations, although not perfect, were reprinted beyond his lifetime and paved the way for similar works to be published under pioneers such as Keasberry, and later, Shellabear. More importantly, the humble printing press stirred in the locals an interest for the printed word, and opened up new vistas for them to explore. ♦

The author wishes to thank Dr John Bastin and Reverend Malcolm Tan for reviewing this article and sharing their valuable insights.

Notes

1 Bastin, J. (1981). The letters of Sir Stamford Raffles to Nathaniel Wallich 1819–1824. *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 54*(2 [240]), 1–73, pp. 52–53. Call no.: RCLOS 959.5 JMBRAS. [Bastin notes that Regulation No. 1 – "A Regulation for the Registry of Land at Singapore" – was printed that same day on 1 January 1823 and Abdullah's suggestion that it was the regulation on the prohibition of gambling was most likely wrong as this was printed some time later in May 1823. Some academics report the publication date as 31 December 1822 as printing began the night before as described in the *Hikayat Abdullah*. Leona O'Sullivan mentions a proclamation written on 2 December 1822. See O' Sullivan, L. (1984). The London Missionary Society: A written record of missionaries and printing presses in the Straits Settlements, 1815–1847. *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 57* ([2 [247]), 61–104, p. 74. Call no.: RCLOS 959.5 JMBRAS)

2 Hill, A.H. (1955, June). The Hikayat Abdullah. *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 28*(*3* [171]), 3–354, pp. 165–166. Call no.: RCLOS 959.5 JMBRAS

3 Today, Lower Saxony is part of Germany although for some time in the 19th century, it was part of Denmark. This is why Thomsen is sometimes referred to as German and at other times, Danish.

4 According to A.H. Hill, Thomsen was in the Dutch East Indies prior to his arrival in Malacca in 1815 and had likely picked up Indonesian Malay there, which is distinct from the Malay spoken in the Peninsula. This may account for Thomsen's claims in having prior knowledge of the Malay language and Abdullah's frustrations in teaching him the language. See Hill, Jun 1955, p. 291.

5 Milner, A.C. (1981, June). Notes on C.H. Thomsen: Missionary to the Malays. *Indonesia Circle*, 25, p. 45. Call no.: RCLOS 959.8 IC

6 Philip, R. (1840). *The life and opinions of the Rev William Milne, D.D. missionary to China* (p. 197). Philadelphia: Herman Hooker. Call no.: RRARE 266.02341051 PHI

7 Morrison, E. (1839). *Memoirs of the life and labours of Robert Morrison* (Vol 1, p. 355). London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green and Longmans. Call no.: RRARE 266.02341051092 MOR

8 Hill, Jun 1955, p. 17.

9 Hill, Jun 1955, p. 112.

10 Ibrahim bin Ismail. (1980). *Early Malay printing in the Straits Settlements by missionaries of the London Missionary Society* (pp. 43–44, 48). MA Thesis in Library and Information Studies, School of Library, Archive and Information Studies, University College London. Call no.: RSING 686.209595 IBR; Gallop, A.T. (1990). Early Malay printing: An introduction to the British Library Collections. *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 63*(1 [258]), 85–124, p. 95. Call no.: RCLOS 959.5 JMBRAS.

11 Harrison, B. (1979). *Waiting for China: The Anglo-Chinese College at Malacca, 1818–1843, and early nineteenth-century missions* (pp. 30–31). Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. Call no.: RSING 207.595141 HAR

12 Ibrahim, 1980, pp. 44–45; O' Sullivan, 1984, p. 71.

13 O'Sullivan, 1984, p. 73.

14 Many of Thomsen's works were translated with much help from Munshi Abdullah.

15 O' Sullivan, 1984, p. 73.

16 Church Missionary Society. (1825). *Missionary register* (Vol. 13, p. 387). London: Seeley, Jackson & Halliday. Retrieved from Hathi Trust Digital Library website.

17 Bastin, J. (1983). The missing second edition of C.H. Thomsen and Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir's English and Malay vocabulary. *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 56*(1 [244]), 10–11, p. 10. Call no.: RCLOS 959.5 JMBRAS

18 Noorduyn, J. (1957). C. H. Thomsen, the editor of "A Code of Bugis Maritime Laws". *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, 113*(3), 238–251, pp. 246–247. Call no.: RUR 572.9598 ITLVB

19 Proudfoot, I. (1993). *Early Malay printed books: A provisional account of materials published in the Singapore-Malaysia area up to 1920, noting holdings in major public collections* (p. 550). Kuala Lumpur: Academy of Malay Studies and the Library, University of Malaya. Call no.: RSING 015.5957 PRO

20 Ching, 1996, p. 150; Harrison, 1979, p. 125; Proudfoot, 1993, p. 550.

21 For more information on the publication, see Ong, E.C. (2016, January–March). A Christian sermon in Malay. *BiblioAsia, 11*(4), 96–97. Call no.: RSING 027.495957 SNBBA-[LIB]; O'Sullivan, 1984, p. 72.

22 Ibrahim, 1980, pp. 80–81.

23 Noorduyn, 1957, pp. 241–243.

24 Ching, S. (1996). *Printing presses of the London Missionary Society among the Chinese* (pp. 127–128) [PhD dissertation]. London: University College of London. Retrieved from UCL Discovery website.

25 Hill, Jun 1955, p. 18; Raffles, S. (1830). *Memoir of the life and public services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles* (pp. 536–537). London: John Murray. Call no.: RRARE 959.570210924 RAF

26 O' Sullivan, 1984, pp. 74–78. [Raffles wrote on 5 January 1823 that he had "a press going in English & Malay". See Bastin, 1981, p. 17.]

27 Byrd, C.K. (1970). *Early printing in the Straits Settlements, 1806–1858* (p. 13). Singapore: Singapore National Library. Call no.: RSING 686.2095957 BYR

28 O' Sullivan, 1984, p. 86.

29 O'Sullivan, 1984, pp. 86, 90; Ching, 1996, pp. 112, 126–127. [On 27 November 1832, Thomsen returned this small wooden press to Penang at the request of the LMS.]

30 Bastin, 1981, pp. 52–53

31 Ching, 1996, p. 158.

32 O'Sullivan, 1984, pp. 78–79; Ching, 1996, pp. 159–160. [Milton left the mission but not Singapore, remaining there until his death in 1849.]

33 Ching, 1996, pp. 63, 154–155, 445.

34 O'Sullivan, 1984, p. 74.

35 Bastin, J.S. (2014). *Raffles and Hastings: Private exchanges behind the founding of Singapore* (pp. 216–217). Singapore: National Library Board and Marshall Cavendish Editions. Call no.: RSING 959.5703 BAS

36 The only known complete work for the 1827 edition is found in the Singapore/Malaysia Collection at the National University of Singapore Library. See National University of Singapore. (2011, September 6). *The Singapore/Malaysia Collection*. Retrieved from National University of Singapore website.

37 Noorduyn, 1957, p. 248.

38 O'Sullivan, 1984, pp. 82, 102; Noorduyn, 1957, p. 248

39 The National Library, Singapore, has a copy of this first edition.

40 Tomlin, J. (1844). *Missionary journals and letters* (pp. 293–294). London: James Nisbet and Co. Call no.: RRARE 266.3 TOM

41 *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (Vol 12, p. 165). (1834). London: Frederick Westley and A.H. Davis. Retrieved from Hathi Trust Digital Library website.

42 Ching, 1996, pp. 161–162, 164.

43 O'Sullivan, 1984, p. 80; Ibrahim, 1980, p. 82.

44 Thomsen's connection with the LMS ceased thereafter and little is known of his further endeavours or even death date. See Whitehouse, J.O. (1896). *Register of missionaries deputations, Etc 1796–1896* (p. 30). London: London Missionary Society. Retrieved from Hathi Trust Digital Library website.

45 Church Missionary Society. (1835). *Missionary register* (Vol. 23, p. 95). London: Seeley, Jackson & Halliday. Retrieved from Hathi Trust Digital Library website.

from BRITANNIA to the NCO club

The much-loved NCO Club on Beach Road was a favourite downtown R & R spot for off-duty soldiers. **Francis Dorai** charts its history.

Francis Dorai has worked for over two decades in publishing, both as writer and editor in a broad range of media, including *The Straits Times*, Insight Guides, Berlitz Publishing, Pearson Professional, Financial Times Business and Editions Didier Millet. He is the author of several books, including *South Beach: From Sea to Sky: The Evolution of Beach Road*.

Beach Road is a fine example of a street that meshes the new with the old. Along this reclaimed stretch of land is a fascinating mix of low- and high-rise buildings from different eras, influenced by ethnic, Victorian, Art Deco and early Modernist and post-Modernist architectural styles.

Dominating the far end of Beach Road, just opposite Raffles Hotel, are the glass-encased twin towers of South Beach. What is unusual about South Beach is the cluster of low-rise pre-1950s structures that have been preserved by the developer and tastefully integrated within the complex of futuristic towers.

Most of these early Modernist structures are closely connected with the Singapore Volunteer Corps (SVC) – the precursor of the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) – whose history dates back to 1854[1]. All of the heritage buildings are pre-World War II, save for the NAAFI Britannia Club at the corner of Beach Road and Bras Basah Road that opened in 1952.[2] Renamed the SAF NCO (Singapore Armed Forces Non-Commissioned Officers) Club in 1974, this is where generations of soldiers in Singapore would unwind and enjoy their rest and recreation hours until the curtain came down on its history some 26 years later.[3]

The NAAFI Britannia Club

In some ways, Beach Road Camp and the legacy of the SVC have been overshadowed by the NAAFI Britannia Club next door: the siren call of beer, swimming and billiards, among the club's other comforts, being louder than the call to take up arms. For the British armed forces personnel who served in Singapore in the 1950s and 60s, the Britannia Club was where some of their fondest memories of Singapore were forged.

The club was declared open on 17 December 1952 by Malcolm MacDonald, the British Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia. "The Far East's most luxurious club for the British fighting forces of land, sea and air" was what the *Singapore Free Press* reported on its opening day. The clubhouse took 14 months and $1.275 million to build – which was no small change at the time.[4] Members of the SVC benefited too as they were allowed access to the club.

The building was funded by the British Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes (NAAFI), which at its peak operated recreational clubs, food and beverage outlets, shops and supermarkets wherever British servicemen and their families were stationed.

The old NAAFI Shackle Club, likely located where the War Memorial Park stands today, had clearly outgrown itself by this time, and a more sophisticated recreational club was needed for the thousands of British servicemen and their families living in Singapore, as well as for visiting Allied forces who called in from time to time.[5] With the SVC headquarters next door, the elegant Raffles Hotel opposite and a prime downtown spot facing the shimmering sea beyond, deciding on the location of the new club must have been an easy one.

In fact, Nuffield Swimming Pool – named after the British philanthropist and founder of Morris Motors Company, Lord Nuffield – had been completed a year before the clubhouse was ready and became the focal point of the building. It was one of Singapore's first Olympic-sized pools, at 50 m long and 20 m wide. The pool was lined with green-and-white mosaic tiles and was framed by a grass verge lined with multi-coloured umbrellas. A children's paddling pool and fountain were located at one end, but most striking of all was the set of three diving boards, perched 3-, 9- and 15-ft above the surface of the glistening pool.[6]

The three-storey clubhouse created quite a stir when it first opened. Designed by the Hong Kong-based British architectural firm Palmer & Turner, the post-war Modernist structure with its rust-coloured tiled façade and pitched green roof was a bold counterpoint to the Victorian-style Raffles Hotel opposite.

The fittings inside the clubhouse were luxurious and it was clear that no expense had been spared: timber parquet strips, mosaic and terrazzo for the flooring, wall skirtings embellished with Italian marble, concealed overhead lighting and plush furniture. The club's facilities were equally top-notch: on the ground floor was the air-conditioned pub and main restaurant with a dance floor of polished teak.

In addition, there was an al fresco cafeteria, and a hairdresser and sports shop. Upstairs was an open-air terrace hugging the entire length of the building and providing "a splendid grandstand view of the swimmers and the pool". Arranged around the terrace were the lounge bar, billiards room, table-tennis room and a music room with a piano. The third floor was reserved for offices and meeting rooms.[7]

Party on Britannia

The British Empire may have been on the decline after World War II with its colonies, including Singapore, agitating for independence, but life for the British forces at the Britannia Club was one endless social whirl. Its activity and social calendar published in *The Singapore Free Press* was jam-packed with events like tombola nights, variety shows, drama and cabaret performances, ballroom and quickstep dance classes, billiards and beer drinking contests.

One of the highlights announced soon after its opening was a "bathing beauty contest for Miss Britannia 1953" in which "servicewomen and servicemen wives ... parade round the swimming pool in their smartest swimsuits".[8] The club's annual Christmas and New Year's Eve balls were naturally highlights of the calendar with tickets sold out weeks in advance.

Britannia Club holds a special place in the hearts of many former British servicemen and women. Carol Traynor, who served in the Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC) in Singapore from June 1966 to April 1967, together with her friend Jenny Nelson, recalls her time at the club: "We used to frequent the Britannia Club after our shifts at Tanglin Camp, taking along a wicker basket packed with food, suntan lotion and books together with a little battery-operated record player. How lovely

(Facing page) A 1969 photo of the NAAFI Britannia Club on Beach Road. The clubhouse was officially opened by Malcolm MacDonald, the British Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia, on 17 December 1952. It took 14 months and $1.275 million to build. *Lim Kheng Chye Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*
(Below) A 1960s aerial view of Beach Road (left) with Raffles Hotel (extreme left), Nicoll Highway (right) and Marina Bay (extreme right). The Britannia Club with its Nuffield Swimming Pool stands on the right side of Beach Road. *Lim Kheng Chye Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

(Above) Carol Traynor (top), who served in the Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC) in Singapore from June 1966 to April 1967, and her friend Jenny Nelson (bottom), used to frequent the Britannia Club after their shifts at Tanglin Camp. They would sunbathe on the terrace above the pool with the blue sea in the distance. To them, life in Singapore was like being on a permanent holiday. *Courtesy of Carol Traynor.*
(Right) Nuffield Swimming Pool at the Britannia Club – named after the British philanthropist and founder of Morris Motors Company, Lord Nuffield – had been completed in 1951, a year before the clubhouse opened. It was one of Singapore's first Olympic-sized pools. *Courtesy of Editions Didier Millet.*

Be My Pin-up Girl

Suddenly for a few weeks in March 1956, Wrens, Wracs and Wrafs – acronyms for British servicewomen in the army, navy and air force – at the Britannia Club started primping and preening themselves. The reason: NAAFI in Britain had launched a worldwide "Beauty in Uniform" competition, and the winner could find herself the pin-up girl for homesick British servicemen all over the world. Soldiers were encouraged to send photos of servicewomen in uniform to the NAAFI office in Britain.

