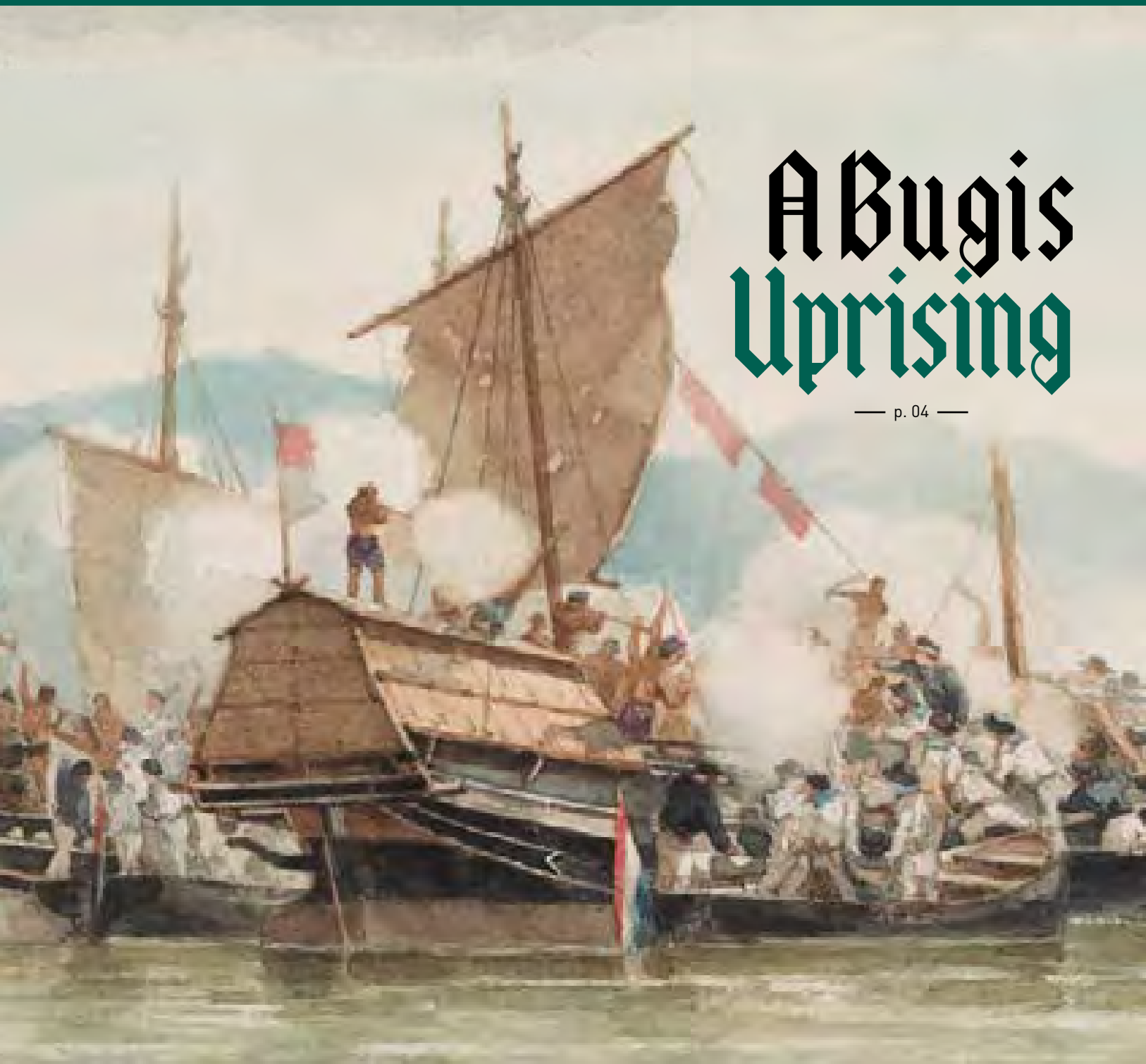
National Library Singapore
biblioasia.nlb.gov.sg

biblioasia

Vol. 18 Issue 02 JUL–SEP 2022



A Bugis Uprising

p. 04

Director's Note

One of the pleasures of working in the National Library is that we are located in the Bugis area. There are plenty of shopping and eating options all within walking distance. As you might have guessed, Bugis Street got its name from the Bugis who came to Singapore and settled in the area. But what you may not know is that the Bugis settlement dates back to the 1820s and sprang from a misunderstanding during a royal wedding in Riau. Benjamin J.Q. Khoo's lively essay takes us back 200 years to a wedding celebration gone terribly wrong that arguably altered the course for Singapore.

The National Library is also not far from one of the deepest underground places you can publicly access: Bencoolen MRT station. At 43 metres below the surface, this is Singapore's deepest MRT station. Modern technology allows us to burrow deep but even in the mid-19th century, people were already creating structures below the surface, as Lim Tin Seng uncovers.

This year being the 80th anniversary of the Fall of Singapore, we have two essays about World War II. In the first piece, Janice Loo visits the Kranji War Cemetery and writes movingly about those buried or remembered there. The other essay by Lee Meiyu and Seow Peck Ngiam is in Chinese, and looks at the items relating to the Japanese Occupation period that have been donated to the National Library.

While on the subject of violence, we also have a story by Choo Ruizhi on the acts of terror committed in Singapore by the Communist Party of Malaya. While most people are aware of the Malayan Emergency, and of the tumultuous decade of the 1960s, few remember that the Communist Party was also active in the 1970s.

On a more peace-led note, don't miss Kelvin Tan's essay on how Chinese Buddhist women were behind some of the early iconic vegetarian restaurants in Singapore.

There are also interesting essays on the late forensic pathologist Chao Tzee Cheng by Goh Lee Kim, Chinese and Japanese photo studios in prewar Singapore by Zhuang Wubin, the forgotten history of Sennett Estate by Winnie Tan and the story of how Singapore Airlines took flight as told by Ang Seow Leng.

Plenty to read as usual in this issue so buckle up and enjoy the ride!

Ms Alicia Yeo
Director
National Library

Editorial & Production

Editor-in-Chief
Jimmy Yap

Senior Editor
Veronica Chee

Engagement Editor
Soh Gek Han

Contributors
Ang Seow Leng
Choo Ruizhi
Goh Lee Kim
Benjamin J.Q. Khoo
Lee Meiyu
Lim Tin Seng
Janice Loo
Seow Peck Ngiam
Kelvin Tan
Winnie Tan
Zhuang Wubin

Design and Print
Oxygen Studio Designs Pte Ltd

Please direct all correspondence to
National Library Board
100 Victoria Street #01-02
National Library Building
Singapore 188064
Email: ref@nlb.gov.sg
Website: www.nlb.gov.sg

On the cover
Battle with Bugis proas in Riau, 1820. Painting by Jacob Eduard van Heemskerck van Beest. *Het Scheepvaartmuseum, the National Maritime Museum, Netherlands [S.1172(01)f].*

BiblioAsia is a free quarterly publication produced by the National Library Board. It features articles on the history, culture and heritage of Singapore within the larger Asian context, and has a strong focus on the collections and services of the National Library. *BiblioAsia* is distributed to local and international libraries, academic institutions, and government ministries and agencies. Members of the public can pick up the magazine at the National Library Building and public libraries. The online edition can be accessed with the QR code on the right.

biblioasia.nlb.gov.sg

ISSN 0219-8126 (print)
ISSN 1793-9968 (online)

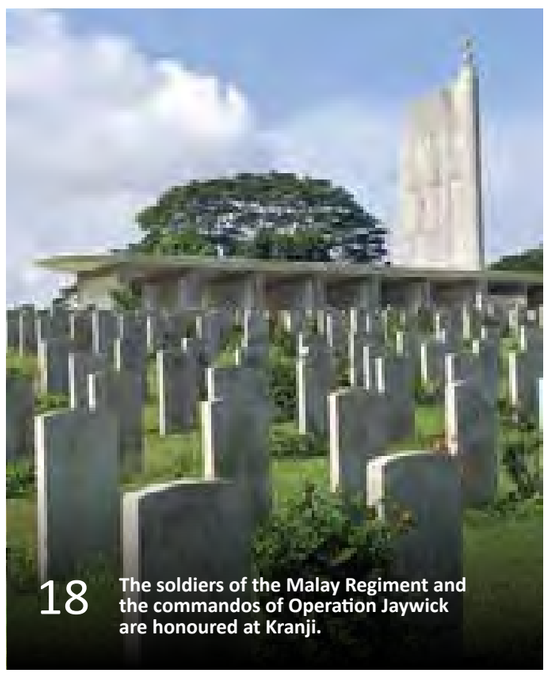
CONTENTS

biblioasia
VOLUME 18 ISSUE 02 JUL SEP 2022

Image credits, clockwise from top left: Awnsham Churchill, *A Collection of Voyages and Travels, Some Now First Printed from Original Manuscripts, Others Now First Published in English* (London: J. Walthoe, 1732). (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RRARE 910.8 CHU); JTC; National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board; Shi Chin Yam, *Top 100 Vegetarian Delights* (Singapore: Man Fut Tong Old People's Home, 1998). (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 641.5636); Janice Loo.


04 An uprising in Riau brought the Bugis to Singapore.


10 Jurong Rock Caverns is located 150 m below Jurong Island.


18 The soldiers of the Malay Regiment and the commandos of Operation Jaywick are honoured at Kranji.


46 Driven by their faith, Buddhist women founded beloved vegetarian restaurants in Singapore.


52 April 1970 marked the start of renewed communist violence in Singapore.

Sailing boats in Riau, c. 1867. *Image from Leiden University Libraries, the Netherlands (Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International; CC BY 4.0).*

A Royal Wedding Gone Wrong

THE 1820 UPRISING IN RIAU THAT BROUGHT THE BUGIS TO SINGAPORE

Celebrations during a royal wedding in Tanjung Pinang in 1819 led to a terrible misunderstanding that would change the course of history in Riau and Singapore.

By Benjamin J.Q. Khoo

At nine at night on 26 December 1819, the Dutch Artillery Captain G.E. Königsdorffer in Tanjung Pinang was startled by shots ringing out from the nearby Bugis kampong. Alarmed and determined to find out the cause, he dispatched a patrol from his fort. As the shots died into the silence of the night and the troopers marched out, little did he know that this was the beginning of a chain of events that would end with being shot in the shoulder, numerous dead and the flight of the Bugis across the Straits to the disputed settlement of British Singapore.

The Dutch Return to Riau

No such premonitions were apparent to Königsdorffer when the Dutch frigate *Tromp* dropped him in Tanjung Pinang on Bintan island.[1] Sometime in November 1818, the Dutch had returned to their former possessions in the East Indies (Malay Archipelago) and were eager to renew their old alliances. Arriving in a show of military force on Pulau Penyengat, they promptly signed a treaty with the reigning Bugis Viceroy or Yang Dipertuan Muda Raja Jaafar, which was sealed with the stamp of Sultan Abdul Rahman Muazzam Shah of the Johor-Riau Sultanate. The flag of the Netherlands was raised on the island, and Königsdorffer was appointed Resident and Commandant over the small garrison of 150 men.

However, any notion of a quiet return was quickly dispelled. In February 1819, news came that a British party had landed on the nearby island of Singapore and established a trading post there.[2] To find out more about this new settlement, Dutch Captain Cornelius P.J. Elout returned to Riau from Batavia (now Jakarta) in June 1819. Although he was there to implement the treaty that the Dutch had signed with the Bugis, Elout also took the opportunity while in Riau to measure the sentiment on the ground and reaffirm the allegiance of the royal court.[3]

As 1819 drew to a close, the East Indies seemed to be firmly in the hands of the Dutch. The new settlement of Singapore was precariously placed and badly defended. Its regnal conspirators sat uneasy while the agent who had provoked the occupation (namely Stamford Raffles) had decamped to Bencoolen (now Bengkulu) to nurse his ailing health. In diplomatic circles, angry protestations raised in Dutch letters caused an uproar and made the British authorities initially disavow Raffles's schemes. The survival of Singapore and British plans to secure a base at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula hung in the balance.[4]

In Riau on the other hand, local loyalties were secured by treaty, money and timely intervention. Unfortunately for the Dutch, before the year was out, a terrible misunderstanding would turn the whole situation on its head.

Shots in the Night

Unbeknownst to Königsdorffer and his men in the nearby fort that fateful night, a huge celebration was taking place within the Bugis kampong. According to the Malay literary work, *Tuhfat al-Nafis* (*Precious Gift*), one of the Bugis chiefs, Arung Belawa,[5] was getting married to his cousin Raja Fatima.[6] The people of Tanjung Pinang and Pulau Penyengat had gathered together to celebrate the union, and the boisterous festivities were enlivened by the firing of shots, following Bugis custom and practice. Caught up in the fervour of the moment, the Bugis fired numerous shots in succession, the pops growing louder and more insistent, first with small, light shots, and finally with the thunder of a 12-pound cannon.

These were the shots heard by the Dutch in the fort.[7] Feeling uneasy, Königsdorffer dispatched a military patrol under the command of a sergeant with the instruction to bring back someone who could enlighten them.

What happened in the Bugis kampong is not recorded. In any case, the sergeant and his men managed to arrest not one but five people, among them Raja Ronggik, the cousin of Arung Belawa, who was also

A flank soldier of the Dutch colonial troops, 1823. *Image from National Militair Museum, Soesterberg.*

Benjamin J.Q. Khoo is a Research Officer at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute and a 2020/21 Lee Kong Chian Research Fellow at the National Library, Singapore. Studying the histories of the early modern world, his research focuses on networks of knowledge and diplomatic encounters in Asia.

(Above) Two Bougis (or Bugis) men of Bokyes, an island off the coast of Makassar. *Image reproduced from Awnsham Churchill, A Collection of Voyages and Travels, Some Now First Printed from Original Manuscripts, Others Now First Published in English (London: J. Walthoe, 1732). (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RRARE 910.8 CHU).*

one of the chieftains. These men gave themselves over civilly and went along with the Dutch. The Bugis men were then placed in a waiting room and this is when the dreadful misunderstanding occurred.[8]

Opinions of the exact trigger of the incident differ, but the accounts agree that the Bugis drew their krises first and struck. However, no one was absolutely certain as to why they had done so. According to the *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, the sergeant had ordered that the Bugis men be disarmed of their krises, to which they refused. The soldiers then attempted to relieve them of their weapons. In the ensuing scuffle, a furious Raja Ronggik drew his kris and charged at the Dutch soldiers, prompting the other Bugis to follow. Other Dutch accounts state that it was the decision to put them in clinks that enraged them. This was akin to being treated like common criminals, which wounded their pride and sparked discontent on that humid night.[9]

Regardless of the trigger, the violence happened in a flash. The glints of the drawn krises saw the Dutch respond with rifle fire. A few bloody moments later, the bodies of the five Bugis men were on the ground: two lay severely wounded, and three were dead, the latter including Raja Ronggik. On the Dutch side, one was slain while five others were heavily injured. A routine inquiry had gone horribly wrong.