The Straits Times reported, rather tongue-in-cheek on 20 February 1956, that "British troops at the Britannia Club Singapore approved enthusiastically when told of the competition... Said Private James Love of the King's Own Scottish Borderers: 'First-class idea. I haven't been here long, but I've already met a couple of lasses who could give any film star a run for her money. I am going right out to buy myself a camera!'"[11]

those days were! We would sunbathe on the terrace above the pool with the blue sea in the distance and music blaring from our portable record player. Coming from blustery and cold England, we loved Singapore's balmy tropical weather. It was like being on a permanent holiday."[9]

The offspring of British servicemen recall blissful times spent at the club. Most of these servicemen and their families lived in rural Changi, Serangoon Gardens and Sembawang because of their proximity to British bases. Driving to the Britannia Club downtown was a weekend treat for the children. John Harper, whose father served as Warrant Officer at the RAF Changi and Tengah bases from 1957–59, remembers the monthly excursions to the club: "The first stop would invariably be the magnificent swimming pool. Dad would head off to the bar to meet other servicemen while mum would keep an eye on my two brothers and I as we swam in the pool – making sure that when we leapt off the highest diving board, which at 15 ft seemed as tall as the Eiffel Tower at the time, we would resurface from the water!"[10]

Exit Britannia

In the late 1960s, Britain's economy entered a difficult phase and its defence budget was scaled back. On 18 July 1967, the Labour government announced plans to withdraw its troops in Singapore by 1975 – only to revoke this six months later and bring the date forward to 1971. The news was met with much handwringing in Singapore. The sudden pullout by the British meant a severely weakened Singapore, which was still heavily dependent on Britain for propping up both its economy and its defence.[12]

Singapore's first batch of national servicemen was still in training in 1967, and the British military bases had been powering the local economy – the cost of maintaining the Singapore Naval Base alone was 70 million pounds a year. In addition, thousands of Singaporeans, including domestic maids and shopkeepers, depended on the British forces for their livelihoods.[13] The newly independent Singapore had a raft of issues to grapple with – high unemployment, inadequate housing and pitiably low cash reserves – and this announcement could not have come at a worse time.

But the process had started and there was no turning back. As a compromise, the British agreed to extend the deadline for withdrawal from March to December 1971. Singapore had inherited Britain's rule of law and the infrastructure it set up, but it was the sudden British withdrawal of support that forced the newly independent country to come into its own. Without Britain to fall back on, the Singapore government had to adopt a series of tough economic measures to put the country on track.

Enter the NCO Club

The Britannia Club closed on 30 April 1971; the pool was drained and the doors and windows shuttered. The poolside picnics, the rambunctious parties and the laughter vanished, and a lone *jaga* (watchman) was hired to guard the desolate premises. Its closure marked the end of the colour and gaiety that British military life had brought to Singapore.[14]

A year later, the government negotiated with NAAFI to buy out the Britannia Club and the 63,000 sq ft of prime real estate it sat on. The idea at the time was to convert the premises for public use, but with defence being a priority, a decision was made to turn it into a recreation centre for non-commissioned officers (NCOs) of the Singapore Armed Forces and their families.[15]

The government spent $236,000 sprucing up the premises, and on 17 March 1974, the newly refurbished NCO Club was officially opened by Minister for Defence Goh Keng Swee. A fancy club in the middle of downtown with an Olympic-sized pool, food and beverage outlets, and recreational facilities was much welcomed by soldiers working in military units scattered in the rural outskirts of Singapore.[16]

Lim Phai Som, the first president of the club from December 1973 to April 1974, had only five months to get the club ready before the big opening day. After being left derelict for nearly three years, the club was in shambles when renovations began in October 1973. But Lim and his team managed to restore the shine back to the club before it opened.

Truth be told, the facilities of the NCO Club were quite spartan on opening day. Compared to what the British forces had enjoyed at the Britannia Club, the Singapore soldiers were only served by a handful of hawker stalls – selling local fare such as chicken rice, *wonton* noodles and *rojak* – a Snack Bar, the Barrel Lounge, Billiards Room, Reading Room and, of course, that magnificent swimming pool. But still, it was a place to call their own – and the downtown location was undeniably superb.

Something for Every NCO

It cost the NCOs little to join the club: regulars paid $1 a month in membership dues and their national service counterparts paid 50 cents or $1 depending on their rank.

Ex-national serviceman Aloysius Lim, who stepped into the freshly minted club in April 1974 recalls: "I went like 'Wow!'. The facilities were first rate and you couldn't beat the downtown location. Even the senior officers were envious that such a posh facility was given to us lowly NCOs. It was the perfect place to meet up with my army buddies on the weekends. We would have a couple of cheap beers at the Barrel Lounge, walk over to the nearby Satay Club at the Esplanade for dinner and then watch a late-night movie at the old Capitol Theatre in Stamford Road. Everything was within walking distance."[17]

Membership numbers, both men and women, grew steadily over the years. By the time the club celebrated its fourth anniversary in March 1978, it already had 25,282 members.

A wide range of activities and courses was organised for NCOs and their families and at heavily subsidised rates. In 1978 for instance, according to the in-house magazine *The NCO*, the following were offered to members: a 10-session copper tooling course for $15; 12 social dancing classes by "Mr Sunny Low of Poh San Studios fame" for $15; fashion design over 12 sessions by "the talented Mrs Raja from the Adult Education Board"; a 12-session music course for children by "Mrs Koh Teck Lee of the Yamaha Music School"; and eight classes on magic tricks for $10.

More and more enrichment courses were held over the years. By the 1980s, there was everything from sewing and skin care to language classes – Mandarin, Japanese, French – and courses on how to use a computer and basic car maintenance.

(Top) The NCOs were a sporty bunch, representing the club in water polo matches, swimming competitions, soccer, badminton and hockey tournaments, and marathons. *Courtesy of MINDEF.*
(Above) In the 1980s and 90s, the NCO Club organised events such as tombola nights, barbecue nights, Christmas and New Year parties, social dance lessons, music and swimming classes as well as cultural performances for members. *Courtesy of MINDEF.*

SAFE Supermarket for Super Savings

In early 1973, Minister for Defence Goh Keng Swee mooted the idea of setting up a special shop where SAF personnel and their families could purchase discounted goods such as groceries and electrical items.

The concept was inspired by the so-called PX (or Post Exchange) stores in American military bases, where both active and retired military personnel could buy food and basic household items at marked-down prices. The idea could not have been more welcome in 1973 as Singapore had been battling with runaway inflation triggered by the global oil crisis.

A non-profit business arm of the military was set up called SAF Enterprises, or in short, SAFE. The intention was for these no-frills SAFE stores to pass on the savings accrued from rent-free premises and bulk purchases to military personnel and their families.[18]

Within months of the announcement, two SAFE supermarkets opened, one at Dempsey Road Camp and the other at the NCO Club. Apart from air-conditioning, the supermarkets had none of the luxuries one would find in an Orchard Road store. SAFE did give the downtown stores a run for their money though – selling groceries, basic furniture like PVC sofas and dining chairs as well as small electrical items like hairdryers and fans at significantly discounted prices.[19]

Soldiers and their families descended on the supermarkets in droves on the weekends. Snaking queues also formed for the duty-free beer, which sold at less than half the retail price. In the 1970s and 80s, the NCO Club became synonymous with cheap beer.[20]

Richard Chung, who was a national service guardsman in 1980, recalls having to show his SAF 11-B (the military identity card) before making his purchase: "We bought beer even if we didn't drink beer. It was that cheap. Some rascals would buy the beer, sell it off to friends and relatives at a higher price and pocket the difference. Of course it was illegal, but who was to know?"[21] The SAFE people must have figured this out, which was why each soldier was only allowed to buy one carton a month.

In July 1974, as the oil crisis worsened, the Dempsey Road outlet was opened to all civil servants, but without access to the cheap beer. Over the years, the grocery sales were eclipsed by sales of electrical goods. In the late 1970s, Setron and Grundig television sets, Hotpoint and Acma refrigerators, Singer sewing machines, Akai and Telefunken hi-fi stereo sets – brands that have vanished over the years – were all the rage, and getting these items for that new HDB flat was a much-cherished dream.[22]

To make the electrical products affordable, SAFE introduced a low-interest credit scheme for public sector employees and military personnel. They only had to agree to pay a small initial downpayment and the balance in 12, 18 or 24 instalments, and they could cart home a brand new 24-inch Grundig colour television set from Germany.

In 1977, the SAFE supermarket in Dempsey closed, and the outlet at the NCO Club was rebranded as SAFE Centre, stopping its sales of groceries altogether to focus on electrical goods and furniture.

In the early 1980s, SAFE closed its NCO Club store and opened a SAFE Centre in Chin Swee Road. The company would eventually be sold and renamed SAFE Superstore in 1989, expanding perhaps too quickly over the years before it went out of business in 2003.[23]

(Top) The Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) established SAFE supermarkets at the Dempsey Road Camp and NCO Club, selling food and basic household items at discounted prices to military servicemen and their families. The biggest draw was the duty-free beer, which sold at less than half the retail price. *Courtesy of MINDEF.*
(Right) Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Goh Keng Swee visits the SAF Enterprises (SAFE) supermarket at the NCO Club during its official opening on 20 December 1973. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

The NCO magazine. Top: May 1980, Vol. 5, No. 1. Above: Nov 1981, Vol. 6, No. 2. *Courtesy of MINDEF.*

Events like tombola nights, barbecue nights, excursions, picnics and cruises throughout the year were well patronised, and Christmas and New Year parties were always a highlight in the calendar. In December 1991 for instance, the New Year's Eve "Dance Night" only cost $25 per couple – for drinks, entertainment, a lucky draw and door gifts.

Every club anniversary in March would be celebrated with a huge Family Carnival. In the 1980s, quite a few of these took place at the Mitsukoshi Garden in Jurong or Big Splash in the east coast, both sprawling outdoor water theme parks where NCOs and their families would gather for a day of revelry and feasting.

The NCOs were a sporty bunch – representing the club in swimming competitions, soccer, badminton and hockey tournaments, and marathons (or road relays as they were known then) – in addition to being artistically adept. The club's Indian and Chinese dance troupes had an active calendar of performances. The club members were also a generous lot, organising dinners and outings for senior citizens and disabled children living in homes.[24]

Over the years, 15 the NCO Club was renovated and upgraded several times. The Barrel Lounge was moved to a different location with a live band providing entertainment; the al fresco hawker stall area by the poolside was converted into a gym; the Cosy Corner started featuring Karaoke Nights in addition to its regular Dance Nights; an air-conditioned cafeteria serving local and Western food was added; a jackpot machine room (called "fruit machines" in a throwback to Singapore's colonial past) and a video games arcade supplemented the Billiards Room; and a basketball court and multi-purpose hall, the latter for tombola nights and performances, were built.[25]

But the most ambitious addition to the NCO Club was the value-for-money SAFE Superstore (see text box) where army, airforce and military personnel could buy groceries and household appliances at bargain prices.

The End of an Era

Due to restructuring, the term NCO was dropped from the SAF lexicon and changed to Warrant Officers and Specialists on 1 July 1992. Thereafter, the NCO Club was renamed the SAF Warrant Officers and Specialists (WOSE) Club on 22 March 1994, but its functions remained largely the same.[26]

However, with Beach Road Camp earmarked for redevelopment in the mid-1990s, it became clear that the occupants of the NCO Club and Beach Road Camp would eventually relocate elsewhere.[27]

In 2000, the last battalion at Beach Road Camp moved out and a year later, in October 2001, the SAF WOSE Club relocated to a new clubhouse at Boon Lay Way with a new identity. The clubhouse was officially opened on 8 February 2002 by Tony Tan, who was the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence at the time. Its new identity, THE CHEVRONS, signifies the V-shaped stripes worn by all Warrant Officers and Specialists.[28] ♦

This is an abridged version of the chapter "1854–2001: History of Beach Road Camp and NCO Club" from the book *South Beach: From Sea to Sky: The Evolution of Beach Road* – by Francis Dorai and published by Editions Didier Millet for South Beach Consortium in 2012. The South Beach development, designed by the British architecture firm Foster + Partners, was launched in December 2015 and comprises a luxury hotel, offices, apartments and retail space.

Notes

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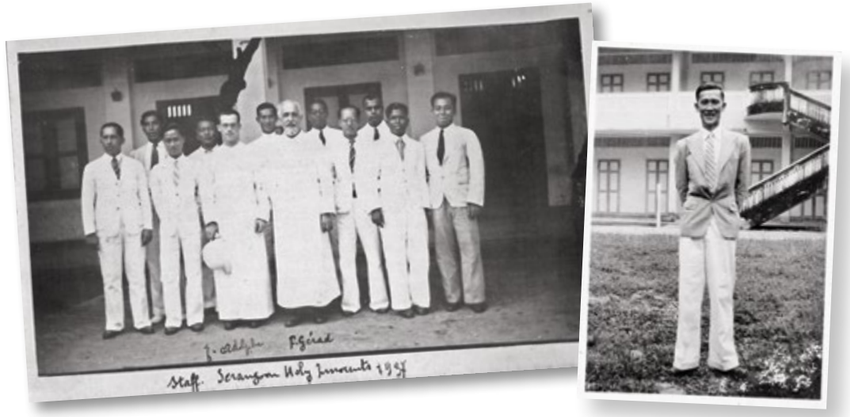
TIES THAT BIND

The Story of Two Brother Poets

An American Studies scholar unravels a decades-old mystery surrounding a bone fragment and uncovers a brotherly bond from beyond the grave. **Michelle Heng** has the story.



(Facing page) *Finding Francis: A Poetic Adventure* and *I Found A Bone and Other Poems* were published in 2015 and 2016 respectively by Ethos Books. **(Right)** Staff of the Holy Innocents' English School in 1937. Teo Kah Leng is the third person from the left of the back row. *Courtesy of the Archives of the Brothers of St Gabriel House in Rome.* **(Far right)** Photo of Teo Kah Leng taken in front of Holy Innocents' English School c. late 1940s–early 50s. *Courtesy of Anne Teo.*

"I held the arm bone in my hand,
And let my warm tears fall;
My brothers were slain at Ponggol Beach,
My brothers Peter and Paul."

Excerpt from "I Found A Bone"
by Teo Kah Leng

When American Studies scholar, Dr Eriko Ogihara-Schuck, embarked on the proverbial journey of a thousand miles to find out all she could about the elusive poet behind *F.M.S.R.*[1] – widely acknowledged as one of the first notable works of English poetry by a Singaporean writer – little did she suspect that her research would unravel the mystery of not just one but two long-forgotten poets.

Ultimately, this would set in motion a chain of events that would turn the dregs of a family's painful war-torn past into a serendipitous "reunion" of two talented brother-poets[2] and the publication of two unique collections of poetic works.

The Search Begins

Dr Ogihara-Schuck, a Japanese national who teaches American Studies and Japanese at Technische Universität Dortmund in Germany where she resides with her German husband, first chanced upon *F.M.S.R.*[3] when she answered a call in December 2012 for academic papers by the late Professor Tatsushi Narita, a specialist on the works of the Anglo-American modernist poet T.S. Eliot.[4]

On perusing *F.M.S.R.* at the British Library, she was intrigued how this 10-part poetic narrative about a train journey from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur on the Federated Malay States Railways (FMSR) took inspiration from T.S. Eliot's seminal work, *The Waste Land*,[5] using it as a literary vehicle to call for the advancement of Malayan modernism.[6]

Her initial idea to turn to Japan for her research was shelved upon discovering that much ground on the Japanese reception of T.S. Eliot had already been covered.[7] So she turned to the literary works of her "second home", Singapore – where she had spent her teenage years from 1988 to 1994 when her father, a former Panasonic employee, was based here.

Her interest in republishing *F.M.S.R.* and making it available to the public grew. However, the endeavour was fraught with problems from the very start as *F.M.S.R.* was an "orphan work", and republishing it would not be possible unless its copyright status could be verified. No biographical information about the author, Francis P. Ng, could be found and the premises of the book's London publisher had been bombed during World War II.

On probing further, Ogihara-Schuck unexpectedly discovered that "Francis P. Ng" was actually a pseudonym[8] and that the poet's real name was Paul Teo Poh Leng, a primary school teacher who was born in Singapore in 1912. She found this vital piece of information in "The Song of the Night Express", the seventh section of *F.M.S.R.* that had been published separately as a poem in the Spring 1937 issue of the British literary journal, *Life and Letters To-day*.[9]

This breakthrough discovery of the poet's real identity enabled Ogihara-Schuck to gather further information about the author while working at her desk in Germany. Tapping the National Library Board's online resource, NewspaperSG, she found quite a few newspaper articles with his name.

Help also came from several other sources. Tim Yap Fuan, the Associate University Librarian at the National University of Singapore, tracked down Teo Poh Leng's essays that had appeared in the *Raffles College Union Magazine* (Teo was a student of the college between 1931 and 1933); and the University of Chicago's archives shared with her a letter that Teo had sent to an American poetry magazine in 1931. But no further details of Teo could be traced following the publication of his last essay in the *Raffles College Union Magazine* in 1941.

Undaunted, Ogihara-Schuck flew to Singapore in the summer of 2014 to do further research. The full details of her astonishing discovery are documented in the article "On the Trail of Francis P. Ng: Author of *F.M.S.R.*" in Vol. 10 Issue 4 (Jan-Mar 2015) of *BiblioAsia*, the quarterly journal published by the National Library, Singapore.[10]

What happened subsequently is the stuff of detective fiction novels. Journalist Akshita Nanda picked up on the *BiblioAsia* article, contacted Ogihara-Schuck and followed up with a report on the Japanese academic's search for a pioneering Singaporean poet who had disappeared during World War II. The article, published in *The Straits Times* on 22 February 2015[11] would ultimately lead to a series of startling discoveries and, eventually, a touching family reunion.

The Brother-Poets

The Straits Times' article headlined "Do you know Teo Poh Leng?" jogged the memory of a reader by the name of Samuel Chia. He contacted the reporter to tell her about his childhood recollection of a poem titled "I Found A Bone", penned by a poet named Teo Kah Leng, then a teacher at the Holy Innocents' English School. Chia had correctly guessed that Poh Leng was Kah Leng's brother due to the similarity of their names. He further suspected that Poh Leng was one of the two brothers, "Peter and Paul" mentioned in the final line of "I Found A Bone", who had died during the Japanese Occupation.

Peter was the Christian name of Teo Kee Leng, the elder brother, while Poh Leng (whose Christian name was Paul) was the youngest sibling. Kah Leng himself had escaped the same fate because he was not at home when his brothers were hauled away by the Japanese soldiers.

Chia, a former pupil at St Gabriel's School, which was then a sister-school of the Holy Innocents' English School, was too young to read the entire poem but he recalled being drawn to "I Found A Bone" because it was accompanied by an attractive illustration of a tranquil landscape with coconut trees framing a beach. The poem, with the drawing, was published in the 1955 issue of the *Holy Innocents' English School Annual*.[12]

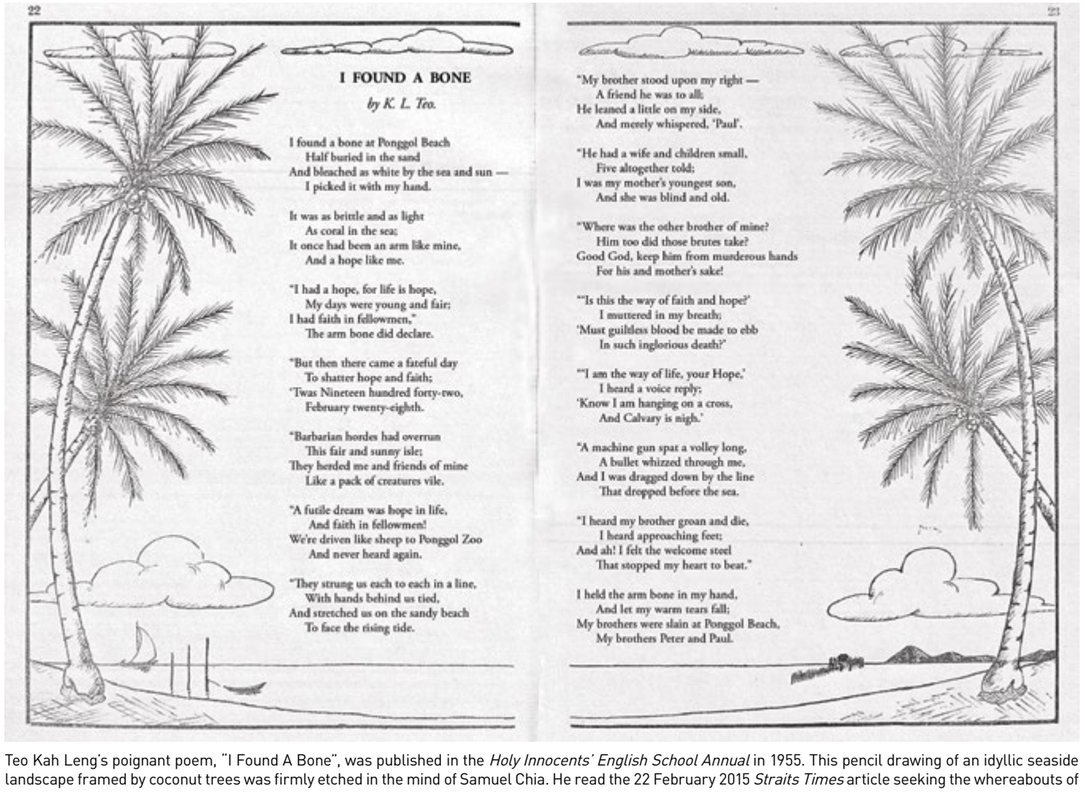
Chia had asked his sister to read the poem for him – its memorable themes of loss and despair in a war-ravaged Singapore touched him deeply – and etched in his mind both the poem and its poet for the next few decades.

The haunting poem about a man who found his brother's arm bone fragment at Punggol beach was one of the few clues linking Teo Kah Leng and Teo Poh Leng as brothers. Sadly, it also confirmed the latter's death during the Sook Ching massacre at the onset of the Japanese Occupation – Punggol beach was one of the sites where Chinese men had been slain by Japanese soldiers.[13]

This was something that Ogihara-Schuck had earlier surmised; all traces of Teo Poh Leng seemed to have vanished after the fall of Singapore in 1942. As an English-speaking teacher, Teo Poh Leng was most likely a target of the Sook Ching, which saw many thousands of Chinese males being executed for their perceived anti-Japanese stance.[14]

When Ogihara-Schuck was told about the provenance of the poem "I Found A Bone" and the possible connection between

Michelle Heng is a Literary Arts Librarian at the National Library, Singapore. She has curated a tribute showcase, *Edwin Thumboo – Time-travelling: A Poetry Exhibition* in 2012, and compiled and edited an annotated bibliography on Edwin Thumboo, *Singapore Word Maps: A Chapbook of Edwin Thumboo's New and Selected Place Poems* (2012) as well as the *Selected Poems of Goh Poh Seng* (2013).



Teo Kah Leng's poignant poem, "I Found A Bone", was published in the *Holy Innocents' English School Annual* in 1955. This pencil drawing of an idyllic seaside landscape framed by coconut trees was firmly etched in the mind of Samuel Chia. He read the 22 February 2015 *Straits Times* article seeking the whereabouts of the elusive author of *F.M.S.R.* and provided the crucial link that Teo Kah Leng and Teo Poh Leng could be related, helping to solve a decades-long mystery about the poet's identity. *Courtesy of Montfort Schools.*

the two Teos, she knew she was on the brink of making a new discovery. She was already aware that Teo Poh Leng's Christian first name was Paul, and had deduced that "the Chinese names Poh Leng and Kah Leng sounded like a pair of siblings' names".[15] "I Found A Bone" contained another clue to the hitherto missing piece of the puzzle: the poem included the fateful date, 28 February 1942, when Teo Poh Leng was taken away by the Japanese.

Meanwhile another person was similarly piqued by *The Straits Times*' article. This was Anne Teo, the daughter of Teo Kah Leng. Her father had died in 2001 at the age of 92. Who was this Japanese researcher trying to track down her uncle? She contacted Ogihara-Schuck and provided confirmation that Teo Poh Leng was indeed her uncle and that he had fallen victim to the Sook Ching massacre. As Anne had been born after her uncle's death, she could only recall hearing about Uncle Poh Leng from her father and relatives. Although unaware of his work as a poet, she somehow instinctively knew that "Francis P. Ng" was her uncle when she read *F.M.S.R.*

Aside from being privy to the fact that "Francis" was Poh Leng's Christian middle name and "Ng" was his mother's surname, the imagery of the Serangoon area portrayed in *F.M.S.R.* sounded familiar to Anne as she had grown up in that district.

Finding Francis is Published

On learning of Ogihara-Schuck's plans to republish *F.M.S.R*, Anne Teo proposed a collaboration with her on the project. She also provided the much needed confirmation that her uncle had been dead for more than 70 years, which meant that copyright for the book had expired and now resided in the public domain.

Another person who played a significant role in this journey was the Singaporean poet and literary activist, Alvin Pang, who had been aware of *F.M.S.R.* more than a decade before Ogihara-Schuck began researching it. After being introduced to the original 1937 edition of *F.M.S.R.* – one of five extant copies available in the world – by former librarian Yenping Yeo of the National Library, Singapore, in the early 2000s, Pang approached several Singapore institutions in the hope of creating awareness of this long-forgotten poem.

Thus, when Ogihara-Schuck fortuitously turned to Pang for advice on the republishing of *F.M.S.R.*, he introduced her to Fong Hoe Fang, the founder of Ethos Books. Fong too was similarly enthused by the discovery of this lost poet "who was published on the same platform with writers like Robert Frost and W.B. Yeats", and under his guidance, *Finding Francis: A Poetic Adventure*, was published in October 2015.[16]

Finding Francis is indeed an apt title for this volume of Teo Poh Leng's works, reflecting the painstaking two-and-a half-year mission that began in February 2013 and saw Ogihara-Schuck crossing the globe from Germany to London and to Singapore in her bid to unravel a thread in Singapore's literary history. What is even more fascinating is that an obscure early 20th-century Singaporean poet could have captured and engaged the imagination of a foreigner such as Ogihara-Schuck – an American Studies scholar of Japanese descent who lives in Germany. Her only link to Singapore was the six years she spent as a teenager in Singapore.

For Ogihara-Schuck, the most serendipitous part of her project was the discovery of another pioneer Singaporean poet –Teo Kah Leng – and the unpublished manuscript of some 50 poems that his daughter Anne had inherited upon his death in 2001. A year after publishing *Finding Francis*, Ogihara-Schuck and Anne launched Teo Kah Leng's poetry collection, *I Found A Bone and Other Poems* in August 2016, with Ethos Books and the aid of a grant from the National Arts Council.

The Redemptive Power of Poetry

For Anne Teo, the discovery of her late uncle and his published poems was proof that her father and his brother were bound by their mutual love for verse.[17] Juxtaposing her father's poems with that of her uncle's, she suggests that their brotherly bonds rose above the tragedy of war and the Japanese Occupation through the redemptive power of forgiveness, as seen in the poem "I Found A Bone".[18]

There are enough Christian motifs in the poem to suggest this idea. It starts and ends with Teo Kah Leng's voice but switches to the persona of his younger sibling, Teo Poh Leng, in stanzas 12 and 13 as he recounts his tragic death at Punggol beach: "I am the way of life, your Hope… / Know I am hanging on a cross / And Calvary is nigh".

Although Teo Kah Leng lost his two beloved siblings in the war and was suddenly thrust with the financial and moral responsibility of looking after his extended families, Anne says that her father was able to "help Uncle Poh Leng remain a poet even after his death" by literally immortalising him in "I Found A Bone".

Indeed, some of Teo Poh Leng's poetry seemed to uncannily portend future tragic war events even before he fell victim. "Uncle Poh Leng seemed to have believed in the importance of forgiveness", she adds.[19] Anne highlights Poh Leng's poem "Time Is Past" as an ode to forgiving past transgressions and moving on: "Time its neck no more holds me in case. / Time is past: / I move upon an earthless plane, / At last!"

Reflecting on the grim events that had cast a pall over her father's youth and the remainder of his life following the Japanese surrender, Anne says that even though her father's "yoke was heavily laden with misery, despair, and sorrow… he chose to exercise his right to be 'free' by forgiving the perpetrators". She draws attention to her father's poem "The Cicada", in which he penned these lines: "The past is gone. Let it be dead! / Call not to life its phantoms dread / With fearful shrieks and tearful cries".[20]

For Ogihara-Schuck, her quest to uncover the life of Teo Poh Leng magnified the "feel" of his powerful verses. In an email, she revealed how she was emotionally affected by the untimely end of Teo Poh Leng, whose promising career as a poet, along with whatever hopes and dreams he had, was shattered by the Sook Ching. "It was really painful to read articles about Raffles College students (including Poh Leng) graduating from college and looking forward to their future while not knowing what was going to happen to them some years later."[21]

Ogihara-Schuck was wistful when she came across a list of Sook Ching victims containing their names, ages and addresses. The knowledge that so many in Singapore had suffered at the hands of the Japanese must have been an uncomfortable memory.