The Uprising

News of Raja Ronggik's death spread like wildfire. The next day, the Dutch sought to reassure the incensed Arung Belawa that it was only a misunderstanding. However, his fury could not be quenched. Not only did he get his men to secretly shoot at Dutch patrols, he also sent spies and behaved very belligerently.[10]

Between the last days of 1819 and the first of the new year, almost two weeks of uneasy silence ensued. The suspense finally broke on 14 January 1820 when 400 Bugis launched a surprise attack on the house of the Dutch income-collector, Johan Hendrik Walbeehm. Why this site was chosen is unclear, but there were already hints of simmering discontent with the new taxes imposed by the Dutch.

The Bugis then took over the remaining Dutch fortifications on the beach and propped them up with their own defences. At the same time, they besieged Königsdorffer's garrison which had suffered from years of neglect and

(Facing page) A Bugis nautical chart of the Malay Archipelago, 1816–20. *Image from Utrecht University Library, *VIII*.C.a.2 (Dk39-8).*

was in a sorry condition. To bolster its strength, Königsdorffer had added a firm palisade fence with a cannon, but this was insufficient to repel the Bugis assault. The Bugis had also planned well; half the Dutch regiment had returned to Melaka for the change of guards, and the garrison thus had less manpower. With knowledge of the lay of the land, the Bugis chose an advantageous position, dug up the ground and built breastworks encircling the Dutch fort, all the while maintaining their assaults with cannon fire and cutting off Dutch access to supplies in preparation for a siege.[11]

Compounding this dire situation was a lack of authority in court. The sultan and yang dipertuan muda were in Lingga, leaving the Arab Tengku Syed behind to hold court in their absence. In the interim calm before the storm, Königsdorffer, having well apprised himself of the gravity of the situation, initially called twice or thrice daily on Penyengat in order to consult with this intermediary over the growing Bugis discontent.[12]

Tengku Syed did all he could to defuse the situation. He advised the Dutch to keep their correspondence to letters, to always go about with armed escorts, and even forestalled an assassination on Königsdorffer's life by Belawa's men.[13] His other appeals were to the Bugis, with a slew of couriers dispatched to pacify Arung Belawa. But Arung Belawa could not be swayed.[14]

This siege lasted for 15 days until reinforcements for the beleaguered Dutch forces finally came from Melaka and Muntok (or Mentok). On 25 January, a war-brig arrived to augment Dutch defences in Riau, and the expected showdown erupted on 29 January. At dawn, Dutch ships opened fire at the Bugis and around one hundred Dutch soldiers broke the siege by attacking the batteries.[15]

In the tumult, Königsdorffer, who had bravely defended the small garrison while waiting to be relieved, was manning a six-pound cannon when he received two shots to his shoulder. Despite the Bugis putting up a brave fight, the outcome was decidedly one-sided. When the dust of battle had cleared, the Dutch side counted seven dead and 13 injured. For the Bugis, the count was brutally high: around 80 men, all slain.[16]

The Flight to Singapore

Immediately after the collapse of this uprising, the Bugis escaped in their boats and fled across the Straits for safety in the settlement of Singapore. This took place the following day, on 30 January. Bugis men, women and children emptied themselves from their houses and escaped via Riau Terusan, between Senggarang and Bintan, towards the island of Singapore.[17]

William Farquhar, Resident of Singapore at the time, counted almost 500 of them, arriving in a fleet of ships, leaving behind a Bugis kampong smouldering in ash. Farquhar was very pleased to offer them refuge, settling them along the Rochor River, which eventually became Kampong Bugis.[18] Their arrival shifted the lucrative Bugis trade westwards, away from Dutch Riau and towards British Singapore. This proved a turning point in Singapore's fortune. Besides the material gain, the British obtained added satisfaction in witnessing the troubles of the Dutch, whom they viewed as a rival.

"The Bugguese [Bugis]," wrote Farquhar to Raffles in March of the same year, "have lost all confidence in their [the Dutch] system of government". Raffles gloated upon learning of the debacle. "They must now regret the wild ambition, which induced them to aim at such extensive sovereignty," he replied in April 1820, "their empire is literally crumbling to pieces".[19]

It was a sorry situation back in Riau, with many kampongs destroyed and Dutch fortifications in ruins. Anxiety was at a high and many feared that this was a sign of more trouble coming to pass. Several court nobles were disgruntled and made plans to flee. Similarly, the Chinese, who had worked in Riau and established their own settlements since the 18th century, also suffered much collateral damage. Those on Tanjung Pinang saw their kampongs go up in flames and most of the inhabitants were forced to decamp to Pulau Penyengat. The Dutch compensated the Chinese with 6,000 guilders to rebuild their houses. This expense was necessary to prevent them from following the Bugis in relocating to Singapore. However, it was not enough to prevent some from choosing this course.[20]

If in 1819, Riau seemed secure and prosperous, 1820 was the year in which the balance tipped irreversibly in Singapore's favour. This influx of people, Bugis as well as Chinese, increased Singapore's population, much to the chagrin of the Dutch who could only watch as the prized trade was diverted across the Straits.

The Aftermath

When hostilities ceased, the Dutch announced a general amnesty to get the Bugis to return and preserve the peace. Tengku Syed even offered to mediate between both sides.[21] But both of these gestures were swiftly rebuffed by the Bugis in Singapore.

The Dutch then dispatched Lieutenant Paris de Montaigu to Singapore, bearing a letter for Farquhar to persuade him to hand over "the rebel prince Belawa". Farquhar immediately shot the proposal down as "quite inadmissible".[22]

The incident came to cause much reflection and consternation for the Dutch in the East Indies. Besides losing impetus to a developing Singapore, it also reflected the teething issues they faced in returning to local administration under much transformed political circumstances. In his reflections in 1828, Captain Cornelius P.J. Elout pinned the misunderstanding with the Bugis on Dutch "unfamiliarity with the language and customs of the natives".[23]

Likewise, another Dutch military officer and traveller, Colonel Hubert Gerard Nahuijs, who made a voyage to Riau and Singapore around the year 1824, placed the blame squarely on "our officers, who were ignorant of the country's ways and manners", mistaking the firing of shots in marriage celebration as a sign of rebellion.[24] In order to avoid such a fiasco from occurring again, Nahuijs encouraged the Dutch government to appoint experienced officers who understood local principles and customs.[25]

What became of Captain Königsdorffer? After being temporarily relieved of his duties as he recuperated from his injury, Königsdorffer was eventually replaced as Resident of Riau by Count Lodewijk Carel von Ranzow in 1821. This was not a slight on his abilities, and his discharge was duly celebrated with the feting of honours. For his leadership and bravery, Königsdorffer was awarded the Cross of the Legion of Honour. He was also recommended for the Military Order of William (Militaire Willems-Orde), one of the highest honours in the Netherlands.[26]

Finally, in all this, the Dutch did not lose sight of practical military concerns. The Bugis attack showed how badly Dutch bulwarks on Riau were in need of reinforcement. In place of the old, dilapidated garrison, a new fort was constructed: Fort Kroonprins. It rose from the hillock, but was fortified with a dry ditch, a wall of hewn stone with four bastions and a lunette.[27] Looming like a panopticon over Riau, it was an impressive symbol of Dutch colonial power.[28]

Epilogue

Although Arung Belawa seemed to have settled quite comfortably in Singapore, he spent his time harassing Dutch ships, sporadically attacking gambier plantations in Riau and generally proving to be a nuisance.

In 1824, the Dutch finally succeeded in convincing Arung Belawa to return to Tanjung Pinang. Walbeehm, the Dutch income-collector, who somehow managed to escape with his life during the surprise Bugis attack in 1820, was credited with this persuasion, but much more enticing was the high monthly salary that the Dutch government promised to pay Arung Belawa – a pension sum of 500 florins.[29]

Arung Belawa and about 260 of his entourage sailed back across the Straits, comprising his family members, slaves and followers. They did not return to their former kampong but chose to establish their base across the bay, slightly beyond the confines of the Dutch presence there.[30]

However, the return of Arung Belawa and his people to Riau brought no evident contribution to its prosperity and trade. It was the Bugis traders whom the Dutch wanted, but they had chosen to remain behind in Singapore instead.[31]

The story after 1824 needs no further retelling. The Anglo-Dutch Treaty, inked between Britain and the Netherlands in London on 17 March 1824, formalised the division of the Johor-Riau Empire into British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies.

Riau – the successor to the Malay ports of old – and the Dutch residents who came after Königsdorffer were witness to its gradual peripheralisation, while its neighbour Singapore became one of the major trading nodes of the world.[32] All this was set in motion by a misunderstanding across the Straits, arising from shots fired into the dark. ♦

(Above) Kampong Bugis, Singapore, 1890–1910. *Image from Rijksmuseum, the Netherlands. Gift of the heirs of C.J.J.G. Vosmaer, Leiden.*

(Facing page) Detail from a Southeast Asia map (1782–1828). *Image reproduced from Jan Meinhard Pluvier, Historical Atlas of South-East Asia (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 31. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 911.59 PLU).*

NOTES

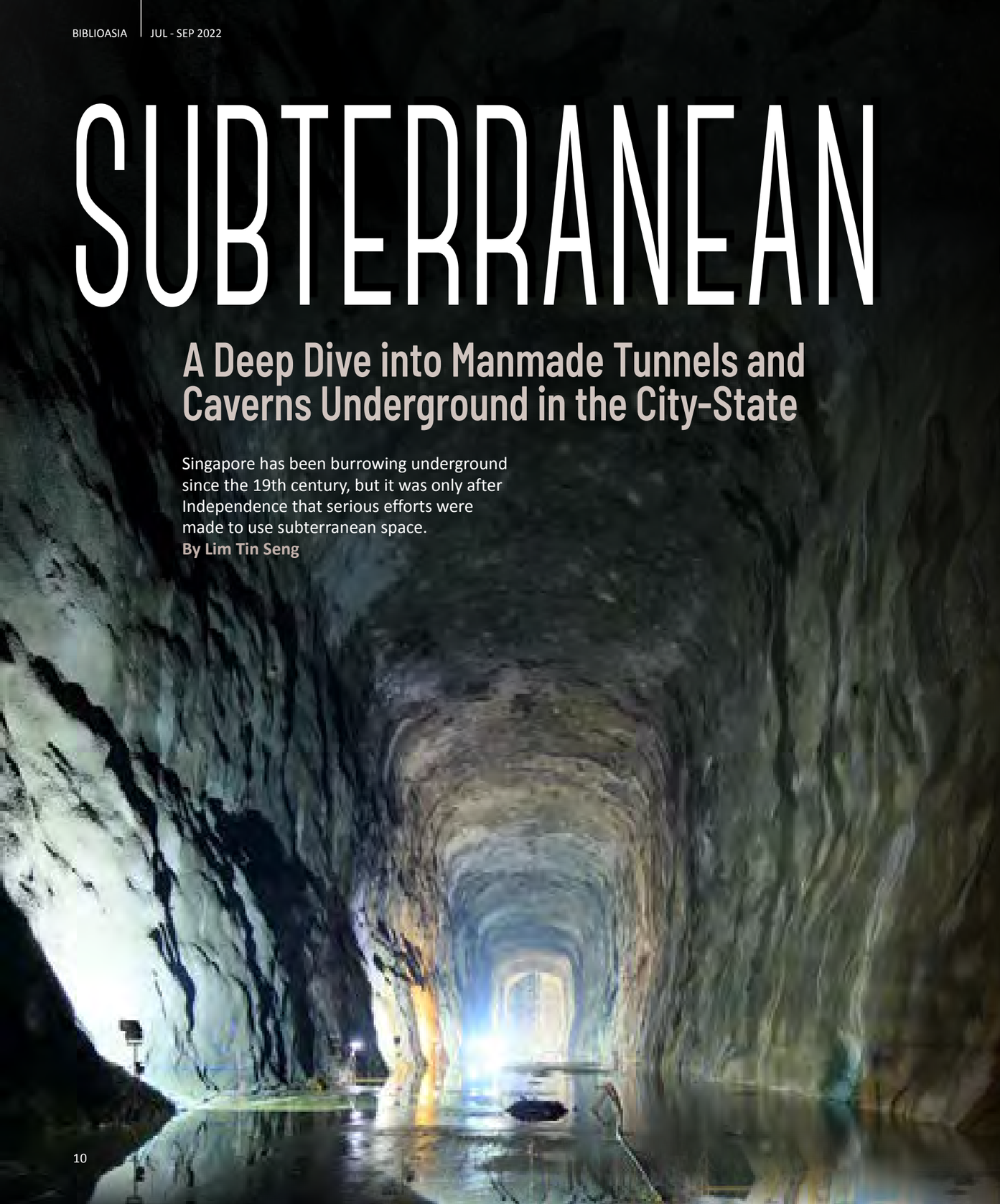
1 Elisa Netscher, *De Nederlanders in Djohor en Siak, 1602 tot 1865* (Batavia: Bruining and Wijt, 1870), 257.
2 Arnold Willem Pieter Verkerk Pistorius, *Een Bezoek aan Singapore en Djohor: Eene Voordracht* (s'-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1875), 9; C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore, 1819–2005* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), 28–29. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 959.57 TUR-[HIS])
3 Netscher, *De Nederlanders in Djohor en Siak*, 258.
4 Turnbull, *History of Modern Singapore*, 30.
5 Arung Belawa was a Bugis from the royal house of Sidenreng in Celebes (Sulawesi).
6 Raja Ali Haji ibn Ahmad, *The Precious Gift (Tuhfat al-Nafis)*, trans. Virginia Matheson and Barbara Watson Andaya (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1982), 229–30. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 959.5142 ALI)
7 Raja Ali Haji ibn Ahmad, *Precious Gift*, 229–30.
8 P.H. Van der Kemp, "De Commissiën van den Schout-Bij-Nacht C.J. Wolterbeek Naar Malakka En Riouw in Juli-December 1818 En Februari-April 1820" *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië* 51, no. 1 (1900): 49–50. (From JSTOR via NLB's eResources website)
9 Willem Adriaan van Rees, *Toontje Poland: Voorafgegaan door Eenige Indische Typen*, vol. 1. (Arnhem: D.A. Thieme, 1867), 242. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RRARE 959.8 REE-JSB], accession no. B29032467K)
10 Netscher, *De Nederlanders in Djohor en Siak*, 259–60; Van der Kemp, "De Commissiën van den Schout-Bij-Nacht C.J. Wolterbeek," 50.
11 Netscher, *De Nederlanders in Djohor en Siak*, 260; Raja Ali Haji Ahmad, *Precious Gift*, 230.
12 Said Mohamad Tongko Zien, "Rapport van Tongko Said, afgezant van den Sulthan van Lingga en zijne Hoogheid den onderkoning van Riouw" (unpublished manuscript, 1824), 15.
13 Said Mohamad Tongko Zien, "Rapport van Tongko Said, afgezant van den Sulthan van Lingga en zijne Hoogheid den onderkoning van Riouw," 15–18.
14 Raja Ali Haji Ahmad, *Precious Gift*, 230.
15 Van der Kemp, "De Commissiën van den Schout-Bij-Nacht C.J. Wolterbeek," 61–62.
16 Netscher, *De Nederlanders in Djohor en Siak*, 261.
17 Van der Kemp, "De Commissiën van den Schout-Bij-Nacht C.J. Wolterbeek," 62.
18 Turnbull, *History of Modern Singapore*, 33–34.
19 Sophia Raffles, *Memoirs of the Life and Public Service of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles* (London: John Murray, 1830), 444, 446. (From BookSG)
20 Van der Kemp, "De Commissiën van den Schout-Bij-Nacht C.J. Wolterbeek," 62–63.
21 *Gazeta de Lisbon*, 153–313 (Terça-feira, 19 de Setembro, 1820) (Lisbon: Na Officina de Antonio Correa Lemos, 1820), 244.
22 Van der Kemp, "De Commissiën van den Schout-Bij-Nacht C.J. Wolterbeek," 65.
23 Wolter Robert van Hoëvell, "Waarom Heeft Rio Als Vrijhaven Niet Met Singapoera Kunnen Mededingen?" in *Tijdschrift Voor Nederlandsch-Indië* 14 (1852): 415. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RRARE 382.71095981 HOE)
24 Hubert Gerard Nahuys van Burgst, *Brieven Over Bencoolen, Padang, het Rijk van Menangkabau, Rhiouw, Sincapoera, en Poelo-Pinang* (Breda: F.B. Hollingérus Pijpers, 1826), 234. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RRARE 915.9804 NAH-[JSB]; accession no. B29268406D)
25 Nahuys van Burgst, *Brieven Over Bencoolen*, 233.
26 Van der Kemp, "De Commissiën van den Schout-Bij-Nacht," 49, 58–59; A.R Falck, *Ambts-Brieven van A.R. Falck, 1802–1842* ('s Gravenhage: Van Stockum, 1878), 133. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RRARE 909.81 FAL; accession no. B29032462F)
27 George François de Bruyn-Kops, "Sketch of the Riau-Lingga Archipelago", *Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia* 9 (1855): 97. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RRARE 950.05 JOU; microfilm no. NL25797)
28 Steven Adriaan Buddingh, *Neêrlands Oost-Indië*, vol. 3 (Amsterdam: Wed. J.C. van Kesteren en Zoon, 1867), 15.
29 Netscher, *De Nederlanders in Djohor en Siak*, 261; Ota Atsushi, "The Business of Violence: Piracy around Riau, Lingga, and Singapore, 1820–40", in *Elusive Pirates, Pervasive Smugglers: Violence and Clandestine Trade in the Greater China Seas*, ed. Robert J. Antony (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 133. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 364.1336091646 ELU)
30 Engelbertus de Waal, *Onze Indische Financien: Nieuwe Reeks Aanteekeningen*, vol.7 ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1884), 14.
31 Netscher, *De Nederlanders in Djohor en Siak*, 262.
32 Dianne Lewis, "British Policy in the Straits of Malacca to 1819 and the Collapse of the Traditional Malay State Structure", in *Empires, Imperialism and Southeast Asia: Essays in Honour of Nicolas Tarling*, ed. Brook Barrington (Clayton, Victoria: Monash Asia Institute, 1997), 32. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 325.54 EMP)