She reveals: "I could recognise some of the addresses, so I 'felt' the reality of the experience. It was the same feeling I had when I saw the list of Jewish victims of the Holocaust at the school where my husband teaches. As part of a school project, the students had researched on former Jewish pupils at their school who had been sent to concentration camps."[22]

In a fitting denouement of the transcendental power of the brother-poets' works, Anne writes in the concluding essay of *Finding Francis* that "through their poems, the brother-poets sought to unshackle themselves from a dreaded past through forgiveness, to foster hope in their lives. As Dad wrote in "I Found A Bone", taking on the voice of his brother, 'life is hope'".[23]

The personal lives of the two brother-poets and the Christian concept of forgiveness and redemption articulated in Kah Leng's "I Found A Bone" – despite its tragic ending – is an expression of that hope. ♦

Notes

1 *F.M.S.R.* was published in 1937 by the London publisher, Arthur H. Stockwell. See Toh, H. M (2007). *Introduction to Singapore poetry on Ars Interpres*. Retrieved from Ars Interpres website; Pang, A., & Shankar, R. (Eds.). (2015). Editors' introduction. In *Union:15 years of drunken boat, 50 years of writing from Singapore* (pp. 12–13). Singapore: Ethos Books. Call no.: RSING S821 UNI

2 Teo, A (2015). Conclusion (p. 55). In E. Ogihara-Schuck & A. Teo. (Eds.), *Finding Francis: A poetic adventure*. Singapore: Ethos Books. Call no.: RSING S821 NG

3 Ng, F.P. (1937). *F.M.S.R.: A poem*. London: Arthur H. Stockwell. Call no.: RCLOS 821.9 PNG-[FRL]

4 Tatsushi Narita was looking for participants in his panel discussion titled "T.S. Eliot: East and West" but passed away before the conference convened. Although she had never met Narita in person, Ogihara-Schuck attributes the start of her research on *F.M.S.R.* to his last research effort before his death. Ogihara-Schuck's paper was presented at the International Association of American Studies (IASA) conference in Poland in 2013.

5 Holden, P. (2009). *Introduction: Literature in English in Singapore before 1965* (p. 10). In A. Poon, P. Holden & S. G-L. Lim. (Eds.), *Writing Singapore: An historical anthology of Singapore literature*. Singapore: NUS Press; National Arts Council Singapore. Call no.: RSING S820.8 WRI

6 Ogihara-Schuck, E. (2015). Introduction (pp. 8–32). In E. Ogihara-Schuck & A. Teo. (Eds.), *Finding Francis: A poetic adventure*. Singapore: Ethos Books. Call no.: RSING S821 NG

7 Personal email communication with Eriko Ogihara-Schuck, 2016.

8 Only much later did Ogihara-Schuck discover the origins of the pseudonym Francis P. Ng – a combination of Teo Poh Leng's first and middle Christian names, Paul Francis, but in reverse order, and his maternal family name, Ng.

9 Teo, P.L. (1937). The song of the night express. *Life and Letters To-day, 16* (7), 44. Not available in NLB holdings.

10 Ogihara-Schuck, E. (2015, Jan-Mar). On the trail of Francis P. Ng: Author of F.M.S.R. *BiblioAsia, 10* (4), 38–45. Call no.: RSING 027.495957 SNBBA-[LIB]

11 Nanda, A. (2015, February 22). Do you know Teo Poh Leng? *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from Factiva via NLB's eResources website.

12 Ogihara-Schuck, E. (2016). Editors' introduction (pp. 6–8). In K.L. Teo, *I found a bone and other poems*. Singapore: Ethos Books. Call no.: RSING S821 TEO

13 Ogihara-Schuck, E., & Teo, A. (Eds.). (2015). Acknowledgements (pp. 4–5). In F. Ng & K.L. Teo, *Finding Francis: A poetic adventure*. Singapore: Ethos Books. Call no.: RSING S821 NG; Lee, G.B. (2005). *The Syonan years: Singapore under Japanese rule 1942–1945* (pp. 113–115). Singapore: National Archives of Singapore and Epigram Pte Ltd. Call no.: RSING q940.53957 LEE-[WAR]; "Chinese massacre" Japs hanged at Changi. (1947, June 26). *Malaya Tribune*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

14 Tan, S., et al. (2009). *Syonan Years, 1942-1945: Living beneath the rising sun* (p. 14). Singapore: National Archives of Singapore. Call no.: RSING 940.530745957 TAN-[WAR]; Akashi, Y. (1970, September). Japanese policy towards the Malayan Chinese, 1941-1945. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, 1*(2), 61-89, p. 67. Call no.: RSING 959.005 JSA

15 Ogihara-Schuck, E. (2016). Editors' introduction (pp. 6–8). In K.L. Teo, *I found a bone and other poems*. Singapore: Ethos Books. Call no.: RSING S821 TEO

16 Nanda, A. (2015, October 12). Work of lost Malayan poet Teo Poh Leng republished after 78 years thanks to ST article. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from Factiva via NLB's eResources website.

17 Teo, A (2015). Conclusion (p. 55). In E. Ogihara-Schuck & A. Teo. (Eds.), *Finding Francis: A poetic adventure*. Singapore: Ethos Books. Call no.: RSING S821 NG

18 Teo, A (2015). Conclusion (p. 55). In E. Ogihara-Schuck & A. Teo. (Eds.), *Finding Francis: A poetic adventure*. Singapore: Ethos Books. Call no.: RSING S821 NG

19 Teo, A (2015). Conclusion (p. 55). In E. Ogihara-Schuck & A. Teo. (Eds.), *Finding Francis: A poetic adventure*. Singapore: Ethos Books. Call no.: RSING S821 NG

20 Teo, A (2015). Conclusion (p. 55). In E. Ogihara-Schuck & A. Teo. (Eds.), *Finding Francis: A poetic adventure*. Singapore: Ethos Books. Call no.: RSING S821 NG

21 Personal email communication with Eriko Ogihara-Schuck, 2016.

22 Personal email communication with Eriko Ogihara-Schuck, 2016.

23 Teo, A (2015). Conclusion (p. 55). In E. Ogihara-Schuck & A. Teo. (Eds.), *Finding Francis: A poetic adventure*. Singapore: Ethos Books. Call no.: RSING S821 NG

The SOOK CHING

February 15 marks the 75th anniversary of the fall of Singapore. **Goh Sin Tub** recounts the horrors that many Chinese suffered at the hands of the Japanese in this short story.

In December 1941, just as I turned 14, World War II descended on us in Singapore. Our family was then living in a shophouse on peaceful Emerald Hill, which suddenly became no longer peaceful, indeed more like a battlezone. Our neighbourhood was close to Monk's Hill, an anti-aircraft artillery site and therefore a target of enemy air attack. The din of that aerial bombardment so near was nerve-racking. We packed a few bags and fled off to Granduncle's house, a relatively safe storehouse-cum-residence in Philip Street in the centre of town.

Then, on 16th February 1942[1] (Chinese New Year's Day of that year!), to our shock and dismay, the British capitulated and the Japanese army marched in.

On 17th February, our new masters issued their first public order in Singapore, now called Syonanto: all male Chinese adults were to report the very next day at designated camps – under threat of "severe punishment", a phrase quickly to become familiar. Most of us presumed then it was only for some kind of registration of people.

But those concentrations of the Chinese were actually for a sinister purpose. The conquering Japanese troops had arrived with horrendous baggage: memories of bloody encounters with the mainland Chinese in the still ongoing Sino-Japanese war. And they were sorely aware that the Chinese in Singapore had been anti-Japanese, staging demonstrations, organising boycotts of Japanese goods and raising money (the China War Relief Fund) to help the Chinese on the mainland in their fight against invasion. And there were the Singapore Chinese who took up arms against the Japanese: volunteers with the British forces as well as those MCP (Malayan Communist Party) diehards, who struggled against them in the jungles of the Malay Peninsula.

Led by the ruthless Kempeitai (Japanese Military Police), the victorious soldiers went all out to screen the Chinese, however hasty and slapdash the operation, to seek and destroy anyone suspected of being hostile, no matter how flimsy the evidence, no matter how many were fingered. This operation was their infamous Sook Ching – a haphazard sudden horror that slaughtered possibly up to 50,000 Singapore people.[2] Indeed there were few Singapore Chinese families who did not lose one or more relatives in that massacre, without doubt the darkest hour in our history.

The day the Allied troops left was the signal for instant lawlessness and chaos in the streets. My father saw how looters, our own local people, went on a rampage, breaking into vacated shops and homes everywhere. He became anxious about our own home that we had left unguarded. Not knowing how bloodthirsty and trigger-happy the occupying soldiers were, he rashly decided to rush back home instead of reporting to the Maxwell Road camp designated for our area. He would not risk the whole family going back with him, but he agreed to take along Sin Chan, my 16-year-old elder brother.

We were to remain ignorant till days later about what happened to Father and Sin Chan after they left the safe haven of Granduncle's house.

Meanwhile, Granduncle took charge of me. Together with his own son and his workers (whom he had always treated like family members, even to the extent of providing them with meals and shelter in his home), he took us to report at the Maxwell Road camp.

The camp was an unforgettable experience, although we were only there overnight.

At the barricaded entrance of the camp, we came face to face with the ugly face of the enemy: uncouth and aggressive Japanese soldiers, yelling loudly and brandishing bayoneted rifles at us, clearly straining to

Goh Sin Tub (1927–2004) wore many hats in his lifetime – as teacher, social worker, high-ranking civil servant, banker and property developer, and also as chairman of the Board of Governors at St Joseph's Institution. Although he had been writing since his school and university days, he only pursued it seriously after his retirement in 1986. Although Goh was a prolific writer of short stories, he also wrote poetry and two noteworthy novels. In all, he published 20 books during his two-decade-long writing career, mainly about Singapore and its struggles during its transformative years.

> … we could hear screams now and then – and we could see bodies lying around, whether dead, ill or asleep we did not know.

be given cause to stab or shoot us. Indeed, we could hear screams now and then – and we could see bodies lying around, whether dead, ill or asleep we did not know. As we stepped around the screened entrance into the open area of the camp, we were hit with a shocking scene: a panoramic sea of anxious faces. Fear, palpable as heartbeats of panic, in all eyes. Frightened faces wherever we looked. And into that quagmire of terror-stricken humanity we were at once engulfed, with that sinking sensation of being sucked in, identity lost, now part of the world of the helpless and the damned…

For hours we stayed in that hell-hole, squatting around in tight huddles, doing nothing, on the edge of hysteria from not knowing our fate.

We were shoved into queues. Then hurried forward, one by one. It was followed by more waiting outside a makeshift tent. Soon, we were standing there before our judges and executioners: a screening panel of unfriendly soldiers and interpreters. This included some strange men who had their faces hidden behind hoods and spoke only in whispers but did a lot of pointing with their fingers.

Those of us cleared after questioning were given slips of paper chopped with a seal. When they ran out of paper, they would stamp those cleared on their shirts or arms. These chops had to be preserved at all costs. Over the coming days they would be lifesavers: precious proof of screening clearance whenever Japanese soldiers checked us on the streets or came to search our homes.

Here and there, someone before that inquisition team would be dragged off and made to squat in a cordoned group below the hot sun under the surveillance of soldiers with guns vigilantly trained on them.

We thought they were people needing further screening or selected to do some work or other. We did not know that they were the ones who would never go back home.

Granduncle took up the rear of our family group in the queue. I think he wanted to make sure that all his family got through that Sook Ching filter.

We did – all of us.

He did not.

A clueless teenager who had grown up as a sheltered child, I stood wide-eyed and quavering like jelly before those Japanese inquisitors. That helped me. I was clearly not worth their wasting time on. An interpreter passed me a stamped slip and told me to scram. I quickly stepped out into the open street.

Granduncle had given me strict instructions. *Don't hang around outside the*

(Above) Japanese fighter planes began air raids of Singapore on 8 December 1941. The first air raid in the early hours of that morning killed 61 and injured 133 people. In the days to come, Singapore would see frequent air raids by the Japanese, sometimes several times a day before the British officially surrendered on 15 February 1942. The numbers that died were never fully documented. *Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.*
(Left) Painting of a scene showing Japanese soldiers herding Chinese men to be killed in the mass execution known as the Sook Ching. According to some estimates, as many as 50,000 Chinese men died during the bloodbath that took place in the days following the fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942. *Chia Chew Soo Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

A piece of paper bearing the Chinese character 檢 (meaning "checked"). In the days following the fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942, Chinese men were made to report to mass screening centres. Those who passed the screening by Japanese soldiers were given slips of paper that were stamped with this symbol and released. When the paper slips ran out, some were stamped on their arms and shirts. Thousands of others, however, who did not receive these stamps, were herded off to various sites in Singapore where they were executed. *Chu Chin Lam Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

camp once you're out of it. Don't wait for the rest of our group. That could be dangerous.

So at once I took to my heels, heading for our Philip Street home. The trouble was that I was such a wimp and literally not streetwise at all. I did not know my way around that Chinatown neighbourhood. I got lost and wandered about the streets, getting more and more confused and frightened. I must have been going around in circles for hours. There was nobody around I could ask for help. Everyone was either still in the camp or locked up behind their own closed doors. The few I saw, perhaps like me screened and released, were in desperate hurry to get out of the streets – no one had time for a lost kid.

That was one of those times when the grace I received from school education by the Christian Brothers taught me what to do. I prayed.

And my prayer was answered.

I heard someone calling out to me. It was Yeo Tian Chwee, one of Granduncle's young workers. He too had been cleared. He had headed for the safety of home at once. When he found out that I was missing he bravely went back into the streets to search for me.

We reached home safely. Someone told us that although everyone else was back, Granduncle was still not home yet. Tian Chwee immediately took to the streets again to find out what had happened to him. He did not return till he had to – it was getting dark and the Japanese had imposed curfew after dark.

He came home with sad news. Someone had seen Granduncle: he was one of those pushed into the packed trucks that took away the uncleared…

Grandaunt cried but she never gave up hope.

The days of Granduncle's not coming home stretched into weeks, then months, then years…

And the vultures came, always bringing hope, always needing to be paid to get more news, devouring the old lady, flesh and spirit, till she became a shadow of her old happy self. Till she wept those lovely eyes of hers hollow and blind.

> … just as Sin Chan opened the door a bayonet was impatiently thrust in. My brother felt the coldness of steel right next to his cheek…

Tian Chwee, thankfully saved from that Sook Ching purge, remained a mainstay of the family, marrying the daughter of his boss, managing the family business, looking after the old lady and the rest of the family and workers.

For myself, Sook Ching was the purge of my childhood innocence. It was my first encounter with evil…

What of my father and Sin Chan?

We were worried sick about them. They had disobeyed the Japanese authorities' order: they had not reported to their designated screening camp. Both had no saving chop to safeguard them from detention (or a worse fate) if caught without that precious proof of clearance. So we thought. Actually, both had also gone through another Sook Ching camp.

My brother had been cleared.

My father had not…but lived.

Where were they? What to do? We could only pray – my mother with her calming joss-sticks (she was not a Christian then), I with the powerful prayers the Christian Brothers had taught me.

Suddenly, they turned up at Philip Street – with a harrowing story of hide-and-seek, and running for dear life, and finally escaped from the Japanese.

The day they set out they had to pass through Japanese barricades but they reached our Emerald Hill home safely. They found the house all right – or almost all right, as the house adjoining ours had been partially devastated by a bomb that totally demolished the house next to it on the other side!

They had no food and had to depend on the charity of neighbours.

The soldiers came frequently to search all the houses. On one occasion there was a peremptory knocking, and just as Sin Chan opened the door a bayonet was impatiently thrust in. My brother felt the coldness of steel right next to his cheek – a chilling experience he recalls up to this day.

The people of Emerald Hill were ordered to report for screening. They were to assemble at Ord Road, not far off. Father and Sin Chan packed food and other necessities on to a bicycle which they pushed along. They did not get far. Their bicycle was spotted by Japanese soldiers and snatched away from them – everything on it too!

They reached Ord Road where they stayed for two days. Fortunately, there were good people around who shared food with them. From Ord Road they were made to march to Arab Street where their Sook Ching camp was situated.

At Arab Street, Father was relieved to spot a friend who had a crockery shop there. He gave food and shelter to Father and Sin Chan while they waited for their screening the next day.

Sin Chan was lucky. He was quite dark-complexioned then. That fact might have saved his skin as he looked like a Malay – without any fuss they cleared him stamping him on the hand with their precious chop.

Yes, he was lucky. He recalled a school cadet corps friend of his, fit-looking like him – the young man stupidly came to that same camp wearing his military-looking cadet boots. He did not make it out of the camp.

Father, tall and athletic-looking, was fingered too. He was roughly pulled aside and made to squat on the roadside with others in a group guarded by soldiers – those not given stamps of clearance.

His immediate concern was for his son. He at once yelled to him: "Don't worry. Just go to my friend's house. Stay there. Wait for me to come back!"

How could Sin Chan not worry? But what else was there to do? He obeyed Father and went to the crockery shop to wait.

Father later told Sin Chan what happened to him. He saw trucks coming along to pick up those in the squatting group. He knew then he had to get out of there. He noticed a monsoon drain near where the trucks were lined up. He delayed climbing up on to the trucks. He waited for his chance when the guards were not looking. That chance did not come till the very end when he was the last man in the group: he then slipped quietly into the drain. He hid till everyone had gone. Then he climbed out and made his way to his friend's shop not far off.

Miraculously, Father had escaped the Sook Ching!

Father and Sin Chan decided to find their way to Philip Street. They had to hide and watch what was going on ahead of them in case they came upon any barrier. Where they found people being checked for clearance chops they had to find other routes – as Father did not have clearance. They came upon scenes of people being made to kneel on the roadside for hours. Those people were hit with the butts of rifles. Prudently, Father and Sin Chan stayed away from those roadblocks.

Finally, at River Valley Road near the old Great World Amusement Park, they found a sandbag wall that they thought was unguarded. As it was getting dark they thought they could take a chance and climb over the barrier.

Father climbed over to the top. He reached out with his hand to help Sin Chan over.

At that moment their world nearly came to an end. There were soldiers around! These yelled out at them: "Kora!" and more – words they did not understand. They were not about to stay and find out what that was about. They continued their run from the wall. One soldier opened fire. But they were already over – and running off as fast as their legs could carry them. Luckily, the soldiers decided not to give chase.

Our family reunited, we decided to play it safe and not test any barricade till the need for stamped clearances was over.

We stayed on at Granduncle's place for many days after that till the dust stirred up by that first wave of savage Japanese invaders had settled down. The barricades were removed, and it was less hazardous to make our homeward journey to Emerald Hill.

The nightmare of that "purification through purge" has passed into history – unforgettable history.

For me personally, Sook Ching was no "purification through purge." Yes, my guilelessness had been purged – but Sook Ching was also impurification for me: my initiation, into the reality of a hard and cruel world. ♦

"The Sook Ching" was first published in 2004 as part of *Walk Like a Dragon*, a collection of short stories by Goh Sin Tub and published by Angsana Books. In 2016, "The Sook Ching" was reprinted along with other short stories by well-known Singaporean writers in a new anthology called *Written Country: The History of Singapore Through Literature*. Compiled and edited by Gwee Li Sui and published by Landmark Books, *Written Country* reconstructs the history of modern Singapore through 50 stories that capture pivotal moments in Singapore's history. The 355-page book retails for $23.37 (excluding GST) at major bookstores and is also available for reference and loan at Lee Kong Chian Reference Library and branches of all public libraries (Call no. RSING S820.8 WRI and S820.8 WRI).

Notes

1 According to official accounts, Singapore fell to the Japanese on 15 February 1942. The British surrender took place at the old Ford Factory in Bukit Timah, where the Japanese had set up their headquarters.

2 Following the fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942, Chinese males between 18 and 50 years of age were ordered to report to designated centres for mass screening. Many of these ethnic Chinese were then rounded up and taken to deserted spots to be summarily executed. This came to be known as Operation Sook Ching (the Chinese term means "purge through cleansing"). It is not known exactly how many people died; the official estimates given by the Japanese is 5,000 but the actual number is believed to be 8–10 times higher.

(Below) A drawing from *Chop Suey*, part of a four-volume book of illustrations by the artist Liu Kang that offers a rare insight into how people in Singapore were persecuted and tortured by the Japanese during the Occupation years. This scene depicts an execution scene from Operation Sook Ching (or "purge through cleansing"). Chinese males perceived to be anti-Japanese were rounded up and taken to deserted spots to be killed. *All rights reserved, Liu, K. (1946). Chop Suey (Vol. I). Singapore: Eastern Art Co.*
(Right) Illustration and handwritten note by the artist Ma Jun (马骏) describing the display of severed heads at the Cathay Building on 6 July 1942. *All rights reserved, Tan, S. T. L., et. al. (2009). Syonan Years 1942–1945: Living Beneath the Rising Sun. Singapore: National Archives of Singapore.*

Syonan Gallery

War and its Legacies

A revamped exhibition space opens at the old Ford Factory in Bukit Timah, marking the 75th anniversary of the fall of Singapore. **Fiona Tan** details its major highlights.

Fiona Tan is an Assistant Archivist with the Outreach Department, National Archives of Singapore, where she conducts research to promote a greater awareness of its collections.

Along a relatively quiet stretch of Upper Bukit Timah Road, now dwarfed by high-rise condominiums, stands the Art Deco façade of the old Ford Factory – built in 1941 and designed by the French structural engineer Emile Brizay as Ford Motor Work's first car assembly plant in Southeast Asia.

Part of the original building was torn down when the area was redeveloped in the mid-1990s, but the main structure, housing the very spot where the British Lieutenant-General Arthur E. Percival surrendered to Lieutenant-General Tomoyuki Yamashita, commandant of the Japanese forces, on 15 February 1942, has been preserved.

That fateful event was preceded by a week of intense fighting, dubbed "The Battle of Singapore", between the combined British and Allied forces and Japanese troops after the latter made landfall on the northwestern coastline near the Johor Strait. Percival made the fatal error of assuming that the Japanese would attack from the northeastern coastline and had his firepower and soldiers concentrated along that front. The rest, as they say, is history.

A New Exhibition Opens

The Former Ford Factory – as the building is officially known – was gazetted as a national monument on 15 February 2006, following its conversion into a World War II exhibition space by its custodian, the National Archives of Singapore (NAS). Memories at Old Ford Factory (MOFF), as the gallery was called, operated for a decade until it closed in February 2016 for a major revamp.

Now, after a year-long refurbishment, the MOFF reopens as "Syonan Gallery: War and its Legacies" on 16 February 2017, featuring refreshed content and a new focus. Syonan or Syonan-to, meaning "Light of the South", was the name given to Singapore by its Japanese rulers between 18 February 1942 and 12 September 1945. The gallery subtitle highlights a new area of focus for the exhibition by looking at the impact of the war and the Occupation years, including the immediate and longer-term legacies of this period on Singapore and the region.

Back in 1981, seeing the dearth of written records left behind by the Japanese administration during the three-and-a-half years it occupied Singapore, the NAS, under its then Director Lily Tan, "embarked on a project to collect oral recordings and to look for documents, photographs and all kinds of paraphernalia related to the war and the Occupation".[1]

More than three decades after Tan made that call, the NAS has amassed a significant collection of personal records and oral histories on this subject. Over the years, many researchers have been using these sources to reconstruct authentic accounts that have significantly enriched our understanding of life in Singapore during the Japanese Occupation.

The lack of sufficient documentation from this period, however, remains a persistent black hole, which is why NAS continues the effort to collect oral histories and personal records relating to people's experiences of the war and the Occupation.

One such programme was the Call for Archives in March 2016, which saw over 400 items donated by members of the public, some of which will be on display in the revamped gallery. NAS continues to welcome donations of historical significance from the public so that these can be preserved for the generations to come.

As we approach the 75th anniversary of the fall of Singapore on 15 February 2017, it is timely to revisit these memories and experiences.

Highlights of the Syonan Gallery

The revamped Syonan Gallery showcases the British surrender, the subsequent Japanese Occupation years, and the legacies of the war. Through oral history accounts and archival records from the collections of NAS, the National Library, Singapore, partner agencies and private collectors, this new exhibition aims to capture the diverse experiences of people who lived through this crucial period of our history.

(Above) "The Meeting of General Yamashita and General Percival" (1942), an oil painting by Saburo Miyamoto. *All rights reserved. Tan, S.T.L., et al. (2011). Battle for Singapore: Fall of the Impregnable Fortress (Vol. 1). Singapore: National Archives of Singapore.*
(Facing page) Facade of the old Ford Factory on Upper Bukit Timah Road. Now converted into the Syonan Gallery. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

The gallery features a wide range of material, from government records and oral history interviews to maps and records from private collectors, including cherished personal documents and artefacts from individuals who have kept these items all these years because of the memories – however painful or traumatic – they represent. Overall, the displays balance big-picture overviews of major events interspersed with deeply personal stories and asides.

The first thing a visitor sees upon entry to the lobby are displays that set the scene of pre-war Singapore and highlights the history of the Former Ford Factory. The exhibition space proper is broadly divided into three zones:

- **Fall of Singapore:** Outlines the events leading up to that fateful moment where British forces surrendered unconditionally to the Imperial Japanese Army in the Ford Factory boardroom.
- **Becoming Syonan:** Captures the diverse experiences of people during the Japanese Occupation.
- **Legacies:** Highlights the various legacies of war and Occupation in Singapore, from the political and social changes that arose and the ways we remember the war in Singapore today.

In total, there are over 200 exhibits on display at the gallery. As it is not physically possible to cover all the exhibits within the confines of this article, we highlight a small selection here.

Fall of Singapore

Featuring the three intertwining narratives of Japanese military aggression, British defences and the civilians in Singapore caught up in these larger forces of empire and war, this section of the gallery provides visitors with fresh perspectives into what Winston Churchill – the British Prime Minister during the war years – proclaimed as the "worst disaster and largest capitulation in British history".

Graduation yearbook of the Chinese Military Academy

One of the highlights of this section is a graduation yearbook of the Chinese Military Academy (1940), which belongs to 96-year-old Lim Kheng Jun.

Even before the war descended on Southeast Asia, the Chinese community in Singapore had already been mobilised to help China in the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45). In addition to raising funds through the Singapore China Relief Fund Committee, overseas Chinese also contributed their services. For instance, over 3,000 people from Malaya and Singapore volunteered as drivers and mechanics, braving the treacherous 1,146-km-long Yunnan–Burma Road, to transport military and aid supplies to the battle front.

Others like Lim Kheng Jun enlisted in the Chinese Military Academy (中央陆军军官学校) in 1939. Lim was trained in China as an intelligence officer, and later, as a police officer deployed to Beiping and then Hainan. In March 2016, Lim responded to the open call for archive materials for the exhibition, bringing along his treasured copy of the yearbook as well as personal records of his involvement in the Sino-Japanese war.

(Right) Lim Kheng Jun pictured here with his graduation yearbook at the public Call for Archives event held at the National Library Building on 12 March 2016.
(Below) Lim Kheng Jun as a young soldier in 1940 (second row, on the left), p. 117.
(Far right) Japanese intelligence map of the town of Singapore with annotations marking out places of Japanese interest. Donated by Lim Shao Bin. *Collection of National Library, Singapore.*

Japanese intelligence map of Singapore

Another item of note – donated by Lim Shao Bin to the National Library – is a Japanese intelligence map of Singapore. It is accompanied by a booklet with 83 key locations marked up in red.

As the Japanese military prepared to advance into Southeast Asia, the chief planner of the Malayan Campaign, Lieutenant-Colonel Masanobu Tsuji, hired Japanese who were living in Singapore as informants. The Japanese military also sent "observation staff" to carry out espionage work in Malaya and Singapore in the late 1930s.

This map and its accompanying booklet contain annotated photographs of 83 key locations in Singapore town that were photographed and documented by Japanese informants before the war. These documents highlight important commercial and government buildings, such as police stations and municipal buildings. Japanese-owned businesses, such as shipping lines, were also identified on the map, enabling the Japanese intelligence to identify locations with Japanese interest and spare them from attacks during the invasion.

(Left) Identity cards issued under the Defence (Security Registration) Regulations donated by A.J. Tyler, Chin Sin Chong, David E.S. Chelliah and Victor Tan. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*
(Middle) Such postcards and paintings depicting scenes of war were distributed to Japanese soldiers and exhibited in the newly conquered territories as well as in Japan to highlight the might of the Japanese military. Donated by Taka Sakurai. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*
(Top) Overseas Chinese certificate of registration, 1942. Donated by Ow Peng Hoong. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

Identity cards issued under the Defence (Security Registration) Regulations

As the war in China waged on and hostilities in Europe broke out, the British colonial administration began to prepare the local population for the possibility of war in Malaya. Initially, the preparations were subtle, such as familiarising the public with air raid precautions and basic civil defence skills, but from 1941 onwards, the war preparations became more overt with screening of the population and recruiting locals to join the military.

In that same year, it became compulsory for all non-military residents of Singapore to carry identity cards under the Defence (Security Registration) Regulations.[2] These cards – that allowed the government to screen the population for potential spies – were among the first ominous signs of the looming war.

Japanese artistic impressions of occupied Singapore

Also found in this section of the gallery are *sensō sakusen kirokuga* (war campaign documentary paintings). A few months before the fall of Singapore, the Japanese military administration started to send prominent Japanese artists to various parts of Southeast Asia to paint scenes of war based on photographs or after talking to soldiers on the ground.

These depictions of war, which took the form of postcards and paintings, were distributed to Japanese soldiers and exhibited both in the newly conquered territories and in Japan to highlight the bravery of the military.[3]

There are five postcards and two watercolour paintings on display, donated to the NAS by Taka Sakurai, formerly an officer with the propaganda department of the Imperial Japanese Army. Sakurai produced these postcards based on artists' impressions of scenes of Singapore after the fighting ceased. The postcards were then distributed to Japanese soldiers to commemorate their victory.[4]

Becoming Syonan

On 18 February 1942, Singapore was officially renamed Syonan-to. The Japanese Occupation was a grim period in our history. From the acts of state-sanctioned violence to grandiose promises as part of the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere", this section of the gallery showcases the experiences of people living under a new administration as well as the acts of resistance by those who chose to fight back and make a stand.