SUBTERRANEAN SINGAPORE

A Deep Dive into Manmade Tunnels and Caverns Underground in the City-State

Singapore has been burrowing underground since the 19th century, but it was only after Independence that serious efforts were made to use subterranean space.

By Lim Tin Seng



Lim Tin Seng is a Librarian with the National Library, Singapore. He is the co-editor of Roots: Tracing Family Histories – A Resource Guide (2013), Harmony and Development: ASEAN-China Relations (2009) and China's New Social Policy: Initiatives for a Harmonious Society (2010). He writes regularly for BiblioAsia.

Gleaming skyscrapers are a common sight in Singapore's city centre as the country attempts to overcome the limitations of space by reaching skywards. Less obvious, but no less important, are Singapore's efforts to take advantage of space underground.

Some of these underground structures are marvels of engineering. Located 150 m below Jurong Island, the Jurong Rock Caverns have been hailed as "Singapore's deepest underground project". Officially opened in September 2014, the nine-storey high caverns are designed to hold liquid hydrocarbons such as crude oil and condensate. These caverns have a total capacity of 1.47 million cubic metres, which is the equivalent of 600 Olympic-sized swimming pools.[1]

The Jurong Rock Caverns are not accessible to the public though. Those who wish to see what Singapore looks like in the depths of the earth don't have to go far. All they need to do is take a trip on the Downtown Line to Bencoolen Station. At 43 m below the surface, this is currently Singapore's deepest MRT station where the station platform is on level B6.[2] (Spoiler alert: it looks like an MRT station platform.) Even a simple drive can take you far below the surface. One stretch of the 5-km long Marina Coastal Expressway is not merely underground, it is actually beneath the seabed.

Thanks to advanced technology, Singapore has been able to reach depths that would have been considered unimaginable only a few decades ago. However, burrowing underground is not a recent phenomenon here. Before the war, the British constructed tunnels under bunkers and forts to aid the defence of Singapore. Located in places such as Pasir Panjang, Sentosa and Labrador Park, these subterranean walkways were primarily used to store ammunition.[3]

However, between 1936 and 1941, the British built a tunnel network under Fort Canning Hill that was different from the rest. Known today as the Battlebox, the 9-metre-deep maze was the command centre for the Malaya Command during World War II. Bomb- and flood-proof, the underground structure was "a self-containing centre" equipped with an electricity generator, a ventilation system and over 20 purpose-built rooms.[4]

Interestingly, an even older underground military structure lies close to Battlebox. This is the sally port that was part of the old Fort Canning. When Fort Canning was built on top of the hill in 1861, it had a narrow, easily defended passageway called a sally port that burrowed from the fort on top of the hill and led to a path on the side of the hill, some 6 m below. The sally port allowed soldiers to enter and leave the fort without compromising the fort's defence. The entrance to the sally port lies about 15 m from the entrance to the Battlebox.

While military installations may capture the imagination, it is probably accurate to say that in the pre-war years, the island's underground spaces were mainly used for the laying of utilities. Comprising power transmission cables, gas pipes, sewerage pipes, telephone lines and water mains, these were placed in the ground by the Singapore Municipality "to keep them out of sight" as well as to protect them from elements and human-inflicted damages.[5]

One of the earliest underground utilities laid was the water mains of MacRitchie Reservoir. Built in the late 1870s to replace an old brick conduit, these 0.6-metre cast iron pipes conveyed water from the reservoir to the town of Singapore via Thomson Road.[6] To lay the water mains, the Municipality used the conventional trenching method where a trench was dug for the pipes before being filled back in. (This method was also deployed for other underground utilities projects including the island's first sewerage pipes in the 1910s.[7])

Laying these pipes was not an easy task. The municipality encountered "considerable difficulties" as the "pipes have had to be laid mostly in soft, water-logged ground which necessitated substantial timbering to trenches, continuous pumping, and a considerable amount of shoring to buildings".[8]

These projects were also not popular because of the inconvenience the digging created on the surface, especially when it involved digging up roads. As the *Straits Times* noted in 1928: "So long as the Municipality continue to extend the water, electricity, and sanitation services throughout the city, so long will the invaluable Tamil labourer continue to obstruct the public roads, and so long will disgruntled members of the public half-seriously assert that the Municipality dig holes in the roads for the sheer fun of doing it."[9]

(Facing page) Jurong Rock Caverns, hailed as "Singapore's deepest underground project," is located 150 m below Jurong Island. *Courtesy of JTC.*

Today, there are over 5,700 km of underground water mains in Singapore, compared to 1,300 km in 1958. During the same period, underground power transmission cables have also increased from a mere 82 km to more than 11,500 km. The story is the same for underground sewerage pipes network, which have increased in length from 423 km to 3,600 km.[10]

Moving Beyond Underground Utilities: Mass Rapid Transit

The post-war years saw the beginnings of an effort to move structures underground (as opposed to just utilities). In 1965, Singapore opened its first underground car park. Located at Raffles Place, the 127 m by 27 m structure accommodated up to 150 vehicles and was linked to the basement of Robinsons department store via an underground walkway.[11] However, it was not until 1982 when Singapore started building the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system that the country began to use its underground spaces on a grander scale.

The initial MRT network was first launched in 1987 and completed in 1990. It had 42 stations and covered a total length of 67 km, of which 48 km are aboveground while the remaining 19 km are underground.

Given that this was Singapore's first major effort at tunnelling underground, there were issues. In November 1985, there were several cave-ins along Scotts Road due to the alluvial nature of the soil there.[12] Tunnelling works under Robinson Road also had to be halted the following month when the boring machine encountered soft marine clay. Nonetheless, these problems were resolved through engineering ingenuity such as using compressed air to hold up the soft texture of the soil, and injecting a high pressure mixture of cement and water to solidify soft marine clay.[13]

Over subsequent decades, the acquisition of new technical know-how on tunnelling has enabled lines such as the North-East Line, Circle Line, Downtown Line and Thomson-East Coast Line to be constructed entirely underground.

(Above left) Entrance to the Battlebox at Fort Canning, 2022. It is currently a museum and tourist attraction. *Photo by and courtesy of Jimmy Yap.*

(Left) Shown here is the entrance to the sally port, which is located about 15 m from the Battlebox. It is an even older underground military structure than the Battlebox, and allowed soldiers to enter and leave the fort without compromising the fort's defence. *Photo by and courtesy of Jimmy Yap.*

Tunnelling underground is not easy because of challenging soil conditions that could be "as soft as toothpaste, mixed with giant hard rocks". At other times, the tunnels had to be dug to depths of up to 14 storeys in order to circumvent existing underground infrastructure such as utility pipes and previously constructed MRT lines. Engineers even had to divert part of the Singapore River and Eu Tong Sen Canal to allow tunnelling works to be carried out safely for the Downtown and North-East lines respectively.[14]

While all construction work is dangerous, there are additional dangers to working underground as the Nicoll Highway collapse on 20 April 2004 has shown. Four men were killed when the tunnel they were working on as part of the Circle Line collapsed. The collapse caused a wide section of Nicoll Highway to cave in, resulting in blackouts in surrounding areas. The body of foreman Heng Yeow Pheow was never found.[15]

For large infrastructure works such as public transport rail lines, the Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM) is used. Tunnelling using a TBM is made up of two phases. During the excavation phase, the TBM will burrow through the ground using its robust cutters like a mechanical mole. The crushed soil and rocks are then removed from the tunnel. The second or the "ring-building" phase will take place after the TBM has tunnelled through 1.4 m of ground. Here, segments of prefabricated reinforced concrete are lowered into the tunnel before being put up against the wall using hydraulic equipment and bolted into place to form a ring. This ring will be the platform for the underground project to be carried out.[16]

Currently, the three most common types of TBMs used in Singapore are the Slurry Shield TBM, the Earth Pressure Balance TBM and the Rectangular TBM. The slurry shield TBM acts like a powerful blender with a cutterhead filled with bentonite slurry that can stabilise the tunnel face as it bores through the soil. With the Earth Pressure Balance TBM, the materials dug out during tunnelling are used to support the tunnel face for the TBM to carry out its task. Finally, the Rectangular TBM features a rectangular instead of a circular cutterhead so that a rectangular tunnel can be constructed

Workers laying a sewage pipe for the Toa Payoh Sewerage Scheme, 1963. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

Workers constructing the underground Dhoby Ghaut MRT station, 1986. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

underground. These machines are enormous. The Rectangular TBM, for example, measures 5.6 m by 7.6 m.[17]

Road Tunnels and Expressways

While the initial MRT system was being built, Singapore also embarked on another underground transportation project comprising a 700-metre tunnel linking Bukit Timah Road to Cairnhill Circle, a 1.7-kilometre tunnel from Kramat Road to Chin Swee Road and a three-storey underground interchange with five slip tunnels at Clemenceau Avenue. These tunnels became part of the 15.5-kilometre Central Expressway (CTE), which was completed in 1991 and connects the city centre to housing estates such as Toa Payoh, Bishan and Ang Mo Kio.[18]

As the project was carried out in the middle of the densely populated city area under various soil conditions, the excavation and tunnelling work "demanded a high level of technical expertise and skill". Six different types of temporary retaining walls had to be erected along the route to hold back the soil, and noise and vibration monitoring instruments were attached to about 40 buildings located within 50 m of the excavation sites. The Singapore River also had to be dammed in stages over a period of two years for construction to be carried out.[19]

Lessons learned from these projects are applied to the construction of more road tunnels along expressways like the Kallang-Paya Lebar Expressway (KPE) and the Marina Coastal Expressway (MCE), as well as arterial roads such as Fort Canning Tunnel, Woodsville Tunnel and Sentosa Gateway.

The MCE, in particular, was especially challenging to build. At the opening ceremony of the MCE in December 2013, then Minister of State for Transport and Finance Josephine Teo noted that the 5-km long expressway was the "toughest tunnelling project the Land Transport Authority (LTA) has ever undertaken". Digging through reclaimed land, some of the soil was described as being "like peanut butter", while a 420 m segment of the expressway had to be built beneath the seabed. That segment is just 130 m from the Marina Barrage, which added to construction difficulties as the barrage would regularly discharge water when it rained heavily, making the environment unpredictable.[20]

Today, at least 10 percent of Singapore's roads are located underground. This figure will grow in the future as the 21.5-kilometre North-South Corridor (NSC) – slated to be completed in 2027 – will have a vehicular expressway underground and a public transport corridor above. Besides the NSC, there will also be more underground arterial roads, especially in upcoming housing estates like Tengah. Tengah is designed to have Singapore's first car-free town centre, with roads running underground to free up space above for pedestrians and cyclists.[21]

Underground Pedestrian Networks

Other than an underground road network for vehicles, there are also underpasses for pedestrians built since the late 1960s.[22] Initially, pedestrians found these underpasses "inconvenient" or "eerie" to use, as the *New Nation* reported in 1981: "[S]ome [pedestrians] shrugged and said they didn't know where the underpasses were. Others exclaimed: 'Aiyah, so inconvenient!'. Some spoke of the eerie feeling walking alone in an underpass, especially at night. 'What if something or someone pounced at you from behind?' one pedestrian asked."[23]

Following the release of the Development Guide Plan for the new Downtown Core in 1996 that proposed turning underpasses into pedestrian malls, the first of such malls, CityLink Mall, was completed in 2000. Stretching some 350 m, the mall offers about 65,000 sq ft (6,039 sq m) of retail space, and links City Hall MRT Station and Raffles City to Marina Centre, Suntec City and the Esplanade. With its high ceilings, wide walkways and strategically placed skylights to allow natural light to stream in,

these design elements strive to achieve an aboveground effect so "it doesn't feel like an underground mall at all".[24] In 2010, a second underground pedestrian mall, the 179,000-square-foot (16,630 sq m) Marina Bay Link Mall, was built. It links One Raffles Quay with the Marina Bay area.[25]

Going Even Deeper

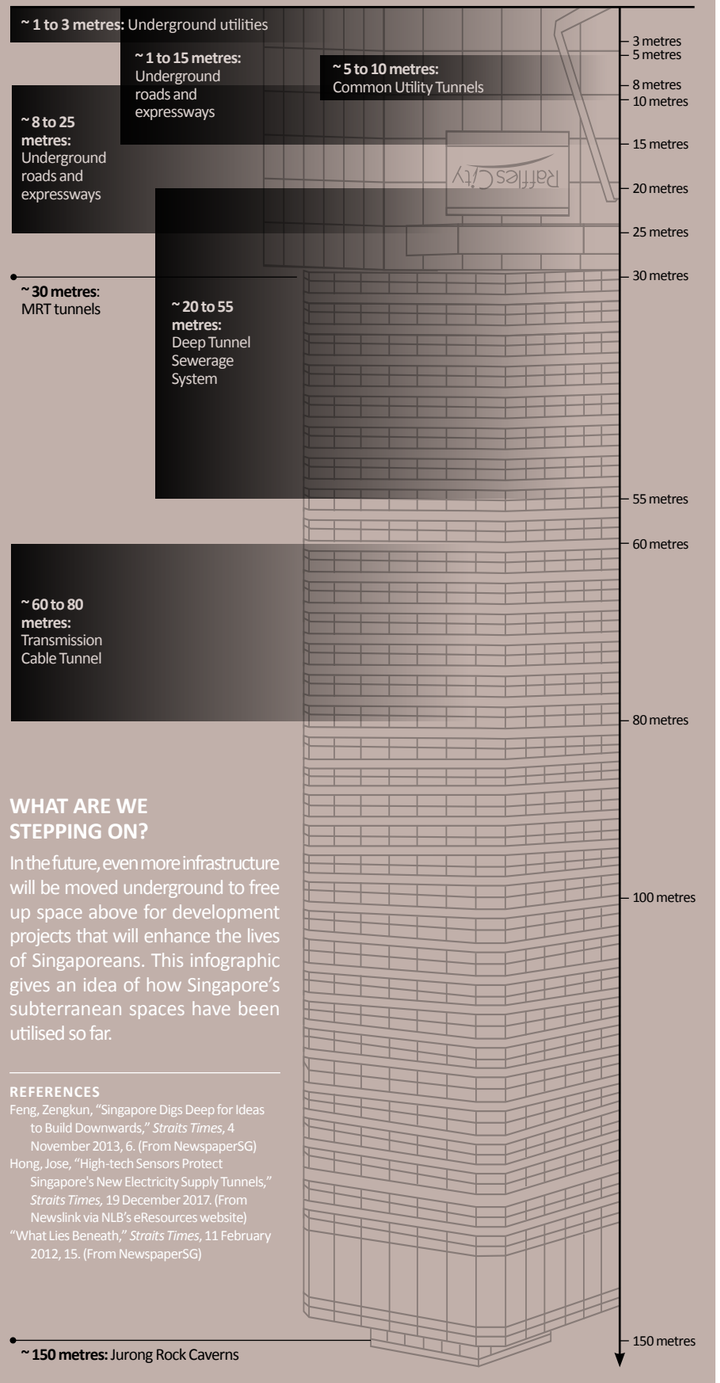
In the early 2000s, Singapore embarked on a new method to lay underground utilities. Known as the Common Services Tunnel (CST), this tunnel system conveys telecommunication cables, power lines and potable water to buildings in the Marina Bay financial district. The CST also houses pipes that supply chilled water to buildings for their air-conditioning needs as well as pneumatic tubes for refuse collection.

The 5.7-kilometre CST is "as big as two MRT tunnels" and its construction, which began in 2001, was met with "immense" challenges. To avoid existing underground infrastructure such as MRT lines, and pier and wharf structures buried under reclaimed land, engineers had to tunnel at depths of up to 20 m underground. At one point, they even had to dig through a 1.5-kilometre-long breakwater of solid rock dating back to the colonial era. Operational since 2006, the CST freed up space above, saved costs and reduced carbon emissions.[26]

Then there is the Transmission Cable Tunnel, which has been described as one of the world's deepest electricity supply projects, and completed in 2018. Located at a depth of between 60 m and 80 m underground (compared to underground MRT tunnels which are 30 m to 40 m deep), the project comprises three tunnels – North-South, East-West and Jurong Island-Pioneer Tunnels. Ranging from a diameter of 6 to 11 m each, these tunnels can house the entire nation's 500 km of extra-high voltage cables with the capacity to hold another 700 km more in the future. These tunnels allow the easy monitoring and replacement of cables with minimal disruption to traffic and the lives of Singaporeans.[27]

The Deep Tunnel Sewerage System (DTSS) is another underground utilities project that requires engineers to dig deep and tunnel through difficult soil conditions. Conceived in 1997, the DTSS "uses deep tunnel sewers to convey used water by gravity to centralised water

At 43 m below street level, Bencoolen MRT Station is currently Singapore's deepest station, 2022. *Photo by and courtesy of Jimmy Yap.*



WHAT ARE WE STEPPING ON?

In the future, even more infrastructure will be moved underground to free up space above for development projects that will enhance the lives of Singaporeans. This infographic gives an idea of how Singapore's subterranean spaces have been utilised so far.

REFERENCES

Feng, Zengkun, "Singapore Digs Deep for Ideas to Build Downwards," *Straits Times*, 4 November 2013, 6. (From NewspaperSG)

Hong, Jose, "High-tech Sensors Protect Singapore's New Electricity Supply Tunnels," *Straits Times*, 19 December 2017. (From Newslink via NLB's eResources website)

"What Lies Beneath," *Straits Times*, 11 February 2012, 15. (From NewspaperSG)

The 158-metre Raffles City Tower in the background shows how deep Singapore has been tunnelling underground.

reclamation plants". Currently, the more than 100-kilometre-long DTSS serves the northern and eastern parts of Singapore through a network of sewers that are linked to two deep tunnel sewers. With diameters of up to 6 m, the two deep tunnel sewers had to be placed at a depth of up to 55 m underground.[28] Phase 1 was completed in 2008, but phase 2 is still under construction. It is slated to be completed in 2025.[29]

The Underground Ammunition Facility (UAF), completed in 2008, is the country's "first cavern development" and "the world's most modern underground ammunition depot". It took 10 years to build and is located under the old Mandai Quarry at an undisclosed depth. By storing ammunition in the UAF, this has helped free up about 300 ha of land, or the equivalent of 400 football fields.

Besides saving land, the use of automation and technology reduced manpower operational needs by 20 percent compared to a traditional depot, and insulation by the granite caverns also cut the energy required for cooling by half. This paved the way for the Jurong Rock Caverns project, which has enabled Singapore to free up some 60 ha of land, or the equivalent of 70 football fields, for other development works.[30]

What Lies Beneath?

In the decades ahead, it is very likely that Singapore will intensify its underground efforts. To prepare for this, the State Lands Act and Land Acquisition Act were amended in 2015 to facilitate the use and development of underground space by clarifying the extent of underground ownership and the introduction of strata powers for the acquisition of a specific stratum of space.[31]

When Singapore adopted the 2019 Master Plan in November 2019 to guide the island's development over the next 10 to 15 years, it laid out a number of key initiatives that are likely to transform the way Singaporeans are going to live on the island in the future. These include creating greener and more sustainable neighbourhoods as well as creating jobs closer to homes. The master plan also called for the increased usage of subterranean spaces through an "Underground Master Plan". The idea is to use the space beneath for infrastructure such as pedestrian walkways, rail lines, utilities, warehousing and storage facilities. This way, the land above can be freed up for housing, community uses and greenery.[32]

In 2017, the Singapore Land Authority, in collaboration with the Singapore-ETH Centre, was tasked to map out a three-dimensional underground plan of the island in a project called Digital Underground to study how underground space can be used more efficiently and effectively. (This centre was established by ETH Zurich – a public research university in Switzerland – and Singapore's National Research Foundation to develop sustainable solutions to global challenges). The plan will be an important asset to building owners, developers and town planners as it will provide a "realistic, digital representation of the physical world below", including the accurate locations of subterranean infrastructure such as underground utilities and pedestrian walkways.[33]

As tunnelling technology improves and as initiatives such as the Digital Underground mature, Singapore is likely to pursue even more projects underground to free up valuable space on the surface. ♦

CityLink Mall connects City Hall MRT Station and Raffles City with Marina Centre, Suntec City and the Esplanade, 2022. *Photo by and courtesy of Jimmy Yap.*

NOTES

1 Janice Heng, "Digging Deep in Singapore for Space Solutions," *Straits Times*, 17 June 2015, https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/digging-deep-in-singapore-for-space-solutions; Teo Chee Hean, "Commissioning Ceremony of the Underground Ammunition Facility," Mandai West Camp, 7 March 2008, https://www.dsta.gov.sg/latest-news/speeches/speeches-2008/commissioning-of-the-underground-ammunition-facility; "Underground Space," Urban Redevelopment Authority, last updated 26 May 2022, https://www.ura.gov.sg/Corporate/Get-Involved/Plan-Our-Future-SG/Innovative-Urban-Solutions/Underground-space.

2 "Factsheet: Downtown Line 3 to Open on 21 October 2017," Land Transport Authority, 31 May 2017, https://www.lta.gov.sg/content/ltagov/en/newsroom/2017/5/2/factsheet-downtown-line-3-to-open-on-21-october-2017.html.

3 "Singapore's 'Underground'," *Straits Times*, 12 February 1992, 22. (From NewspaperSG)

4 "Percival's Fort Canning Bunker Re-opened," *Straits Times*, 1 February 1992, 16. (From NewspaperSG)

5 "Pipe Manufacture in Singapore," *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 2 January 1932, 11. (From NewspaperSG)

6 "The Water-works," *Straits Times*, 31 October 1902, 5. (From NewspaperSG)

7 "The Sewerage Scheme," *Straits Times*, 13 June 1913, 9. (From NewspaperSG)

8 "$8,000,000 Sewerage Scheme Progresses," *Straits Times*, 2 May 1940, 10. (From NewspaperSG)

9 "Occasional Notes," *Straits Times*, 31 January 1928, 8. (From NewspaperSG)

10 Colony of Singapore, *Colony of Singapore Annual Report for the Year 1958* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1959), 222–31. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RCLOS 959.57 SIN); Ahmad Zhaki Abdullah, "Smartphones, Floating Balls and Monitoring Sensors: How Singapore Is Going High-tech in Detecting Water Leaks," *Channel NewsAsia*, 8 November 2020, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/high-tech-detecting-water-leaks-533736; "Protecting Our Underground Network," SP Energy Hub, 11 July 2019, https://www.spgroup.com.sg/about-us/energy-hub/reliability/protecting-our-underground-network; Ng Keng Gene, "S'pore's Strategies to Reduce the Likelihood of Heavy Flooding," *Straits Times*, 23 April 2021, https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/environment/spores-strategies-to-reduce-the-likelihood-of-heavy-flooding.

11 "A Bird's-eye View of Raffles Place Park," *Straits Times*, 4 November 1965, 20. (From NewspaperSG)

12 "Scotts Road Once a River," *Straits Times*, 9 November 1985, 10. (From NewspaperSG)

13 "Raise Tunnel Pressure, MRT Builders Told," *Straits Times*, 28 December 1985, 12. (From NewspaperSG); Singapore Mass Rapid Transit Corporation, *Stored Value: A Decade of the MRTC* (Singapore: Mass Rapid Transit Corporation, 1993), 37. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 388.42095957 SIN)

14 "Downtown Line," Land Transport Authority, last updated 23 August 2021, https://www.lta.gov.sg/content/ltagov/en/getting_around/public_transport/rail_network/downtown_line.html; Leong Chan Teik, *Getting There: The Story of the North East Line* (Singapore: Land Transport Authority, 2003), 68–72. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 625.4095957 LEO)

15 Amanda Phoon, "10 Years Ago," *Straits Times*, 22 April 2014, 6; "Nicoll Highway Opens After $3M in Repairs," *Straits Times*, 5 December 2004, 10. (From NewspaperSG)

16 "What Lies Beneath: Meet LTA's Digging Machine," Land Transport Authority, 28 January 2022, https://www.lta.gov.sg/content/ltagov/en/who_we_are/statistics_and_publications/Connect/TBMs.html.

17 17 "What Lies Beneath: Meet LTA's Digging Machine"; Ministry of the Environment, *Annual Report, 1981* (Singapore: Ministry of Environment, 1982), 23. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RCLOS 354.5957008232 SMEAR); "Going Underground," *New Nation*, 1 September 1981, 8; "Tunnel Mission," *Straits Times*, 1 April 2015, 5. (From NewspaperSG)

18 "It Includes First Underground Road Tunnels in S'pore," *Straits Times*, 11 May 1991, 22; "CTE Project Completed," *Straits Times*, 11 May 1991, 22. (From NewspaperSG)

19 "It Includes First Underground Road Tunnels in S'pore"; "CTE Tunnels Ready Before Year's End," *Business Times*, 4 January 1991, 24. (From NewspaperSG)

20 Josephine Teo, "Opening Ceremony of Marina Coastal Expressway," Ministry of Transport, 28 December 2013, https://www.mot.gov.sg/news/speeches/Details/Speech-by-Mrs-Josephine-Teo-at-the-Opening-Ceremony-of-Marina-Coastal-Expressway-on-28-December-2013; "PWD Engineers Go Abroad to Study Underground Roads," *Business Times*, 12 April 1990, 2; Fadzil Hamzal and Cel Gulapa, "A Highway under the Sea," *New Paper*, 23 December 2013, 16–17. (From NewspaperSG); "Marina Coastal Expressway Opens," *Today*, 29 December 2013, https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/marina-coastal-expressway-opens.

21 Sherlyn Seah, "Land Transport Master Plan 2040: Faster Journeys for Cyclists, Bus Passengers at Priority Corridors," *Today*, 25 May 2019, https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/land-transport-master-plan-2040-faster-journeys-cyclists-bus-passengers-priority-corridors; "North-South Corridor," Land Transport Authority, last updated 10 March 2022, https://www.lta.gov.sg/content/ltagov/en/upcoming_projects/road_commuter_facilities/north_south_corridor.html; Kenneth Cheng, "Tengah to Get S'pore's First Car-free Town Centre," *Today*, 8 September 2016, https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/tengah-get-spores-first-car-free-town-centre; Oscar Holland, "Singapore Is Building a 42,000-home Eco 'Smart' City," CNN, 2 February 2021, https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/singapore-tengah-eco-town/index.html.

22 "Neon Lights and Ads to Lure Pedestrians Under," *New Nation*, 11 June 1981, 12/13. (From NewspaperSG)

23 Nancy Koh, "Going Underground," *New Nation*, 11 June 1981, 12/13. (From NewspaperSG)

24 Colin Tan, "New Downtown Plan Unveiled," *Straits Times*, 24 August 1996, 24; "Coming Soon: CBD With Below Ground Walkway," *Straits Times*, 22 November 1997, 7; Teo Pau Lin, "Underground Mall to Open," *Straits Times*, 17 June 2000, 2; Tan Su Yen, "Shopping Goes Subterranean," *Business Times*, 7 July 2000, 37. (From NewspaperSG)

25 Karen Teng, "Shopping Underground," *Straits Times*, 29 September 2010, 6. (From NewspaperSG)

26 Grace Chua, "Services Tunnel Overcomes Obstacles," *Straits Times*, 12 August 2012, 16. (From NewspaperSG); "Marina Bay: A Vision and the Backbone," Urban Redevelopment Authority, 5 July 2018, https://www.ura.gov.sg/Corporate/Resources/Ideas-and-Trends/Marina-Bay-vision-backbone; "Marina Bay District Cooling System," SP Group, accessed 14 June 2022, https://www.spgroup.com.sg/sustainable-energy-solutions/our-low-carbon-solutions/cooling-and-heating; Liyana Othman, "World's Biggest Underground District Cooling Network Now at Marina Bay," *Today*, 3 March 2016, https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/plant-underground-district-cooling-network-marina-bay-commissioned.