"Screened" stamp

One of the first actions by the Japanese military in Syonan was a mass screening or *dai kenshō* (大検証; "great inspection"), which the Chinese later referred to as Sook Ching (肃清). Such screenings to identify anti-Japanese elements in the population had been carried out whenever Japan conquered new territories in China. Three days after the British surrender in Singapore, Chinese males aged between 18 and 50 were ordered to report to screening centres – and in the confusion, some women and children went as well.[5]

At the reporting centres, those who received a stamp with the character "検" (or "examined") were allowed to leave. Some people brought Overseas Chinese registration passes issued by the Chinese consulate in the pre-war period and had them stamped; while others recounted getting stamped on their T-shirts, other personal identification documents, or even on parts of their body.

One survivor recounted: "When I went home, I had the rubber stamp with the word 'cleared' ['検'] or something like that. I made sure that the

stamp lasted as long as possible. So washing my hands, whenever I took my bath, I got to raise my arm up to make sure the stamp there was not washed away... Wherever you go, you have to show your arm to the Japanese soldiers."[6]

Apart from displays of such documents, the gallery also allows visitors to experience first-hand accounts of Sook Ching survivors by listening to oral history excerpts.

Case of Joseph Francis

Stories of deprivation, suffering and torture were part of the fabric of the Syonan-to years, experienced by both the local civilian population as well as British and Allied soldiers.

One particular story stands out. On 27 September 1943, six Japanese oil tankers were destroyed at Keppel Harbour and suspicion fell upon the prisoners-of-war (POWs) interned in Changi Prison, who were thought to have transmitted news to the raiding party.

Joseph Francis, who worked as a driver for a Japanese inspector at the POW camp, was caught for passing information and a secret transmitter to the prisoners. In the ensuing raid that took place at Changi Prison, many POWs were rounded up for interrogations. Several civilians too were arrested, including Francis, who was tortured by the *kempeitai* (Japanese military police) over a six-month period.

On his release, Francis required extensive medical care and he eventually died in May 1945. After the Occupation, his brother and friends wrote to the British Military Administration, describing in detail Francis' contributions to the anti-Japanese resistance. On display at the gallery is Francis' driver's license and the letter written by his friend, Kenneth Tay, describing the "horrors of inhuman punishment" that Francis endured at the hands of his captors, that had reduced him into a pitiable "living skeleton".

Sketches by William Haxworth

Also worth seeing are the selection of sketches, drawn from a collection of over 300 that were secretly sketched by former police inspector William R.M. Haxworth during his internment at Changi Prison and Sime Road Camp. The sketches depict the crowded and unsanitary living conditions at the camps, and capture the internees' decline in health and weight over time. Several sketches reveal Haxworth's ability to find humorous moments and comic relief through his art in spite of the difficult circumstances.

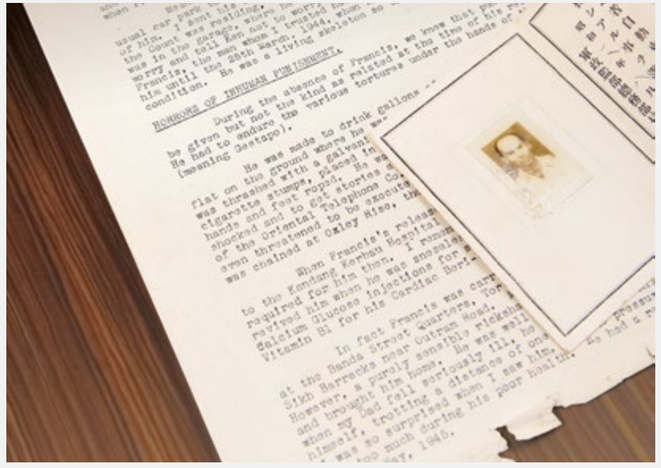
After the war, Haxworth rejoined the police force and stayed there until his retirement in 1954. In 1986, one year after he passed away, his wife donated his entire set of sketches to the NAS.

Legacies of War and Occupation

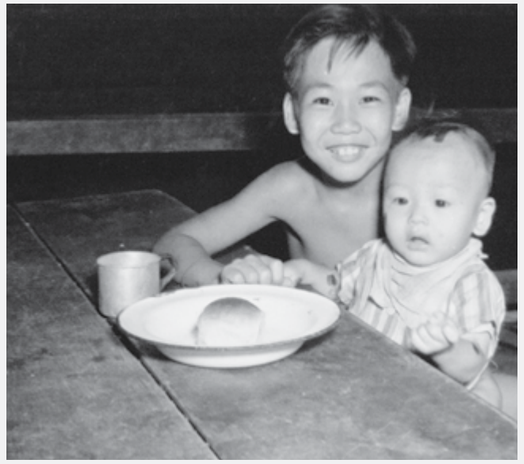
On 5 September 1945, the British returned to Singapore to great relief and rejoicing among the people. However, the initial euphoria soon waned: the wartime experience and the subsequent problems the local population faced, coupled with the inability of the British Military Administration (BMA) to deal with the issues competently, left the people with a less rosy view of the British.

For six months after the Japanese surrender, Singapore and Malaya were run by the interim BMA. People nicknamed it the "Black Market Administration" because it was plagued by corruption and inefficiency. Nonetheless, the BMA, despite difficult post-war conditions, did the best it could to restore public utilities and services, distribute war relief, and ease conditions for business and social activities.

The legacies of war were manifested at various levels – from grand British plans for decolonisation and the social challenges of post-war reconstruction to the political awakening of the people across the political spectrum.



(Below) Records from the British Military Administration files pertaining to the case of Joseph Francis. British Military Administration files, File reference 28/45. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*
(Below right) William R.M. Haxworth's sketches depict the harsh and cramped conditions at the POW camps. *W R M Haxworth Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*



(Above left) Children's feeding centre in the post-war period. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*
(Above) A poster written with blood and Chinese brush ink protesting the arrest of members of the Malayan Communist Party in 1946. *Courtesy of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Internal Security Department Heritage Centre.*

Rounding off the final section of the gallery is a reflective space where visitors are encouraged to consider how they remember the war and its legacies.

Post-war policies

There were significant shifts in terms of social policy in the immediate post-war years. The colonial government adopted a more involved approach to education, housing, health care and social welfare in Singapore, in line with the moderate socialist approach of post-war Britain. These moves were also part of the plan to unite Singapore's plural society in preparation for decolonisation.

A Department of Social Welfare, for instance, was set up in in June 1946 to continue the BMA's work of tackling the lingering social problems caused by the Occupation. The department set up free feeding centres for children, as well as "People's Restaurants", where anyone could buy a cheap and nutritious lunch for 35 cents (later, 8-cent meals were introduced to help the urban poor).[7]

Poster to protest arrests of communists

One of the most profound changes of the war and Occupation was the realisation that the British did not have an inalienable right to rule Singapore. This political awakening coupled with the success of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army during the Occupation resulted in communism gaining traction as a political ideology in the post-war years.

Written with blood and Chinese brush ink, this poster (see image above) was created as a means of protest against police raids on the Malayan Communist Party and other pro-communist organisations on the eve of the 15 February demonstrations in 1946. The communists had organised the agitations as part of their plan to undermine the British. While the demonstrations were ostensibly meant to commemorate the fall of Singapore, the British authorities viewed it as an insult as it was on this day in 1942 that they had surrendered to the Japanese.

In 1948, the Malayan Communist Party abandoned the "united front" strategy of peaceful struggle and pushed for an armed struggle, leading the British to declare a state of Emergency. The ensuing clashes between communists and the colonial government would have far-reaching consequences in shaping the post-war political landscape in Singapore and Malaya. ♦

Notes

1 Foreword to *The Japanese Occupation: Singapore 1942–1945.* (1985). Singapore: Archives & Oral History Department. Call no.: RCLOS q779.995957 JAP

2 Public & security registration (1941, December 27). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 6. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

3 Tsuruya, M. (2005). *Sensō sakusen Kirokuga (War campaign documentary paintings): Japan's national imagery of the "Holy War", 1937–1945*, pp. 1–3 (Doctoral dissertation, School of Arts and Sciences, University of Pittsburgh). Retrieved from University of Pittsburg website.

4 Yeo, C. (Interviewer). (2006, June 30). *Oral history interview with Taka Sakurai* (Transcript of Recording no. 003068/03/03, pp. 61–64). Retrieved from National Archives of Singapore website.

5 W.K. (2001, April 11). *Justice done? Criminal and moral responsibility issues in the Chinese massacres trial Singapore, 1947*, pp. 3–4 (Genocide Studies Program Working Paper No. 18, Branford College, Yale University). Retrieved from the Battle of Manila Online website.

6 Chua, S.K. (Interviewer). (1982, February 2). *Oral history interview with Heng Chiang Ki* (Transcript of Recording No. 000152/08/02, pp. 20–21). Retrieved from National Archives of Singapore website.

7 Ho, C.T. (2013, April 3). *Taking care of its own: Establishing the Singapore Department of Social Welfare, 1946–1949*, pp. 12–13. Retrieved from Academia website.

Syonan Gallery: War and its Legacies

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哎哟 华文字真难写!

Students in pre-1970s Singapore had to learn the correct way of writing the Chinese script. **Ho Phang Phow** describes the painstaking process of mastering this craft.

何炳彪，1964年毕业于南洋大学中文系文学士。1965至2000年任职于立化中学，担任中文教师、华文科主任兼文学史科主任、华文科部门主任等职位。曾任职教育部南区华文科主任以及教育部华文课程编纂员。所编辑的出版物包括多本学校特刊、海燕壁报、学生作品等刊物。

Ho Phang Phow graduated from Nanyang University with a degree in Chinese in 1964. As an educator, he held various positions between 1965 and 2000, including stints at River Valley High School and the Ministry of Education where he was a curriculum planner for Chinese as a second language. Ho has also edited several student works and anniversary magazines for schools and societies over the years.

Before the 1970s, students in Singapore were required to submit "writing assignments" for their Chinese lessons. These lessons trained students to write the Chinese script in the correct form and sequence – by following a set of rules based on type of stroke and its precise order. Over time, with the changes in the school curriculum, such assignments have disappeared, and unfortunately, along with it, an appreciation for the fine art of handwritten Chinese script.

Back then, an eight-volume series published in 1936 was the recommended textbook for students to learn to write Chinese script in Singapore schools. Copies of these long-forgotten assignment books have been preserved in the Chinese textbook collection of the National Library, Singapore – one of which is the focus of this article. More information on the collection can be found in an upcoming publication by the National Library entitled *Pages That Opened Our Minds: A Pictorial Catalogue of Chinese Textbooks in Singapore (1902–2015)*, to be published in March 2017.

国家图书馆收藏了不少二战前后华校的教科书，琳琅满目，有幼稚园的、小学和中学的，一本本，一套套，虽然陈旧，也有残缺，但是小心翻阅，越看越兴奋。这都是我国华校教育留下来的瑰宝啊！

如今这些瑰宝将收入于2017年3月出版的《开卷有益·润物无声：新加坡华文教科书图示目录(1902–2015)》，本人也受邀为此书撰稿。一次，在翻查的过程中，突然发现一套《写字练习本》，供初级小学用，商务版，1936年初版，惊喜极了。

大概是七十年代，华文老师不必批阅学生每周大小楷的作业，学生似乎都解脱了。从此以后，有心学习毛笔字的学生，成为了“书法学会”的会员。

今时今日，科技发达，有了电脑和手机，很多人都成了“一指神功”的高手，轻轻一按，你要的东西立刻出现在眼前，方便极了。但是，也有出现尴尬的状况，当你身边没有这些工具的时候，要写的字，想不起来，想起来又写不出来。因此，过于依赖科技产品，不知是喜还是悲

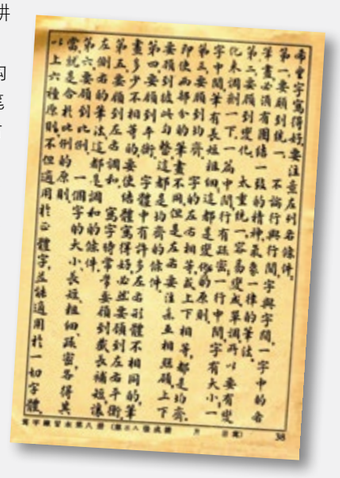
这套《写字练习本》，内容丰富，条理分明，按部就班，学习有序。学生若能拨出一点时间来写字，不但对语文的学习有热情，对文化的了解有深爱，也是一种艺术的享受呢！

看一看：书目资料

书名：《写字练习本》（初级小学），全八册
编校：顾志贤，沈百英
出版：商务印书馆
版次：1936年初版
馆藏：新加坡国家图书，杨善才馆藏（索书号：RCLOS 495.111 XZL-[YOS]）

提一提：本书特点

• 毛笔字和硬笔字的分别，只是应用不同书写工具写出来的字。写字的方法，基本原理是大同小异的，如写字讲究笔顺，要把字写好，就必须根据字的结构来写，哪笔先，哪笔后，左右上下怎样布置……都要按次序，好像建房子一样，才不会东歪西倒，写来写去，顺笔下来，就像流水顺势而下，通畅无阻，字才写得漂亮。



• 根据本书所提供的写字方法，如果儿童认真学习，耐心练习，不但可以掌握好写字的基本功，也能写出一手漂亮的字。

说一说：课本背景[1]

• 本书专供儿童练习写字之用，故定名为《写字练习本》。

• 本书共分八册，每册40页，适供一学期中每周练习两次之用。

• 本书根据新课程标准编辑，内容选取实用材料，涵盖面广。

• 练习写字的内容有：标语、警语、自省语、布告、广告、传单、通启、便条、请帖、留言、书信、儿歌、新诗、故事、史话、物谜、字谜、格言、谚语、对联、宣言等。

• 有关写字指导法，如：执笔法、笔顺等，依程度深浅分编于各册中。

• 本书根据时令排列，并顾及前后联络。应用时尽可自由采用，不必呆照顺序练习；尤其是设计的材料，更需要相机活用。

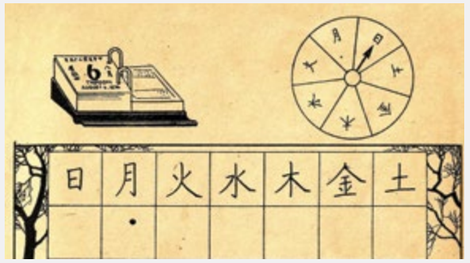
• 每册书后，附有写字标准、俗体字例，或碑帖举例等参考资料。

• 本书以毛笔字为主。

Notes
1 摘自“编辑大意”。

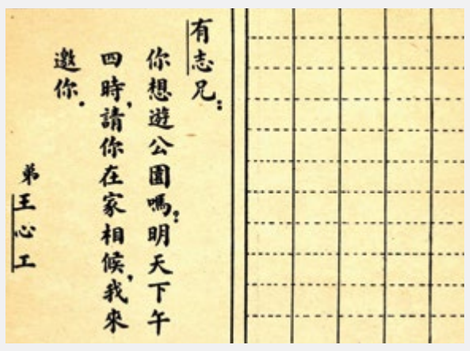
读一读: 课文内容

• 本书为引起儿童练习写字的兴趣，有些练习附有插图，如第二册、第三张：图为日曆，练习写的字，即有关日、月、火、水、木、金、土。



• 通过写字，了解了写字的方法，如笔顺、结构等。

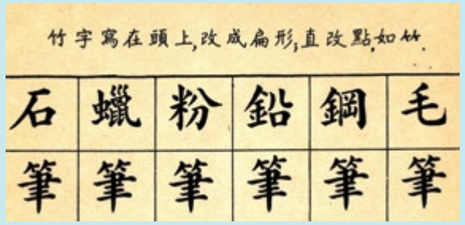
• 通过写字的练习，得到不少生活常识、待人处事、学习修养以及各类实用文的写法等，如第三册、第21张“短信”等。