27 Jose Hong, "Singapore's Deepest Tunnel System Almost Ready, Will Ensure Reliable Electricity Supply," *Straits Times*, 19 December 2017, https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/singapores-deepest-tunnel-system-close-to-completion-will-ensure-reliable-electricity; "Electricity Cable Tunnel Project," SP Group, accessed 14 June 2022, https://www.spgroup.com.sg/cable-tunnel/Home.html.

28 Siau Ming En, "Construction Begins for S$6.5 Billion, 100km Superhighway for Used Water," *Today*, 20 November 2017, https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/construction-begins-s65-bn-superhighway-used-water.

29 "Deep Tunnel Sewerage System: Phase 2," PUB, last updated 23 November 2020, https://www.pub.gov.sg/dtss/phase2.

30 Heng, "Digging Deep in Singapore for Space Solutions"; Teo, "Commissioning Ceremony of the Underground Ammunition Facility"; "Underground Space."

31 "Legislative Changes to Facilitate Future Planning and Development of Underground Space," Ministry of Law (Singapore), 12 February 2015, https://www.mlaw.gov.sg/news/press-releases/legislative-changes-planning-development-underground-space.

32 "Underground Space," Urban Redevelopment Authority, last updated 14 June 2022, https://www.ura.gov.sg/Corporate/Get-Involved/Plan-Our-Future-SG/Innovative-Urban-Solutions/Underground-space; "Master Plan," Urban Redevelopment Authority, last updated 14 June 2022, https://www.ura.gov.sg/Corporate/Planning/Master-Plan.

33 Gerhard Schrotter and Rob van Son, *Digital Underground: Towards a Reliable Map of Subsurface Utilities in Singapore* (Singapore: Digital Underground, 2019), Singapore-ETH Centre, https://sec.ethz.ch/research/digital-underground.html.

"THEY DIED FOR ALL FREE MEN"

STORIES FROM KRANJI WAR CEMETERY

Remembering those who died while fighting the Japanese during World War II.

By Janice Loo

Janice Loo is a Librarian with the National Library, Singapore. Her responsibilities include collection management and content development as well as research and reference assistance on topics relating to Singapore and Southeast Asia.

It was shortly after 4 am on 8 December 1941 when 17 Japanese naval bombers took off from Saigon (now known as Ho Chi Minh City) to attack the airfields at Tengah and Seletar in Singapore.[1]

That air raid claimed 61 lives and injured 133. Among those who died was Corporal Raymond Lee Kim Teck of the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force. His remains (plot 36, row E, headstone 12) rest among the graves of other Commonwealth casualties from the war on the tranquil grounds of the Kranji War Cemetery.[2]

Kranji and the Battle for Singapore

Located in the northwestern part of Singapore, the Kranji area became a military base in the 1930s and was a munitions depot before being converted into battalion headquarters for Australian troops after the Allied withdrawal from Singapore on 31 January 1942.[3]

Kranji was a key battle site during the Japanese invasion. With the loss of Malaya, the retreating Allied units were redeployed in a new defence perimeter around Singapore. The 8th Australian Division, comprising the 22nd and 27th Brigades, was stationed to defend the northwestern coastline that became the initial battleground from 8 to 10 February 1942. Overstretched and outnumbered, the Australian troops bore the brunt of the initial Japanese assault. Of the 2,690 burials and inscriptions of missing Australian personnel at the cemetery, 519 have their date of death recorded as between 8 and 10 February 1942, suggesting that they fell in action during the opening battles. The location of the cemetery is thus significant considering that Kranji was where the war began and ended for many.[4]

Situated on a low hill overlooking the Strait of Johor, the cemetery started out as a small graveyard attached to a prisoner-of-war (POW) camp and makeshift hospital during the Japanese Occupation.[5]

After the Japanese surrender in September 1945, the site was expanded into a permanent war cemetery managed by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) headquartered in the United Kingdom, an organisation established in 1917 to care for the remains of World War I casualties. War graves were relocated from POW camps and cemeteries from other parts of the island to Kranji, which would serve as the main burial ground for Commonwealth casualties of World War II.[6]

Unveiled on 2 March 1957, the cemetery honours the men and women from Britain, Australia, Canada, Sri Lanka, India, Malaya, the Netherlands and New Zealand who gave their lives in the line of duty. Designed by the British architect Colin St Clair Oakes, the cemetery contains 4,461 burials marked by headstones as well as five memorials: the Singapore Memorial, the Chinese Memorial, the Singapore (Unmaintainable Graves) Memorial, the

(Facing page) The Kranji War Cemetery with the Singapore Memorial in the background, 2022. *Photo by and courtesy of Janice Loo.*

(Facing page) An aerial view of Kranji War Cemetery and the Singapore Memorial. *Photo by and courtesy of Weixiang Schrödinger Lim.*

(Above) Detail from a 1942 map of Singapore showing positions of the 22nd and 27th Brigades of the 8th Australian Division. *Image from Alamy Stock Photo.*

Singapore Cremation Memorial and the Singapore Civil Hospital Grave Memorial.[7]

Within the cemetery, the rows of white headstones are set on a gentle, green slope. As far as possible, each headstone marks the burial of a single person, reflecting the CWGC's principle of individual commemoration.[8] The headstones are of the same shape, size, and material, expressing another principle: the uniformity of sacrifice regardless of rank, race or creed.[9]

Organised in a square formation of 100 headstones (five rows of 20 headstones), the cemetery is laid out like a military parade, with the war dead forming a battalion that continues to march on.[10]

Beyond the graves, on the hill's highest point, stands the Singapore Memorial – also designed by Oakes. This structure features 12 stone-clad columns bearing the inscribed names of over 24,000 missing personnel with no known graves. The columns are surmounted by a flat, wing-shaped roof. A 22-metre-tall pylon, which resembles the tail unit of an aeroplane, rises from the centre and is capped by a star.[11]

Four other commemorative panels stand around the Singapore Memorial. Located on the eastern terrace is the Singapore Civil Hospital Grave Memorial, which lists the names of 107 Commonwealth servicemen whose remains lie buried along with those of 300 civilians in a mass grave at the Singapore General Hospital. Situated behind the Singapore Memorial is the Singapore Cremation Memorial, which remembers some 800 casualties, mostly Indian soldiers, whose remains were cremated in accordance with their religious beliefs.[12]

The panel at the western end of the Singapore Memorial, known as the Singapore (Unmaintainable Graves) Memorial, is dedicated to more than 250 casualties who had died in campaigns in Singapore and Malaya, but whose known graves in civil cemeteries could not be assured maintenance by the CWGC and which could not be transferred to Kranji due to religious reasons.[13] Nearby, the Chinese Memorial in Plot 44 marks a collective grave for 69 Chinese servicemen who were killed by the Japanese in February 1942.

Soldiers of the Last Stand

A total of 264 soldiers from the Malay Regiment are honoured at the Kranji War Cemetery. During the Battle of Singapore, the Malay Regiment – comprising some 1,400 men in two battalions – were part of the 1st Malaya Brigade tasked to defend Pasir Panjang on the southwestern part of the island.[14]

From 10 to 12 February 1942, Japanese forces captured the strategic Bukit Timah area, including access to supply dumps and reservoirs, tightening their grip around the city. With Bukit Timah lost, Allied troops were ordered to retreat behind the final defence perimeter that stretched from Pasir Panjang Ridge (now Kent Ridge) on the western end to Kallang in the east. This set the stage

for the last, desperate battle between the men of C Company of the Malay Regiment's 1st Battalion against the 18th Division of the Imperial Japanese Army at Bukit Chandu on Pasir Panjang Ridge on 14 February.

The Battle of Pasir Panjang commenced on the morning of 13 February with intense Japanese bombardment of the Malay Regiment's positions. C Company managed to hold onto Pasir Panjang village despite being heavily outnumbered. At midnight, C Company evacuated to a new position at Bukit Chandu.[15] To their left was B Company, which guarded the approach to Buona Vista village, while D Company covered the Labrador area on their right. C and D companies were separated by a deep drain flowing with oil that had been set ablaze by the enemy's bombing of Normanton Oil Depot on 10 February.[16]

In the early afternoon of 14 February, the Japanese sought to infiltrate C Company's position by disguising themselves as Punjabi soldiers. However, the deception was foiled and when the soldiers neared, C Company opened fire, killing and injuring 22 Japanese soldiers and driving the rest into retreat.[17] Two hours later, the Japanese returned in greater numbers and overwhelmed the men of C Company, who found themselves sandwiched between enemy troops that had overrun B Company on one side, and a wall of fire on the other.

C Company Commander Captain H. R. Rix (plot 11, row D, headstone 1)[18] gave orders to defend the position and fought valiantly, inspiring his men to do the same. Rix's body was retrieved along with 12 other Malay Regiment soldiers at the site of their last stand. In another platoon, Lieutenant G.F.D. Stephen died leading a bayonet charge on the enemy after many of his men had been killed or wounded.[19] His remains were never found and Stephen's name is inscribed on Column 114 of the Singapore Memorial.[20]

Second Lieutenant Adnan Saidi of C Company, who was himself badly hurt, exhorted his platoon to fight till the end, exemplifying the motto that he had chosen for them: *Biar putih tulang, jangan putih mata*, a Malay saying that is the equivalent of "death before dishonour".[21] After taking Bukit Chandu, the Japanese troops set about capturing and executing the surviving members of C Company, including Adnan. According to eyewitness accounts, Adnan was shot and bayoneted to death. His body was hung upside down from a tree and the Japanese forbade its removal for burial.[22]

In total, the Malay Regiment lost 159 lives (six British officers, seven Malay officers and 146 other ranks) during the battle at Pasir Panjang. Adnan and 26 other Malay soldiers who died during that battle, and whose bodies were never recovered, are commemorated on Columns 385 to 390 of the Singapore Memorial.[23]

The Commandos of Jaywick and Rimau

Among those buried in Kranji is Lieutenant Colonel Ivan Lyon of the Gordon Highlanders (a line infantry regiment of the British Army that existed from 1881 to 1994). In September 1943, Lyon, described as a "cool-headed, icy-calm and professional soldier", led a team of 14 Australian and British commandos from Allied Z Special Unit in Operation Jaywick, a bold mission to sabotage Japanese ships in Singapore's Keppel Harbour.[24]

On 2 September, the commandos departed Exmouth Harbour, Western Australia, in a captured Japanese fishing vessel, the *Kofuku Maru*. It had been repurposed and renamed *Krait*, after the small but deadly snake found in tropical Asia. Disguised as local fishermen, the men ditched their uniforms for sarongs and painted their bodies brown.[25]

(Far left) Second Lieutenant Adnan Saidi, platoon commander of the Malay Regiment, led his men in a brave last stand against the Japanese at the Battle of Bukit Chandu. *Image reproduced from Mubin Sheppard, The Malay Regiment 1933–1947 (Kuala Lumpur: Department of Public Relations, Malay Peninsula, 1947), 17. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RCLOS 355.31 SHE-[RFL]).*

(Left) Second Lieutenant Adnan Saidi and 26 other Malay soldiers from the Malay Regiment, whose bodies were never recovered, are commemorated on Columns 385 to 390 of the Singapore Memorial, 2022. *Photo by and courtesy of Janice Loo.*

(Below left) Australian and British commandos from Allied Z Special Unit on board the *Krait* en route to Singapore to sabotage Japanese shipping at Keppel Harbour, 1943. Ivan Lyon is in the back row, third from the left. *Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial, P00986.001.*

(Below) From left: The headstones of Corporal Raymond Lee Kim Teck of the Singapore Volunteer Corps, Lieutenant Colonel Ivan Lyon of the Gordon Highlanders and an unidentified sailor from the Royal Navy. *Photos by and courtesy of Janice Loo.*

Around two weeks later, on 18 September, Lyon and five operatives disembarked at Pulau Panjang in the Riau Islands. On 24 September, Lyon and his men set up on Pulau Subar, an uninhabited islet that served as an ideal observation post.[26]

Two nights later, the raiding party slipped undetected into Keppel Harbour and attached limpet mines (a type of naval mine attached to a target by magnets) to several Japanese ships.[27] The charges went off on the morning of 27 September, reportedly sinking or severely damaging seven Japanese transport vessels, which amounted to some 37,000 tonnes of shipping. All 14 commandos managed to return safe and sound to Australia on 19 October 1942, 48 days after their journey began.[28]

Convinced that the attack was masterminded by internees at Changi Prison, the Kempeitai (Japanese military police) mounted a raid on the prison cells on 10 October 1943, leading to the arrest and torture of 57 innocents, 15 of whom died. This became known as the Double Tenth Incident.[29]

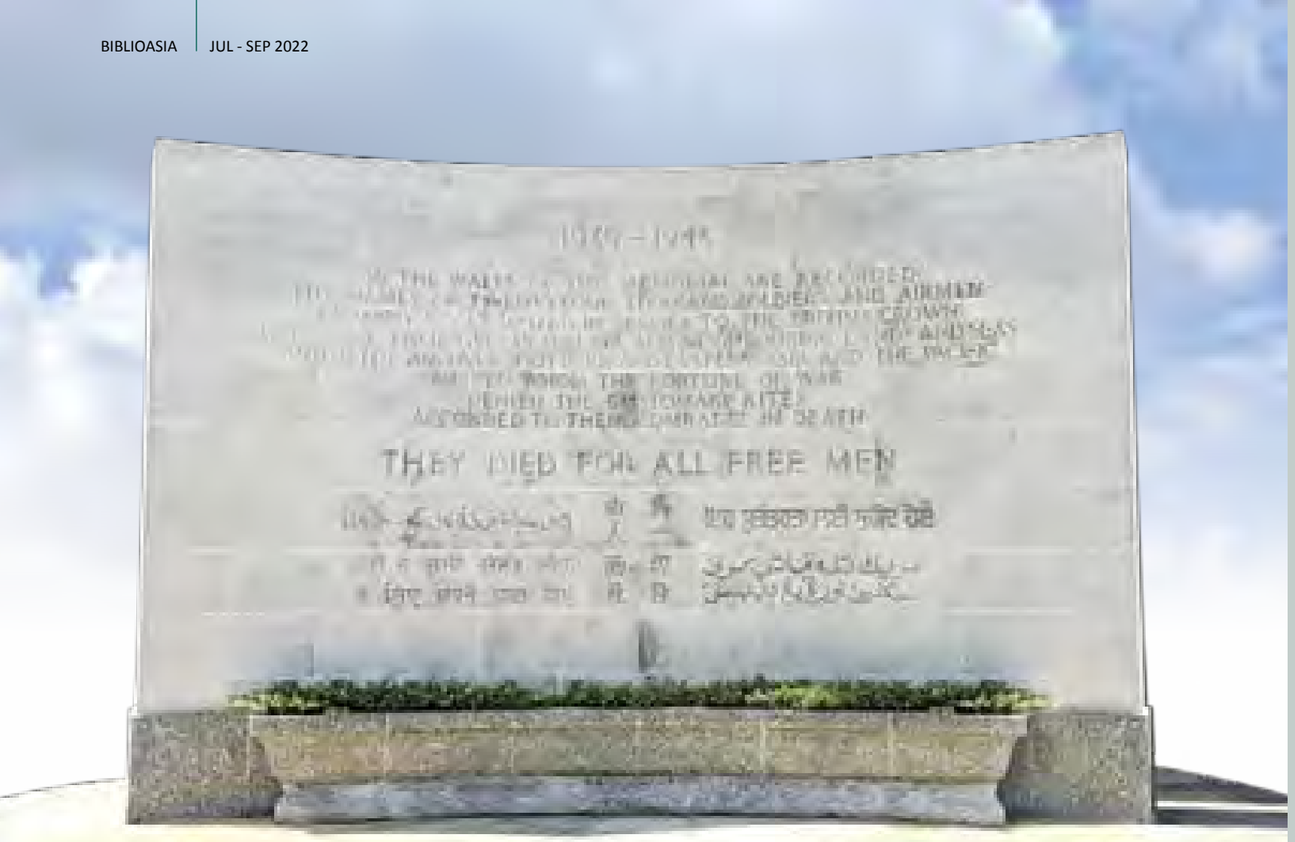
Another raid – the ill-fated Operation Rimau – was planned the following year. The codename was inspired by the tattoo of a Malayan tiger (*harimau* is "tiger" in Malay) that Lyon had on his chest.[30] This time, a larger team of 23 Z Special Unit commandos led by Lyon were dropped off via submarine in the Riau Islands. There, they seized a local fishing boat, the *Mustika*, and sailed it towards Singapore. The original plan was for the men to use motorised submersible canoes, known as "Sleeping Beauties", to plant limpet mines on Japanese ships in Keppel Harbour once again.[31]