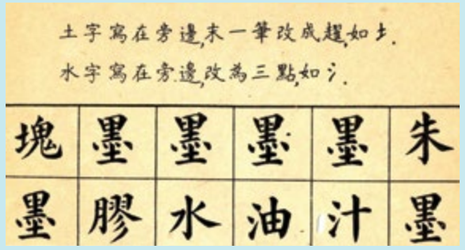


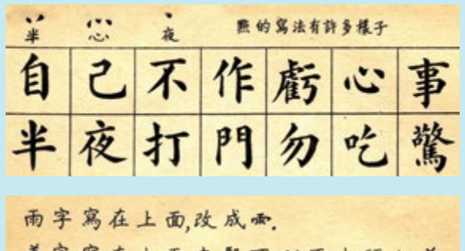
• 项目多，取材广，让儿童提高了练习写字的兴趣。

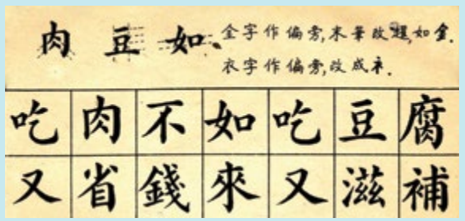
• 练习写字的格式也多变化，让儿童懂得和学习掌握不同的要求，写出端正的字，如：格子小，字要写得小；格子大，字要写得大；无格子，字体大小要有分寸。横写、直写，一样要掌握好。

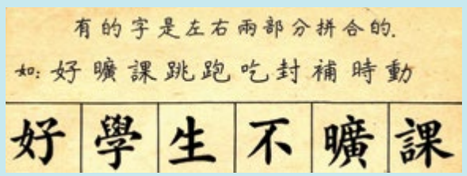
练一练: 写字小贴示

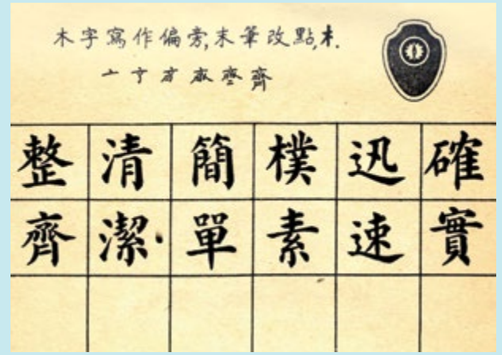


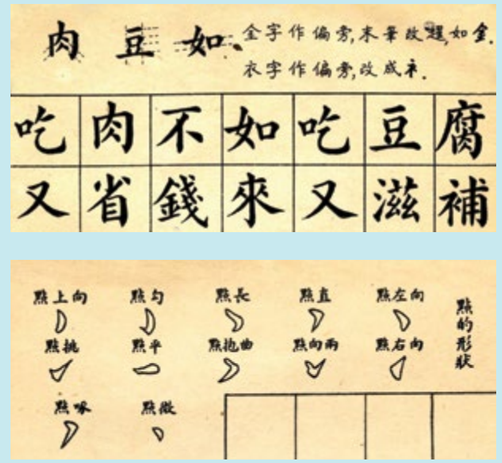


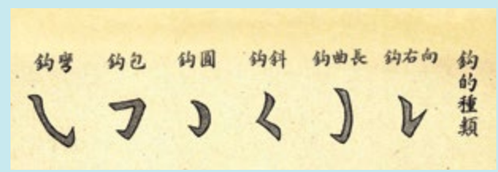


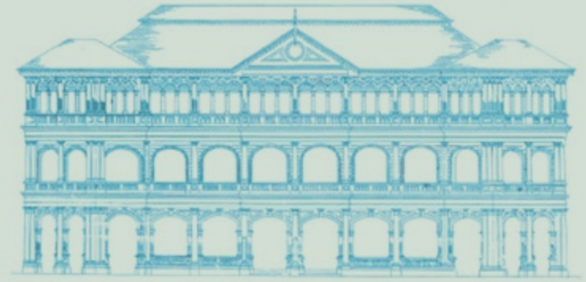












Party Time at the Raffles

The National Library's collection of menu cards from Raffles Hotel provides an inkling of lavish parties and fine dining from bygone days. **Francis Dorai** and **Jessie Yak** take a peek.

The Raffles Hotel – which opened in 1887 with only 10 rooms – experienced its golden age during the first few decades of the 1900s. Immortalised in the writings of Joseph Conrad and Rudyard Kipling, the hotel soon became the lodgings of choice among wealthy travellers, celebrities and the literati, and even members of royalty.

With two extensions added in 1890, the Palm Court Wing in 1894, the now familiar grand Main Building in 1899, and the Bras Basah Wing in 1904, no other hotel in Singapore could rival the Raffles for its luxurious rooms and dining options.

The Raffles became a gathering place for the island's rich and influential – the place to see and to be seen at – hosting lavish gala dinners for events like birthdays, race days, weddings, anniversaries, debutante balls, and even the coronations of European royal families.

One of the things the Raffles Hotel excelled at was throwing a good party. The devil, as they say, is in the details, and this is where the Raffles shone: its army of well-trained staff would leave no plate empty and no glass unfilled in their bid to ensure that every guest left a party plastered, if not with drink, then at least with a wide smile on their faces.

The opening of the Main Building at the turn of the 20th century properly entrenched the Raffles as *the* venue to host a fine party. The new marble-floored Dining Room "capable of seating 500"[1] was where many indulgent dinners – supervised by two French chefs – would be served by white-gloved waiters.

Menu cards from this period, such as the one on 14 July 1917, featured gastronomic fare such as "Clear Turtle Soup, Baked Red Fish [in] Butter Sauce, Chicken en Aspic, Grilled Filet Steak & Sugar Peas, Faisan Roti [roasted pheasant] a l' Anglaise, Iced Asparagus [in] Mayonaise Sauce... [and] Wild Rose Ice Cream...", among other delights. At the outdoor Palm Court, after-dinner music would be played by the Band of the K.O.R (King's Own Regiment).

In 1904, the Raffles introduced a novel form of entertainment – the Skating Dinner. To

Jessie Yak is a Reference Librarian with the Rare Collections team at the National Library, Singapore. She majored in Chinese language and literature at Beijing University and furthered her studies at the University of Cambridge. Jessie is interested in Chinese literature, the Chinese diaspora and the print culture of East Asia.

Francis Dorai has worked for over two decades in publishing, both as writer and editor in a broad range of media, including *The Straits Times*, Insight Guides, Berlitz Publishing, Pearson Professional, Financial Times Business and Editions Didier Millet. He is the author of several books, including *South Beach: From Sea to Sky: The Evolution of Beach Road*.

(Facing page, bottom) Postcard view of the Raffles Hotel, c. 1900. *Courtesy of Professor Cheah Jin Seng and the Singapore Philatelic Museum.*

(Facing page, top) Drawing of the façade of the Main Building. This most recognisable extension of the Raffles Hotel was completed in 1899. *All rights reserved. Liu, G. (2006). Raffles Hotel. Singapore: Editions Didier Millet.*

(Below) Scenes of the lavish Dining Room that was "capable of seating 500". The spacious Dining Room on the ground floor of the new Main Building, which was declared opened in November 1899, was where many extravagant dinners and parties were held. *All rights reserved. Liu, G. (2006). Raffles Hotel. Singapore: Editions Didier Millet.*

(Top) Revellers all dressed up at a New Year's Fancy Dress Ball at the Raffles Hotel, c. 1930s. *All rights reserved. Liu, G. (2006). Raffles Hotel. Singapore: Editions Didier Millet.*
(Top right) Postcard of Raffles Hotel from the 1950s. *Courtesy of the Raffles Hotel and National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*
(Above) The capacious Raffles Hotel ballroom which opened in 1921 – said to be the largest in Asia at the time – was where dance evenings, concerts and musical shows took place. *All rights reserved. Liu, G. (2006). Raffles Hotel. Singapore: Editions Didier Millet.*
(Right) The English writer Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) was so taken with the dining options at the Raffles Hotel after a trip to Singapore in 1889 that he moved to write, "Feed at the Raffles Hotel and sleep at the Hotel de l'Europe" (the latter was the other notable lodgings at the time). What Kipling didn't know was that by 1900, the Raffles would overshadow the Hotel de l'Europe on all counts, including its rooms. *All rights reserved. Liu, G. (2006). Raffles Hotel. Singapore: Editions Didier Millet.*

the accompaniment of a live orchestra, grown men and women put on roller skates supplied by the hotel and "... skated about with the utmost glee until 11 o'clock when the fun had to stop despite the great anxiety of the guests to prolong the rinking".[2]

German author Hermann Hesse was clearly not bemused by the noise emanating from such a party on the night he spent at the Raffles. He recorded in his diary dated 29 October 1911: "the gigantic hotel is horrible acoustically and echoes like a drum in its vast corridors and stairways".[3]

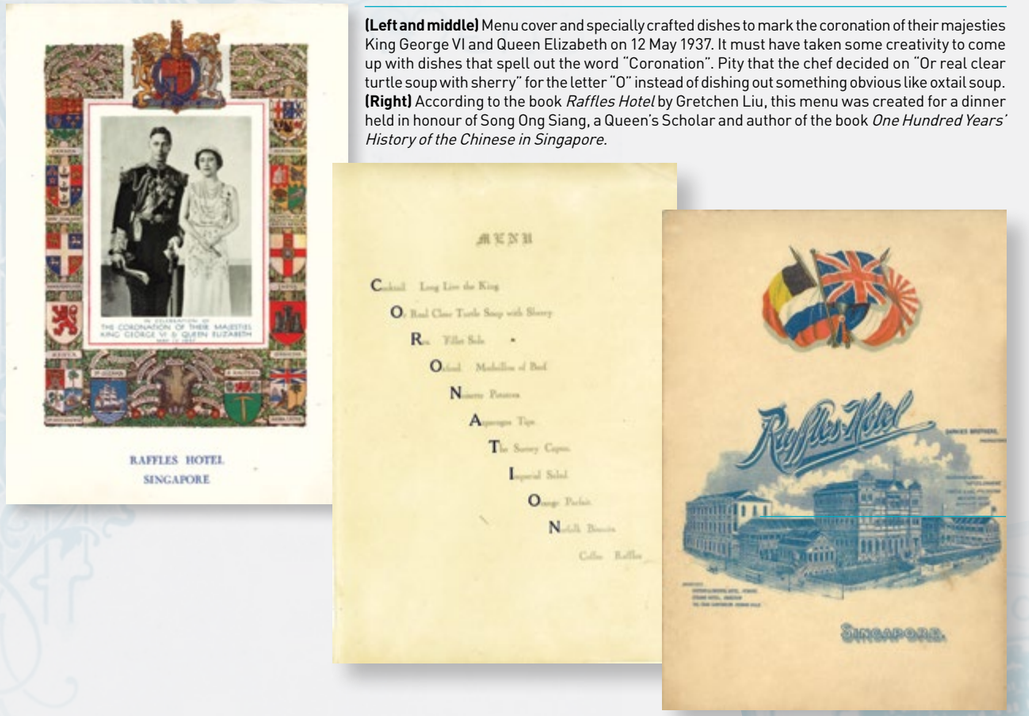
In the heady days before World War II, tickets for the legendary New Year's Fancy Dress Ball would be booked out weeks in advance. The first such party was held on 1 January 1911 and was reported to be a resounding success by the press. The guest list was invariably European with the occasional moneyed Peranakan or Chinese making an appearance.

The opening of the capacious grand ballroom in 1921 further heightened the attraction of the Raffles Hotel. Lively tea dances from 5 to 7pm, and regular dance evenings and concerts became the mainstay of the social calendar, with music provided by the Raffles Hotel Orchestra under the baton of musical director F.A. Cooke.

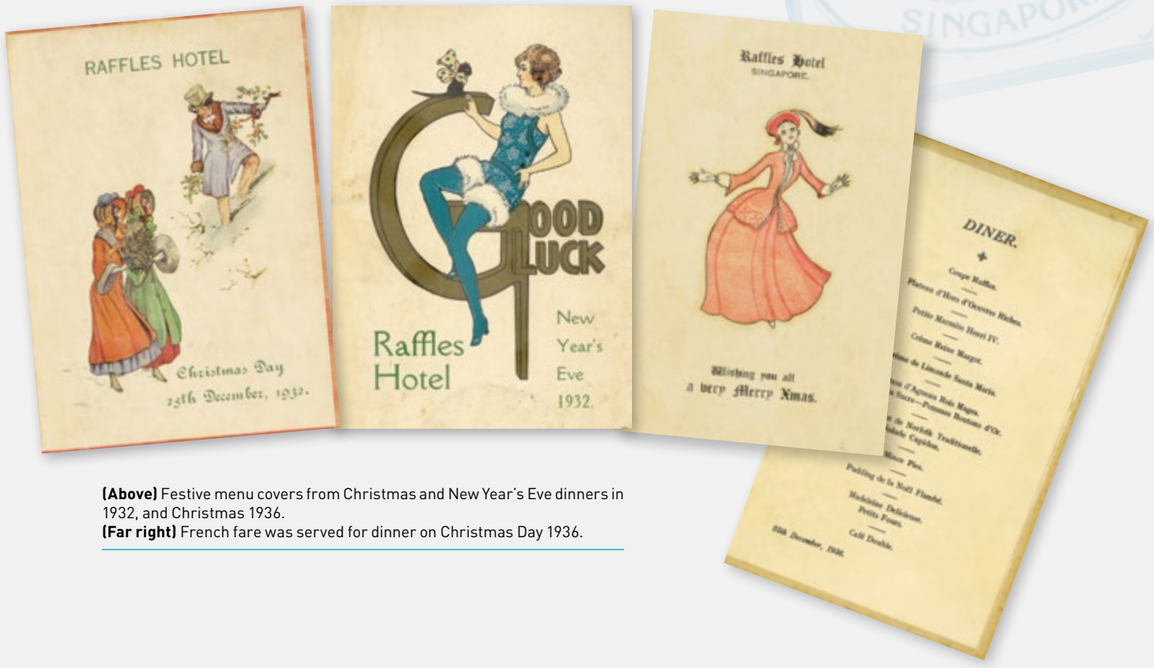
The ballroom also added to the continuing popularity of the New Year's Fancy Dress Ball, which remained a fixture until World War II. Now there was a proper place to show off the quickstep and foxtrot after the stroke of midnight, the dance floor only slightly overshadowed by the outrageous costumes revelers would turn up in.