However, disaster struck as a Japanese patrol boat spotted and challenged the *Mustika* just an hour before the raid was to commence on the afternoon of 10 October 1944. As a result, Lyon aborted the raid and ordered the destruction of the *Mustika* and the "Sleeping Beauties". Unwilling to give up just yet, he and six others pressed on with the mission using folboats (collapsible canoes) instead. It is believed that the raiding party destroyed three Japanese ships on 11 October before scattering.[32]

The Japanese caught up with the commandos and in the clashes that ensued, 13 men, including 29-year-old Lyon, were killed in action or succumbed to injuries while in captivity. Lyon died on 16 October from an enemy grenade during a shootout on Pulau Soreh, an islet in the Riau Islands. He and two other commandos had fought off nearly a hundred Japanese soldiers for over four hours until their positions were discovered.[33]

The other 10 Rimau commandos were captured and incarcerated at Outram Road Prison in Singapore, tried for espionage, and sentenced to death by beheading on 7 July 1945.[34] Their remains rest in a collective grave in Kranji (plot 28, row A, headstones 1–10).

Apart from the group of 10 men and Lyon (plot 27, row A, headstone 14),



The inscription on the Singapore Memorial reads "They Died for All Free Men", 2022. *Photo by and courtesy of Janice Loo.*

another two are buried in separate graves (plot 23, row D, headstone 19; and plot 32, row E, headstone 2) in Kranji, while four have their names etched on the Singapore Memorial (Columns 117 and 118). The remaining six lie in unmarked graves in the Riau Islands.[35]

Lest We Forget

On 2 March 1957, before some 3,000 guests which included veterans and families of the war dead, then Governor of Singapore Robert Black unveiled the dedication tablet on the Singapore Memorial, which bears the phrase "They Died For All Free Men". Timed to drumrolls, the draped flags on the memorial's columns pulled away, revealing the engraved names of more than 24,000 missing personnel. In his speech, Black said: "That simple sentence ["They died for all free men"] tells us why this multitude of men and women of differing faiths and races, but united in the service of their King, were faithful unto death."[36] Black's words hark to the origins of Kranji War Cemetery as an imperial site honouring those who had made the ultimate sacrifice in the name of the then British Empire.[37]

The nearly four-hour long unveiling ceremony included the sounding of the *Last Post*, renditions of *Lochaber No More* and *Reveille*, the singing of hymns, followed by prayers from representatives of the Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and Christian faiths. As Governor Black and selected guests were laying wreaths at the foot of the Cross of Remembrance, an elderly woman in a worn *samfoo* broke away from the crowd and stumbled towards them, sobbing loudly.[38]

She was 81-year-old Madam Cheng Seang Ho, nicknamed the Passionaria of Malaya (after La Pasionaria of the Spanish Civil War). She had fought fiercely alongside her husband, Sim Chin Foo, at the Battle of Bukit Timah.[39] His name was etched on Column 399 of the memorial being unveiled that morning.[40] In January 1942, the pair had joined Dalforce – a volunteer army hastily recruited from the local Chinese community – even though they were already in their 60s at the time. While Madam Cheng survived the war, her husband was one of many who had died at the hands of the Kempeitai. Her anguish is a reminder of the emotional pain that survivors and families endure in the aftermath of the war. Built for the dead, Kranji is equally important as a place for the living to mourn and seek solace.

Today, memorial services are held twice annually. One service is held on the Sunday closest to Remembrance Day on 11 November, while the other is held on ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) Day on 25 April in honour of Australian and New Zealand soldiers.[41]

What began as a site of imperial memory has also evolved to take on new meaning as Singaporeans visit the cemetery as part of national education and historical tours. Interpreted through the lens of nation-building, the cemetery holds lessons on the importance of self-reliance and self-determination, as it commemorates locals who had contributed to the defence of Singapore during World War II and as the war marked the turning point towards decolonisation.[42] ♦

A SERGEANT IN THE LIBRARY

The National Library of Singapore holds a small collection of personal documents, war medals, photographs, postcards, letters and newspaper clippings relating to Sergeant Gordon Laing, who is commemorated on Column 119 of the Singapore Memorial.[1]

Laing had served in the 2/18th Australian Infantry Battalion, part of the 22nd Brigade, 8th Australian Division. The 2/18th arrived in Singapore on 18 February 1941 and was immediately sent north to Port Dickson in Malaya for training. In March, they moved to Seremban, then to Jemaluang on the east coast in late August, before ending up in Mersing in early September. The battalion saw its first major action in an ambush on about 1,000 enemy troops at the Nithsdale Estate south of Mersing on 27 January 1942.[2]

Laing is believed to have been killed in this engagement along with 82 other men on that fateful day. The battalion withdrew to Singapore following the Nithsdale ambush and was redeployed to defend the island's northwestern coastline.

The items relating to Laing were donated by his grand-nephew, Dayne Cowan, to the library in 2019.

(Clockwise from top) Portrait of Sergeant Gordon Laing in uniform. This belonged to Laing's sister, Ilena, whom Laing was very close to. There are holes on the corners as Ilena had tacked the portrait on her wall; Condolence letter (undated) and commemoration scroll from King George VI to Gordon Laing's parents; Letter from the Commonwealth of Australia Department of the Army on the campaign stars and war medals posthumously awarded to Gordon Laing for his service during World War II. *Collection of the National Library, Singapore.*

NOTES

1 Justin Corfield and Robin Corfield, *The Fall of Singapore: 90 Days: November 1941–February 1942* (Singapore: Talisman Publishing, 2012), 116–25. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 940.5425957 COR-[WAR])
2 "Corporal Raymond Lee Kim Teck," Commonwealth War Graves Commission, accessed 31 Mar 2022, https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/2228809/raymond-lee-kim-teck/.
3 Romen Bose, *Kranji: The Commonwealth War Cemetery and the Politics of the Dead* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2006), 21. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 940.54655957 BOS-[WAR])
4 Hamzah Muzaini and Brenda S. A. Yeoh, *Contested Memoryscapes: The Politics of Second World War Commemoration in Singapore* (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 98. (From National Library, call no. RSING 940.546095957 MUZ-WAR])
5 Bose, *Kranji*, 21.
6 Bose, *Kranji*, 33.
7 "Kranji War Cemetery," Commonwealth War Graves Commission, accessed 8 April 2022, https://www.cwgc.org/visit-us/find-cemeteries-memorials/cemetery-details/2004200/kranji-war-cemetery/; Athanasios Tsakonas, "In Honour of War Heroes: The Legacy of Colin St Clair Oakes," *BiblioAsia* 14, no. 3 (Oct–Dec 2018).
8 Edwin Gibson and G. Kingsley Ward, *Courage Remembered: The Story Behind the Construction and Maintenance of the Commonwealth's Military Cemeteries and Memorials of the Wars of 1914–1918 and 1939–1945* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1989), 66. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 355.1609 GIB)
9 Gibson and Ward, *Courage Remembered*, 66.
10 Wan Meng Hao, "More than Meets the Eye: Remembering the War Dead in Singapore," in *Spaces of the Dead: A Case from the Living*, ed. Kevin Tan (Singapore: Ethos Books, 2011), 239. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 363.75095957 SPA)
11 Athanasios Tsakonas, *In Honour of War Heroes: Colin St Clair Oakes and the Design of the Kranji War Memorial* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2020), 178. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 725.94095957 TSA)
12 "Kranji War Cemetery."
13 "Kranji War Cemetery."
14 Nor-Afidah A Rahman, Nureza Ahmad and Alec Soong, "Battle of Opium Hill," in *Singapore Infopedia*. National Library Board Singapore. Article published March 2021.
15 Dol Ramli, "History of the Malay Regiment 1933–1942," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 38, no. 1 (207) (1965): 236. (From JSTOR via NLB's eResources website)
16 Dol Ramli, "History of the Malay Regiment 1933–1942," 238.
17 Dol Ramli, "History of the Malay Regiment 1933–1942," 239.
18 "Captain Harry Rodway Rix," Commonwealth War Graves Commission, accessed 8 April 2022, https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/2821290/harry-rodway-rix/.
19 Mubin Sheppard, *The Malay Regiment 1933–1947* (Kuala Lumpur: Department of Public Relations, 1947), 18. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RCLOS 355.31 SHE-[JSB])
20 "Second Lieutenant Geoffrey Francis Dixon Stephen," Commonwealth War Graves Commission, accessed 8 April 2022, https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/2072314/geoffrey-francis-dixon-stephen/.
21 "Death Before Dishonour," *Straits Times*, 8 December 1991. (From NewspaperSG)
22 Dol Ramli, "History of the Malay Regiment 1933–1942," 239.
23 Dol Ramli, "History of the Malay Regiment 1933–1942," 242; "Second Lieutenant Adnan Bin Saidi," Commonwealth War Graves Commission, accessed 8 April 2022, https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/2529445/adnan-bin-saidi/.
24 Lynette Ramsay Silver, *Krait: The Fishing Boat That Went to War* (Singapore: Cultured Lotus, 2001), 97, 195. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 940.545994 SIL-[WAR])
25 Silver, *Krait*, 165.
26 Silver, *Krait*, 81–83, 89–91.
27 Bose, *Kranji*, 79–81; Petar Djokovic, "Krait and Operation JAYWICK," Royal Australian Navy, accessed 8 April 2022, https://www.navy.gov.au/history/feature-histories/krait-and-operation-jaywick.
28 Silver, *Krait*, 89, 95–97.
29 Silver, *Krait*, 97–98; Heng Wong, "Double Tenth Incident," in *Singapore Infopedia*. National Library Board Singapore. Article published March 2021.
30 Lynette Ramsay Silver, *The Heroes of Rimau* (Singapore: Cultured Lotus, 2001), 111. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 940.5426 SIL-[WAR])
31 Bose, *Kranji*, 82; Silver, *Heroes of Rimau*, 108–09, 111–12, 117–20, 133–34.
32 Silver, *Heroes of Rimau*, 142–46, 283; Bose, *Kranji*, 82–83.
33 Bose, *Kranji*, 83; Silver, *Heroes of Rimau*, 154–55.
34 Silver, *Heroes of Rimau*, 213–16.
35 Silver, *Heroes of Rimau*, 248; Bose, *Kranji*, 87–88.
36 Terry Pillay, "A Living Tribute to Heroes Who Have No Graves," *Sunday Tribune*, 3 March 1957. (From NewspaperSG)
37 Hamzah Muzaini and Yeoh, *Contested Memoryscapes*, 98–99.
38 Nan Hall, "Thoughts of the Past Move 81-Year-Old War Heroine to Tears," *Straits Times*, 3 March 1957; "Tragic Memories in a Garden of Peace," *Straits Times*, 3 March 1957; "A Moving Dedication at New Shrine," *Singapore Free Press*, 2 March 1957. (From NewspaperSG)
39 "A Heroine Is Rewarded," *Straits Times*, 25 July 1948. (From NewspaperSG)
40 "Private Sim Chin Foo," Commonwealth War Graves Commission, accessed 8 April 2022, https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/2537430/sim-chin-foo/.
41 Hamzah Muzaini and Yeoh, *Contested Memoryscapes*, 94.
42 Hamzah Muzaini and Yeoh, *Contested Memoryscapes*, 94, 101–05.

新加坡华社日本佔领时期的

从国家图书馆文献窥看

李梅瑜 (Lee Meiyu) 是新加坡国家图书馆新加坡与东南亚馆藏部的高级图书馆员。她的研究兴趣包括新加坡华人社群。她也是2012年《家书抵万金：新加坡侨批文化展》以及2013年《根：追溯家族历史展览指南》的作者之一。同为新加坡与东南亚馆藏部的高级图书馆员、共同撰稿员**萧碧莹 (Seow Peck Ngiam)** 的职责包括馆藏建设和管理，如许云樵馆藏。她也为图书馆杂志撰写馆藏介绍和研究心得。

新加坡宗乡会馆联合总会许云樵馆藏：许云樵教授日记册

索书号: Lee Kong Chian Reference Library level 11, RRARE C818.8 XYQ-[HYT]

许云樵教授的第五册日记记录了他在1942年2月22日到牛车水登记受检的经历：

“晨携水瓶饼干往牛车水登记，实则受检。……乃至街口，见人皆蹲于街头待检，后方则列成长行，余乃蹲于街口侧。继随众鱼贯入一小店受检，盖一印于衣襟，并受盘话而出。据云昨日频多为宪兵以车解去，未至(知)何故。或谓以华侨登记证盖有安全登记印之故，有谓文化如作者均被捕，有谓出言不逊被捕，实皆推测之词。”

许云樵馆藏，新加坡国家图书馆。

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the Fall of Singapore. Featured in this essay is a showcase of items from the Chinese community relating to the Japanese Occupation of Singapore. These are available in the collection of the National Library, Singapore.