The party atmosphere at the Raffles was clearly contagious, as British traveller Beatrice Borland observed during her stay at the hotel in 1933: "The truth of the matter is, it is impossible to lead a simple life at the Raffles Hotel, so you might as well join in the all-pervading air of wicked gaiety".[4] ♦

(Above) A selection of Raffles Hotel menu cards from the 1930s. From left, sumptuous offerings for breakfast (10 July 1934), lunch (8 February 1936) and dinner (5 July 1934). On the back of the 17 September 1936 menu card is the entertainment programme for the evening. Cocktail dances were held on Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings, while the Orchestral Concerts took over on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. On all six evenings, after-dinner dances took place at the grand ballroom until midnight (Sunday was presumably a quiet day at the Raffles!) By 1931, the hotel had fallen on hard times as a series of poor business decisions by its Armenian owners, the Sarkies brothers, had left the Raffles saddled in debt. Looking at these lavish menu cards, however, it is difficult to imagine the financial difficulties the hotel was mired in.
(Left) In comparison, the breakfast menu offerings some 30 years earlier on 9 August 1903 were decidedly more spartan.



(Left and middle) Menu cover and specially crafted dishes to mark the coronation of their majesties King George VI and Queen Elizabeth on 12 May 1937. It must have taken some creativity to come up with dishes that spell out the word "Coronation". Pity that the chef decided on "Or real clear turtle soup with sherry" for the letter "O" instead of dishing out something obvious like oxtail soup.
(Right) According to the book *Raffles Hotel* by Gretchen Liu, this menu was created for a dinner held in honour of Song Ong Siang, a Queen's Scholar and author of the book *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*.



(Above) Festive menu covers from Christmas and New Year's Eve dinners in 1932, and Christmas 1936.
(Far right) French fare was served for dinner on Christmas Day 1936.

(Above) The Royal Society of St George was founded in 1894 with the aim of promoting "Englishness" and the English way of life in countries wherever the British had settled. The Singapore branch was founded in 1925. Sir Lawrence Guillemard, then Governor of the Straits Settlements, became a patron and life member of the society. Pictured here is the celebratory menu and programme for the society's "England Day" menu on 6 May 1937.

(Above) The menu card of the Jubilee Dinner held on 6 May 1935 to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary. Whoever crafted this menu to spell out the words "Jubilee Dinner" must have really struggled to come up with the appropriate dishes. The letter "U" for "Unless you prefer turtle soup with golden sherry" is rather lame and one wonders what inventive dessert dish called "Raffles" the chef had concocted for the letter "R"!

The Rare Materials Collection

All the menus featured in this article were donated to the National Library, Singapore, by Roberto Pregarz, who was General Manager of Raffles Hotel from 1972 to 1989. He is a collector of historical memorabilia from the Raffles Hotel, and the author of two books: *Memories of Raffles: 22 Years with a Grand Old Hotel* and *Raffles Legends and Stories*.

These menus are part of the National Library's Rare Materials Collection. The collection – which is kept in a climate controlled facility on level 13 of the National Library – comprises over 11,000 items, mostly books and periodicals, but also materials such as manuscripts, maps, photographs, art prints and illustrations, as well as handwritten letters and documents.

To provide access to the materials, the Rare Materials Collection is being digitised and made available on National Library's BookSG website at http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/printheritage. Microfilm copies are also available at level 11 of the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library (Singapore & Southeast Asian Collection) at NLB Building. To view the originals, please email your request to ref@library.nlb.gov.sg

Notes

1 Liu, G. (1999). *Singapore: A pictorial history, 1819–2000* (p. 123). Singapore: National Heritage Board and Editions Didier Millet. Call no.: RSING 959.57 LIU-[HIS]
2 Liu, G. (2006). *Raffles Hotel* (p. 49). Singapore: Editions Didier Millet. Call no.: RSING q915.9570613 LIU-[TRA]
3 Liu, G. (2006). *Raffles Hotel* (p. 50). Singapore: Editions Didier Millet. Call no.: RSING q915.9570613 LIU-[TRA]
4 Liu, G. (2006). *Raffles Hotel* (p. 82). Singapore: Editions Didier Millet. Call no.: RSING q915.9570613 LIU-[TRA]

A new exhibition on Singapore theatre traces its growth from its nascent days in the 1950s when traditional art forms were dominant, as **Georgina Wong** explains.

Although theatre in Singapore has a relatively short history of some 60 years, with its foundations having been laid only in the 1950s, it is made complicated by the fact that the various communities who engaged with theatre in the early days did so independently of one another.

Thus, the Chinese, Malay, Tamil and English theatre scenes developed in parallel, relatively isolated within each community, and rarely crossed boundaries until the 1980s when multilingual and multidisciplinary productions were staged. Therefore, any attempt to study and understand Singaporean theatre as a unified whole is extremely challenging, and likely explains the dearth of research and documentation on the subject.

"Script & Stage: Theatre in Singapore from the 50s to 80s" – which takes place on levels 7 and 8 of the National Library Building until 26 March 2017 – tracks the development of this art form over four decades, from its inception and formative years in the turbulent post-war period of the 1950s and 60s to its growth and maturity in the 1970s and 80s. All this would lead to a flourishing theatre scene in the 1990s and beyond.

The exhibition is by no means exhaustive, but seeks to give a general overview of the development of theatre in relation to the social and political history of Singapore through the performing arts collection of the National Library. Here are some pivotal moments in our theatre scene over the four significant decades.

The Turbulent 50s

Pre-war theatre in Singapore was generally restricted to traditional art forms such as Chinese *wayang* (street opera) or *bangsawan* (Malay opera). While there was a revival of theatre activity after the Japanese Occupation until the 1950s, local playwriting was still very much in its infancy. Although there was a lack of good quality scripts from Malayan playwrights, this did not stop theatre groups from experimenting and regularly staging plays.

For post-war theatre practitioners, the performance stage provided a platform to portray social realities and the clash of cultures. Theatre was also regarded as an agent for change and action within the Chinese community in the 1950s. Theatre activity in schools was often politically charged, and reflected the socio-political issues and sentiments of the day.

This was a time when the Chinese community viewed the British colonial government as being biased against the Chinese-educated. Policies such as the National Service Ordinance (1954), the white paper on bilingual education in Chinese-medium schools (1953) and the deregistration of the Singapore Chinese Middle Schools Students' Union (1956) were viewed by the Chinese as infringements on their autonomy and culture – and would result in violent street protests and riots.

The Burgeoning 60s

Up until the 1960s, English-language theatre in Singapore had been the preserve of the expatriate European community, staged by amateur groups such as The Stage Club and The Scene Shifters. What little local English playwriting that existed took place mainly in schools and universities.

The theatre scene changed with the emergence of local playwrights such as Lim Chor Pee (1936–2006) and Goh Poh Seng (1936–2010). Driven by a passion for literature and theatre, as well as a desire to see Malayan realities depicted on stage, they went on to establish the first two local amateur English-language theatre clubs in Singapore – ETC by Lim and Centre '65 by Goh. Both Lim, a lawyer by profession, and Goh, a doctor, shared similar backgrounds, having received their higher education in the UK.

Their works are considered as important milestones in Singaporean English literature and planted the seeds for a local English-language theatre scene – even as playwrights struggled to find a "Singaporean voice" on stage. Lim's breakthrough *Mimi Fan* (1962), for instance, is now considered Singapore's first English-language play.

The mid-1960s is often referred to as the "Golden Age" of Tamil theatre in Singapore because of the proliferation of quality local scripts and the large number of troupes staging Tamil-language plays.

However, the Tamil theatre scene was not without its problems. A small Tamil population in Singapore meant that audiences were limited and theatre troupes struggled to stay afloat. In spite of this, Tamil theatre continued to grow and expand into other forms of media such as the radio.

put a huge dampener on Chinese theatre for the rest of the decade, although a few groups continued to perform regularly.

The Flourishing 80s

The 1980s was something of a game-changer for local theatre, seeing several leaps in innovation and quality in both script writing as well as theatre production.

Practitioners and playwrights such as Kuo Pao Kun, Stella Kon, Ong Keng Seng and Michael Chiang began writing and producing works that could stand up to foreign productions in terms of quality and critical reception with Singapore audiences and critics.

High-quality scripts and productions such as Kuo Pao Kun's groundbreaking *The Coffin is Too Big for the Hole* (1985) and the multilingual *Mama Looking For Her Cat* (1988), and Stella Kon's monodrama, *Emily of Emerald Hill* (1984) resulted in several amateur theatre groups turning professional – like Practice Theatre Ensemble (now known as The Theatre Practice), TheatreWorks and the Necessary Stage.

By the early 1990s, the local theatre scene had come into its own, paving the way for new amateur theatre groups to emerge and contribute to the vibrant performing arts scene we see today in Singapore. ♦

The Experimental 70s

Within the Malay community for instance, a new generation of dramatists emerged in the 1970s and began pushing the boundaries of Malay theatrical art forms. These playwrights were looking to create a new form of theatre that would shape a unique identity for contemporary Malay drama that was independent of Western influence. One innovative result was the incorporation of traditional Malay art forms, such as *silat* (Malay martial arts) into contemporary plays.

In general, the theatre scene in the 1970s struggled on several fronts. English theatre, in particular, was badly hit by the withdrawal of British troops from Singapore. The expatriate community had made up the majority of theatre practitioners and audiences since World War II.

Tamil theatre struggled with small audiences and talent pools from which to draw. Several Tamil drama groups, including the Rational Drama Troupe, were forced to shut down in the late 1960s due to financial difficulties.

The Chinese theatre scene flourished for a while in the early 1970s. According to Kuo Jian Hong, artistic director of The Theatre Practice, theatre venues would be packed with people watching plays that were often left-leaning. In 1976, however, there was a crackdown on leftist elements in the community and several key theatre practitioners were detained. This

(Left) Programme booklet and handwritten draft of *Mama Looking For Her Cat* by Kuo Pao Kun. **(Below)** Guests at the launch of "Script & Stage: Theatre in Singapore from the 50s to 80s" on 27 October 2016.

About the Exhibition

"Script & Stage: Theatre in Singapore from the 50s to 80s" is held on levels 7 and 8 of the National Library Building until 26 March 2017.

A series of programmes has been organised in conjunction with the exhibition, including public talks by playwrights, directors and artistes; guided tours by curators; and school tours. For more information, look up the website: www.nlb.gov.sg/exhibitions/

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Iconic Theatre Across the Decades

The 50s

家, ***Jia (Family)***. Adapted by 曹禺 (Cao Yu, 1910–1996) from the novel by 巴金 (Ba Jin, 1904–2005). Presented by the Chung Cheng High School Drama Club, 1954

In 1954, *Jia* was staged at the Victoria Theatre for 16 days to full houses, a milestone in Malayan theatre. Over 200 people were involved in the production, with each performance held over two nights and lasting more than six hours. Tickets were sold out within three days – a remarkable feat considering it was not a fund-raising production.

The play was written in 1931 by the well-known Chinese writer Ba Jin, who based it on his childhood years in Sichuan province, China. *Jia* exposes the dark, repressive side of a feudal Chinese family through the lives of three brothers. The play highlights the oppressiveness of the old social system in China, and how a young generation tries to break free from it.

The 60s

The Elder Brother. Goh Poh Seng (1936–2010). Produced by The Lotus Club, University of Singapore, 1966

The staging of *The Elder Brother* is cited as the first time Singlish was used on a public stage. Goh, who wrote the play in 1966, was a novice playwright at the time, experimenting with different forms of the English language to find a fit that would properly represent English as it was used and spoken in Singapore. The characters in the play use a mix of English and Singlish on stage.

அடுக்கு வீட்டு அண்ணாசாமி *Adukku Veetu Annasamy (Annasamy: A Flat Dweller).* புதுமை தாசன் Puthumaithasan (P. Krishnan, 1932–). Broadcast on Radio Singapura from 1969–70.

Adukku Veetu Annasamy is a radio drama series written by P. Krishnan (also known as Puthumaithasan) that was broadcast weekly from 1969 to 1970. Thanks to several repeat broadcasts between 1975 and 1985, the play captivated radio audiences for almost 20 years. It revolves around Annasamy, a man who observes and comments on the lives of the people living in his housing estate, with his wife Kokilavani. It is noteworthy for its depiction of the everyday lives of Singaporeans.

The 70s

Matahari Malam (The Night's Sun). Masuri S.N. (Masuri bin Salikun, 1927–2005). Staged by Persatuan Kemuning Singapura, 1978.

Written as a collaborative effort between the drama group Persatuan Kemuning and the literary association Angkatan Sasterawan '50 (or ASAS '50), the partnership saw ASAS '50 providing quality scripts and Persatuan Kemuning staging the plays. This was not uncommon in the Malay literary scene, where writers often crossed over into drama and vice versa.

One of the founders of ASAS '50 was the Singaporean Malay literary pioneer Masuri S.N. Better known as a poet, *Matahari Malam* was one of the few plays Masuri wrote in his lifetime, along with *Dari Curfew*. Regarded as a bold experimental work, *Matahari* is about an author who is confronted by five fictional characters of his own creation, who express displeasure at how their characters and storylines are being written.

寻找小猫的妈妈, *Xunzhao xiaomao de mama (Mama Looking For Her Cat).* Directed by Kuo Pao Kun (1939–2002). Staged by the Practice Theatre Ensemble, 1988.

Till today, Kuo's iconic work, which he wrote in 1988, is considered as one of the most influential productions in Singapore's theatre history. The production was performed by a multiracial ensemble who used four languages and three Chinese dialects on stage: English, Malay, Mandarin, Tamil, Hokkien, Cantonese and Teochew. The actors also employed non-verbal expressions such as body movements and gestures to explore the widening language divide in Singapore.

The play examines the consequences of language policies in Singapore, resulting in Mama, who speaks only Hokkien, becoming estranged from her English-speaking son.

The 80s

Emily of Emerald Hill. Stella Kon (1944–). Directed by Max Le Blond,1985.

This was a breakthrough for English-language theatre in Singapore when it was staged in 1985 with Margaret Chan in the lead role. Written in 1982 while Kon was living in Edinburgh, UK, the play has been produced well over 50 times in Singapore, Malaysia and around the world. The monodrama is influenced by Kon's Peranakan (Straits Chinese) heritage, and draws inspiration from her childhood home on Emerald Hill and the life of her maternal grandmother.

All the scenes in *Emily* are performed by a single actress, who mimes and interacts with unseen characters on and off stage. Its simplicity was considered avant-garde for its time, but what was most innovative was the play's use of language. Emily's ability to switch seamlessly from Singlish and a mix of Malay and Hokkien to proper English with a clipped British accent held audiences in thrall. It also set the standard for an authentic Singaporean voice to be expressed on stage in the following decades.

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Anatomy of a Free Mind

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