By Lee Meiyu and Seow Peck Ngiam

今年是新加坡沦陷80周年纪念，笔者特此介绍一些华社所捐赠的相关文献，希望有助于学者进一步研究，从而窥看华社在这历史阶段的情况及战后的相关事件。

到访过新加坡国家图书馆的读者或许知道第十层楼有个“椰阴馆”。早在六十年代，已故南洋历史学家及藏书家陈育崧先生便将毕生的藏书慷慨献出，是国家图书馆的第一位捐赠者。这洋溢着东南亚热带风情的馆藏名字出自陈先生，贴切地形容了这批富有新加坡与东南亚研究资料的馆藏。随着2005年新馆巍然耸立于维多利亚街，国家图书馆更加积极地负起保存新加坡文献遗产的使命，并推动捐赠计划，广泛征集各界人士及团体捐赠文献。许多个人收藏家

《昭南岛新生一年间》

索书号：Lee Kong Chian Reference Library level 11, RRARE 959.57 CNJ

由昭南出版社于1943年出版，整理了新加坡在日本军政府一年来的监管下，在各方面所取得的发展和成就，以鼓吹“大东亚共荣圈”和“日本优良文化”等思想。

椰阴馆，新加坡国家图书馆。

新加坡福建会馆珍藏：天福宫二战期间产业登记，1942–1948

索书号：Lee Kong Chian Reference Library level 11, RRARE 369.25957 XJP-[HHK]

这份1942–48年天福宫屋税和地租登记簿让人们看到当时所使用的货币；1945年8月是个分水岭，之前的日据时期采用日本军政府的“香蕉钱”，日军投降之后则恢复使用英殖民地货币。

新加坡福建会馆珍藏，新加坡国家图书馆。

和团体如会馆都认同国家图书馆的设施和团队将能为文献带来更完善的保存，因此踊跃响应号召，将其历年保存的文献资料及史册捐赠给国家图书馆。

许多会馆在新加坡沦陷前已将历年保存的资料如附带地址的会员名单销毁，以防落入日军手中。会馆在日据时期基本上也没有运作，因此有关日据时期的文献也就相应的稀少。即便如此，国家图书馆馆藏还包含了一些有关华社所捐赠的日据时期的资料。

许云樵教授日记中关于日军空袭和大检证的记录

其中一份文献是许云樵教授的日记。已故著名南洋历史学家许云樵于1930年代漂洋过海，从中国苏州南下新加坡寻求新机遇。心思细腻的他将其生活点滴及局势的体会逐一记录在这五本日记册里。日记始于1930年代，止于1942年2月24日，即新加坡沦陷后的第十天。有关日据前后的篇幅虽不算多，但都是当时的实录。沦陷前的日军空袭、莱佛士坊被轰炸后的一片残垣断瓦的凄凉景象、沦陷后的“大检证”记述等，这些描述犹如目击者的记录，历历在目。如今，这些记录已成为宝贵的原始资料，有助于学者重塑历史、窥看当时的面貌。

反映日据时期生活的各类文献

日本军政府在占领新加坡后，马上便展开了日化政策，倡导日本文化为优良、进步繁荣的模式，以作为“大东亚共荣圈”团结的新象征。[1] 教育方面，老师须学习日语，以便 教导学生。在日本军政府通过报纸和各类宣传活动，如学好日语者有奖赏等大力宣传学习日语的重要性下，人们开始纷纷到夜校修读日语课程。[2]另一方面，由于战争扰乱了供应链，物资如粮食和日常用品出现短缺现象，因此，人民的生活十分艰辛。食品进出口业务由日本公司接管，所有批发商和零售商须获得日本军政府的批准才能运作。人民需要通过配给的方式购得粮食，而所得的分量也因为供应越来越困难而减少。[3]

新加坡晋江会馆珍藏:会馆资料文件
(Chin Kang Huay Kuan Collection: Ephemera of Chin Kang Huay Kuan)

索书号: Lee Kong Chian Reference Library level 11, RCLOS 369.25957 CHI

这份资料文件中包含了这张户口调查票。日本军政府派发给良好家庭的“安居证”，后来由户口调查票所取代。人民之后可根据调查票上所记录的家庭成员人数获得相关的粮食配给卡。[4]

新加坡晋江会馆珍藏，新加坡国家图书馆。

昭南岛华侨协会会议录
(Minutes of Meetings of Syonan-to Overseas Chinese Association)

索书号: Lee Kong Chian Reference Library level 11, RCLOS 305.895105957 MIN-[HYT]

协会第一份会议记录是在1942年3月2日，宣布协会成立事宜。会议地点是吾庐俱乐部。协会会长是林文庆。最后一份会议记录是在1945年8月23日，记录了协会结束的工作事宜。

会议录内容丰富，记录了华侨协会的组织和各种活动情况，例如成员名单、各州奉纳金配额和每州不足的原因以及所借款项、调查垦植分区统计表等等。

在华社团体及各界人士的捐赠文献中，有一部分是日据时期的个人文件和出版物。这些都是在当时日军军政统治下产生的文献，是时代的印证，也是反映日据时期日常生活的档案文件。

昭南岛华侨协会

在日本军政府的指导下，成立于1942年3月的昭南岛华侨协会 (Overseas Chinese Association)，其初衷是为了替当局与当地华人社群进行调解。然而，日本军政府却利用昭南岛和马来亚各州府的协会向马来亚华人社会索取5000万元，作为“奉纳金”。[5]

为筹集奉纳金，昭南岛华侨协会推选代表各籍贯的人员负责互查及统筹过程。例如潮州人的财产由海南人的检察员检查；海南人的财产由福建人检查等等。日本军政府也送来一批来自土地局、公司注册官、所得税局等的个人产业细目以方便检查工作。协会同时规定华人拥有财产在三千元以下的免税，凡在三千元以上者，则安值抽缴百分之八。[6]

日本军政府命令这笔款项必须于4月20日献交，后因昭南岛与马来亚各州府无法筹齐款项延期至5月20日，最后期限为6月25日。所缺数额则向正金银行以百分之六年利借款补贴，必须在一年内还清。昭南岛原所承担的奉纳金数额为1000万元，但因霹雳与马六甲两州无法筹获1400万元，昭南岛多承担了250万元，即实付1250万元。[7]

昭南岛华侨协会后期的职责也包括了执行日军所推行的政策。例如协助募集劳工、登记失业者、组织难民等；协助日军恢复社会秩序，例如招募勤劳奉仕队、招募华人警察等；协助粮食增产运动，例如推动华人开垦荒地、积极种植杂粮等；在日用品缺乏时，协助增产代用产品；响应军政当局的贮金运动；协助大规模农村移植工作，赴兴楼建立“新昭南模范村”。[8]

许云樵馆藏和椰阴馆有两份关于昭南岛华侨协会的原始资料，分别为“昭南岛华侨协会会议录”和《五千万元奉纳金勒索始末》。《五千万元奉纳金勒索始末》是协会秘书陈育崧于1946年9月刊登在《南洋学报》的英文篇章。“昭南岛华侨协会会议录”则是许云樵所拍摄的会议记录图像副本。会议记录的全文也可在《新马华人抗日史料》一书中找到。

《五千万元奉纳金勒索始末》
(History of the Formation of the Oversea Chinese Association and the Extortion by J.M.A. of $50,000,000 Military Contribution from the Chinese in Malaya)

索书号: Lee Kong Chian Reference Library level 11, RDTYS 940.53109595 TAN

由昭南岛华侨协会秘书陈育崧在1947年出版的文章记录了协会成立的原因以及筹集奉纳金的详细过程。例如选举各籍贯代表、各州奉纳金配额以及与正金银行所签署的借款合约。

椰阴馆，新加坡国家图书馆。

战后挖掘死难者遗骸，建立纪念碑[9]

1962年2月19日，《南洋商报》报导在东海岸路七英里半的一个山谷下发现了日据时期死难者遗骸。[10] 新加坡中华总商会于是在是年2月28日成立遗骸善后委员会，负责探查、发掘、安葬和其他善后工作。遗骸委员会同时呼吁目击者向中华总商会提供关于屠杀地点的讯息，之后在樟宜、武吉知马等处相继发现遗骸。挖掘工作于1963年3月开始，至12月共挖掘27处，总盛155瓮。1966年2月再次进行挖掘，于10月完成挖掘所有分布全国各地的遗骸，总计发掘12处，盛骨骸452瓮。所有出土遗物统交晚晴园保管。[11]

1963年3月中华总商会又设立募捐委员会，策划日本占领时期死难人民纪念碑的建立。1965年5月中华总商会与政府共同组织纪念碑工作委员会，负责一切关于建纪念碑工作。1967年2月15日，已故前总理李光耀为坐落于美芝路政府大厦草场东侧的纪念碑揭幕。碑由四柱相聚一处，象征新加坡四大种族(马来族、华族、印度族、欧亚族)。四柱之下安置一象征式之铜制骨灰瓮。纪念碑墓地下面埋葬着从各个地点挖掘出来的遗骸。[12]

新加坡南安会馆馆藏有两份由公众人士写给中华总商会告知屠杀地点的信件文件夹，分别为“验证被杀同胞折骨开费存底”和“新加坡中华总商会鸣冤委员会文件及其他信件”。其中有一封由梁后宙所书，叙述了其家族35人被杀害事件。梁后宙是开辟林厝港的大功臣，也曾领导星洲三民主义青年团和华侨抗日守备军抵抗日军。因其抗日活动，在新加坡沦陷前在英军的要求下撤离新加坡。其家人则在沦陷后不久被日军拷打杀害。[13]

胡拯华馆藏也有当时挖掘死难者遗骸所拍下的一系列照片，为这历史性震撼的一刻保留了珍贵的图像记录。这些照片可以在图书馆的照片数据库PictureSG (https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/pictures/) 浏览。

新加坡南安会馆珍藏：验证被杀同胞折骨开费存底

新加坡南安会馆珍藏：新加坡中华总商会鸣冤委员会文件及其他信件

索书号：Lee Kong Chian Reference Library level 11, RCLOS 959.5703 XJP

两份文件夹收入了1962年公众人士写给中华总商会告知屠杀地点的信件。信件包括文字记录和附有地图的图像记录。寄信人有些是亲身经历，指认不幸罹难家属随身物品，请中华总商会注意所挖掘出的遗物。也有一些是根据传闻，请中华总商会派人前往可疑之处询问调查和探掘。

新加坡南安会馆珍藏，新加坡国家图书馆。

此篇文章所列资料存放在闭架或善本书库。如有兴趣浏览，请读者根据各别资料所列出的检索书号讯息到李光前图书馆11楼服务台咨询或发电邮至 ref@nlb.gov.sg。国家图书馆和档案馆还有其他丰富的二战时期历史文献。例如图书馆的林少彬馆藏有日军的军事地图、信件等等、著名画家刘抗在战后以漫画形式记录日据时期所见所闻的《杂碎画集》、日据时期的华文报《昭南日报》、课本《日本语图说》和《标准日语会话读本》、杂志《南光周刊》以及个人文件如日本语成绩证和粮食配给卡等等。档案馆则有口述历史、战俘所留下的画册和日据时期所颁发的个人文件。有兴趣读者可向各别机构询问。♦

作者感谢林源福先生(新加坡国家档案馆前副馆长)审阅此文。

注释

1 陈鸣鸾(1996)。《日治时期1942–1945：从图片忆战时的新加坡》(页107)。(索书号：RSING 940.5425 CML-[WAR])。
2 李玉梅(1993)。《昭南：新加坡在日本统治下，一九四二年至一九四五》(页86)。(索书号：RSING 959.57023 LGB-[HIS])。
3 陈鸣鸾，1996，页125–26。
4 李玉梅，1993，页65，69。
5 蔡史君(2014年10月–2015年1月)。〈二战期间日本占领下的新加坡〉，载《怡和世纪》第24期，页93。(索书号：RSING 369.25957 OPEHHC)；李业霖主编(2000)。《奉纳金资料选编》(页8)。(索书号：RSEA 959.5703 FNJ-[HIS])。
6 李业霖主编，2000，页54。
7 李业霖主编，2000，页8–10。
8 蔡史君，2014年10月–2015年1月，页93。
9 战后大规模挖掘死难者遗骸工作主要由新加坡中华总商会在1960年代领导。挖掘工作告一段落之后，中华总商会在1969年出版了《日本占领时期死难人民纪念碑徵信录》一书，详细记录了挖掘工作到建立纪念碑的始末。
10 〈东海岸七里半大山谷下挖掘出二十一年前被日军杀害者尸骨〉(1962年2月19日)，《南洋商报》，页5。
11 中华总商会经济资料室(1969)。《日本占领时期死难人民纪念碑徵信录》(页18–20)。新加坡：中华总商会。(索书号：RCLOS 725.94 CHI)。
12 中华总商会经济资料室，1969，页3–4，31；新加坡旅游局(2022)。《日本占领时期死难人民纪念碑》。网址：https://www.visitsingapore.com.cn/see-do-singapore/history/memorials/civilian-war-memorial/。
13 李成利(2015)。《梁后宙与林厝港》(页6，97，100，102，105)。新加坡：新加坡南安会馆艺文社。(索书号：RSING 305.8951 LCL)。

胡拯华馆藏收有中华总商会于1963年挖掘战时死难者遗骸过程的照片，保留了珍贵的图像记录。照片显示骨骸出土后，于帐篷下洗涤吹干，盛入瓮中封密。遗骸破土之日，中华总商会董事与死难者家属在该日上午9点向英灵举行祷告。这些照片可以在图书馆的照片数据库PictureSG浏览。

胡拯华馆藏，新加坡国家图书馆。

This Was Once Singapore's Largest Planned Housing Development

A History of Sennett Estate

Sennett Estate is a unique milestone in the history of housing development in Singapore and its quiet streets have had its fair share of excitement over the years.

By Winnie Tan

Winnie Tan is an Associate Librarian with the National Library, Singapore. She is part of the Arts and General Reference team and works on content development, collection management, and research and reference services.

At first glance, there is little to suggest that Sennett Estate, a housing development in Potong Pasir just off MacPherson Road, is particularly noteworthy. It looks like any typical suburb, with its quiet streets lined with houses that were originally built in the 1950s. However, this unassuming estate represents an interesting milestone in the history of home development in Singapore.

Developed in response to the post-war housing crunch, Sennett Estate was once dubbed the biggest planned housing estate in Singapore.[1] And within the 170 acres that make up this quiet estate are stories that link the place to Singapore's larger history: to a time when wealthy Arab families owned large tracts of land and also to a period in crime-infested Singapore when kidnapping was a common occurrence. It is even, somewhat improbably, tied to the Konfrontasi.

Alkaff Lake Gardens

Before Sennett Estate came into being, the area was principally known for the Alkaff Lake Gardens. In the late 1920s, the park was developed by Syed Shaik Abdul Rahman Alkaff of the Alkaff family, a prominent Arab family of merchants and property developers.[2]

"Eighteen years ago, the idea of converting the site into a park occurred to me," he said in a 1948 newspaper interview. "A building contractor suggested that we should decorate the site with Japanese tea-houses, side-walks lined with granite chips, Japanese arches and bridges," he said. Alkaff then hired a Japanese landscape expert to develop what has been described as Singapore's very first Japanese-style garden across 10 acres (40.5 sq m) of land, which opened to the public in 1929.[3]

Alkaff Lake Gardens quickly became a popular evening and weekend resort for families, couples and office workers.[4] Featuring artificial hills and a man-made lake, visitors could go boating on the lake, fishing and picnic under shady trees.[5] The idyllic spot also offered tea houses that could be rented, interspersed among quaint Japanese bridges and manicured shrubbery.

In 1935, Chinese merchant Tan Aik Kee of Nanyang Amusement Co. took over the management of the park and introduced Chinese elements. Chinese-style boathouses reminiscent of dwellings along the Pearl River in Guangzhou were constructed along with Chinese pavilions as well as the introduction of Chinese white and pink lotus flowers.[6] A cinema and a cabaret were even in the works. However, the park fell into disuse by the late 1930s.

The War

At the onset of World War II, the park was requisitioned by the British military in December 1941 and closed to the public. The Singapore Volunteer Field Ambulance Corps then took over the area and made it their headquarters, where they were stationed for a few weeks. The park was initially spared from Japanese bombings and a former sergeant from the volunteer corps believed that this was because there was a "huge red cross set up on the grass, which was visible even from the air". However, after the volunteer corps moved out, the park was bombed and shelled.[7]

The park continued to be off limits during the Japanese Occupation. An armed guard was stationed at the park during those years and even the owner, Syed Shaik Abdul Rahman Alkaff, was prohibited from entering. After the war, the park lay derelict and was overgrown with grass and weeds. As the Alkaffs decided to return to their core business of trading, much of their property, including the park, was sold after the war.[8]

At the end of the tumultuous decade, Alkaff Lake Gardens and the adjacent plots of land were purchased by Sennett Realty in July 1950 with plans to develop a new housing estate there.[9] It was the end of an era and the beginning of a new one.

Planning the Biggest Housing Estate

After the war, Singapore's population increased exponentially, causing a severe housing shortage. In 1947, a study by the Singapore Housing Committee revealed that the colony's population had increased from 560,000 in 1931 to 941,000 that year, with most families crammed into one room or even just a cubicle. The committee found that barely one-third of the urban population was housed satisfactorily.[10]

In July 1950, the *Sunday Times* reported the plans for the new Sennett Estate, the first private enterprise development in Singapore to be built after World War II as a response to the housing shortage. Dubbed the "biggest housing estate planned", it would have 1,400 homes built on 170 acres of land – bordered by Upper Serangoon Road, MacPherson Road and Upper Aljunied Road – with houses priced at an average of $10,000 each, including land and installation.[11]

The estate would comprise shop-houses, bungalows, semi-detached houses and terrace houses, according to C.W.A. Sennett, the managing director of Sennett Realty. "When the plots of land were earmarked, prospective buyers

Semi-detached houses along Pheng Geck Avenue and Wan Tho Avenue, 2022. *Photo by and courtesy of Winnie Tan.*

could either buy the land itself and build their own house, according to their own specifications, or have a house built for them by the Sennett Realty Co," he said.[12] Sennett himself was closely associated with land development in Singapore, having been the former Commissioner for Lands and then Chairman of the Singapore Housing Committee.

Sennett told the *Sunday Times* that the company would "endeavour to bring down the price of private houses to meet the pocket of the middle-class man". "The financial arrangements for people buying housing on the hire-purchase system would have to be worked out with the building society, but the usual terms for borrowing $10,000 was to pay it back at the rate of $85 a month over 15 years," he said. All the houses in the estate would be equipped with modern sanitation, water, electricity and gas. The initial proposal for the estate also included a clinic, market, cinema and kindergarten.[13]

Around the same time, it was announced that Alkaff Lake Gardens would be "filled up with earth and the hillocks levelled to be converted into children's playgrounds and open spaces".[14] Although the park was deemed "a ghost of its pre-war self" by the *Straits Times* at this point, its closure was still met with howls of protest from the public, who lamented the dearth of open spaces in Singapore.

In July 1950, a *Straits Times* reader wrote to the paper to express his "indignant distress and alarm" at the impending fate of Alkaff Gardens. "If this is thought a noble service to the community, towards relieving the present housing shortage, then the impression is certainly highly mistaken."[15] Another reader wrote to the *Straits Budget*, asking rhetorically: "Is Singapore so well stocked with public parks and open spaces that we can afford to see this God-given man-made beauty spot of our city obliterated?"[16] The Singapore Progressive Party issued a statement saying that Alkaff Gardens should be "preserved as a public park" and called upon the "'relevant public authority' to take necessary steps for this purpose".[17]

While Sennett agreed that "Singapore was badly off for open spaces", he said that "these things must be planned for the whole of the Colony instead of picking on one isolated spot such as the former Alkaff Gardens". Moreover, the lake was "really a hole in the ground filled with rain water and breeding mosquitoes".[18] Sennett did promise that trees from the Alkaff Lake Gardens would be kept and replanted in Sennett Estate's new parks.

Within a month of the estate's debut announcement in August 1950, more than 1,000 people had applied to buy the 1,400 units available. In February 1951, Sennett Realty announced that the foundations for the first batch of residential and shop houses were being laid, and the units would be allocated on a "first come, first served" basis.[19]

Meanwhile, representatives from the Sennett housing estate and the Public Works Committee discussed potential names for the estate's 24 roads. The names of the directors of Sennett Realty were initially suggested for the roads to honour the businessmen's "courage and enterprise" in this first-of-its-kind development. However, the committee rejected these names, on the grounds that these private roads would eventually be taken over and maintained as public roads by the Municipality so the names should be approved by the municipal commissioners.[20]

After much debate, a compromise was reached. The roads within the estate were named after flora and fauna, such as Butterfly Avenue, Cedar Avenue and Lichi Avenue, as well as after the businessmen involved in the project. These include Pheng Geck Avenue, after City Councillor Yap Pheng Geck; Kwong Avenue, after A.C.T. Kwong, director and manager of Sennett Realty; and Wan Tho Avenue, after Loke Wan Tho, film magnate and founder of Cathay Organisation. The first section of the estate was built in 1951, with the remaining three phases completed over the following years.[21]

The Early Days

One long-time resident of the area is 68-year-old Julie Kwong, daughter of the late A.C.T. Kwong, who was also once the Chinese general consul in Ipoh. To this day, the retired lawyer and current school administrator lives on the same road that bears her last name.

According to Julie, her father had been the director and manager of Sennett Realty Co. as well as the managing director of the Malayan Realty Co. "In 1956, land was transferred from Sennett Realty to my mother, who together with my father developed plots of land under Kay & Arthur Pte. Ltd."[22] All three companies played a major role in developing the estate.

Having lived in the estate for more than 60 years, Julie recalls how flooding used to be a major problem. As a child in the 1950s, she remembers that when it flooded, she and her siblings "sat atop furniture, made paper boats and floated them" in their living room. "It was fun."[23]

The adults, undoubtedly, found the situation less amusing. "The floods here are getting worse every time it rains," said resident R. Manikam to the *Singapore Free Press* in 1954. "It looks like we are being left to either sink or swim in them." Another resident, F.S. Krempl, added: "We have to remove shoes and roll up trousers to get to the main road. Sometimes we think how nice it would be to have a motor boat service here."[24]

In 1954 alone, residents counted 32 floods, during which water would seep through the walls and floors, rendering the bathrooms and flush systems unusable. "Nuisance from flooding, flies and mosquitoes is getting intolerable," they said.[25] The residents repeatedly petitioned the City Council to fix the problem.

Potong Pasir, where Sennett Estate lies, has long been prone to flooding. It is a low-lying area, and when it rained, the nearby Kallang River would overflow its banks, flooding the vicinity. To prepare for the monsoon season, pig farmers in Potong Pasir at the time would dredge the river to mitigate the floods.[26]

In 1953, the City Engineer's Department enlarged the culverts of drains on Upper Serangoon Road. Although the department noted that "these modifications [had] removed all back flooding into the estate", residents still complained of flooding whenever it rained.[27]

More drainage works ensued in the next decade, but the situation only improved from 1964 when the government approved a $52,000-flood alleviation scheme to extend existing drains that were too narrow and shallow in the area.[28]

(Far left) Alkaff Lake Gardens had a man-made lake, bridges, tea houses and pavilions, 1935. *John Lim Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

(Left) Boating at Alkaff Lake Gardens, 1950s. *Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

(Top) The car in Sennett Estate was rendered a twisted heap of metal after the bomb planted beneath it exploded on 9 December 1963. *Source: The Straits Times © SPH Media Limited. Reprinted with permission.*

(Above) An advertisement listing Sennett Estate's proposed amenities such as shops, a market, a school, a cinema and even medical and dental clinics. *Image reproduced from the Straits Times, 7 October 1951, 15. (From NewspaperSG).*

There are places of worship in Sennett Estate such as Alkaff Upper Serangoon Mosque on Pheng Geck Avenue (left) and Calvary Baptist Church on Wan Tho Avenue (right). *Photos by and courtesy of Winnie Tan.*

After this scheme, there were no more news reports about flooding in Sennett Estate. While flash floods still occasionally plague the area, they are no longer as severe thanks to the flood control measures in place.

Schools and Places of Worship

By the 1960s, there were five government schools in the area – Willow Avenue Secondary School, Cedar Girls' Secondary School, Cedar Primary School, Kwong Avenue School and Sennett Estate Primary. When Alkaff Lake Gardens was finally levelled in 1964, the first three schools were built on the very land where the park once stood.[29]

"During school dismissal time, the school children would always be at our fence and at our front gate, catching spiders along our hedge, or just hanging out by the gate," recalled Julie. As the family's entertainment-cum-family room was situated near the gate, she and her siblings would make music in the afternoons, much to the delight of the children. "My sister would be playing the piano here, my brother on the drums, another sister would be on the accordion," she recalled.[30]

Willow Avenue Secondary School closed in 1991 due to falling enrolment.[31] At the same time, neighbouring Cedar Girls' Secondary School was torn down, with the new school premises ultimately located on the site of the former Willow Avenue Secondary School.[32] Although the new building is now situated along Willow Avenue, Cedar Girls' Secondary School was allowed to retain its original address of 1 Cedar Avenue.[33]

Kwong Avenue School subsequently merged with Sennett Estate Primary to form Sennett Primary School, occupying the former's premises on Kwong Avenue. Sennett Primary closed in 1999 and its pupils were transferred to Cedar Primary School.[34] A hostel was later built at that location for tertiary students, but the premises have since been taken over by the Boys' Brigade headquarters.[35]

Apart from schools, Sennett Estate also has several places of worship. Alkaff Upper Serangoon Mosque is located at 66 Pheng Geck Avenue while Calvary Baptist Church is at 48 Wan Tho Avenue. In addition, Sri Siva Durga Temple is located nearby at 8 Potong Pasir Avenue 2.

Sennett Estate's most notable neighbour though was Bidadari Cemetery. The cemetery opened in 1908 and served the Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Sinhalese communities until its closure 1972. The proximity to a major cemetery did not seem to have deterred homebuyers. "People were more afraid of bumping into cobras," Julie said. Since Mount Vernon Camp, which houses the training and residential facilities of the Gurkha Contingent in Singapore, is located near the cemetery, she added that the estate's residents always felt safe near the burial grounds.[36]

Dangerous Liaisons

While Sennett Estate and Singapore are relatively crime-free today, this was not the case in the 1960s. Crimes involving firearms were common and kidnapping was a regular occurrence. No place was safe, not even quiet neighbourhoods like Sennett Estate.

In November 1964, rubber magnate Ng Quee Lam was visiting a friend living on Kee Choe Avenue one night when a group of four men pulled him out of his car. "Two of them came for me – one from each side of the car. A third man had already stuck a revolver against my driver's chest," Ng told the *Straits Times*. As this happened in the early evening, Ng had hoped that there would be people around to come to his rescue, but unfortunately no help came.[37]

Ng was only freed two weeks later, and the bungalow where he was held captive was on Sommerville Road, off Upper Serangoon Road, just a mere seven minutes' drive from the estate.[38] To deter abductions and secret society activities, the Singapore government enacted the Kidnapping Act and revised kidnapping charges in 1961, raising the maximum penalty from 10 years to death or life imprisonment.[39]

The 1960s was also the period of the Confrontation or Konfrontasi. Indonesia's opposition to the formation of the Federation of Malaysia resulted in armed incursions, bomb attacks and other subversive acts in Singapore and Malaysia between 1963 and 1966.[40] The bombing of MacDonald House on 10 March 1965 is possibly the best-known incident associated with Konfrontasi. The explosion tore through the building, killing three people and injuring at least 33 others.[41]

However, prior to the MacDonald House attack, 29 bombs had already been indiscriminately set off throughout the island. On 9 December 1963, one of those bombs was planted under a car in the back lane of Jalan Wangi in Sennett Estate. The blast killed two Indian shopkeepers operating a five-footway cigarette and sundries stall.[42]

"Many of the residents were shocked to hear of the incident," recalled Julie.[43] However, as her home was situated on the other side of the estate, she only learned about the explosion through news reports.

Kwong Avenue is named after A.C.T. Kwong, director and manager of Sennett Realty, while Puay Hee Avenue is named after Tan Puay Hee, a board member of Sennett Realty and Malayan Realty. *Photo by and courtesy of Winnie Tan.*

A New Alkaff Lake

While the old Alkaff Lake Gardens is no more, the Housing and Development Board announced in 2013 plans to construct a new Alkaff Lake in Bidadari Park, just 500 metres north of the original lake.[44] Apart from beautifying the area, the new lake will also act as a retainer for stormwater before it is discharged into Marina Reservoir.[45]

The new Alkaff Lake – envisioned to be around the size of two football fields and hold 30 million litres of water – will also be the country's first artificial lake to double as a flood control feature.[46] (At the time of publishing, there has still been no word on when the lake and park will be ready.)

Today, Sennett Estate is dwarfed by tall condominium developments and the highly popular Bidadari housing estate. However, within Sennett Estate itself, little appears to have changed. Looking back, Julie agrees that on the surface, the estate is still very similar to what it used to look like a half century ago. However, the rhythm of life in the area is no longer the same, she said, lamenting the loss of street hawkers and the Friday night *pasar malam*.[47]

"The *chwee kueh* lady would wheel [her cart] down the streets, her steamer in front, and the *laksa* man would walk by with ceramic bowls and a huge pot," she said. "They would be on our street and we'd buy from them. They have calls that still ring in my ears today."[48] ♦

NOTES

1 "Biggest Housing Estate Planned," *Straits Times*, 16 July 1950, 3. (From NewspaperSG)
2 Dhoraisingam S. Samuel, *Singapore's Heritage: Through Places of Historical Interest* (Singapore: Dhoraisingam S. Samuel, 2010), 19. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 959.57 SAM-[HIS])
3 Roy Ferroa, "S'pore's Forgotten Park," *Singapore Free Press*, 20 April 1948, 2. (From NewspaerSG)
4 "Alkaff Gardens Becoming a Popular Park," *Sunday Tribune*, 23 February 1936, 17. (From NewspaperSG)
5 Ray K. Tyers, *Ray Tyers' Singapore: Then & Now*, revised and updated by Siow Jin Hua (Singapore: Landmark Books, 1993), 199. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 959.57 TYE-[HIS])
6 "Alkaff Gardens Becoming a Popular Park"; "Brighter Alkaff Gardens," *Straits Times*, 17 September 1935, 12. (From NewspaperSG)
7 Ferroa, "S'pore's Forgotten Park."
8 Ferroa, "S'pore's Forgotten Park"; Tyers, *Ray Tyers' Singapore*, 199.
9 "Biggest Housing Estate Planned."
10 C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore 1819–2005* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2020), 382. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 959.57 TUR-[HIS])
11 "Biggest Housing Estate Planned."
12 "Biggest Housing Estate Planned."
13 "Biggest Housing Estate Planned"; "400 Houses to Go Up in Alkaff Area," *Singapore Free Press*, 29 December 1950. (From NewspaperSG)
14 "Garden Lake To Be Filled Up," *Straits Times*, 18 July 1950, 7. (From NewspaperSG)
15 Speramus Meliora, "A Serangoon Park," *Straits Times*, 21 July 1950, 6. (From NewspaperSG)
16 Pieces of Eight, "Alkaff Gardens," *Straits Budget*, 27 July 1950, 2. (From NewspaperSG)
17 "Wants Alkaff Gardens Preserved," *Singapore Standard*, 29 July 1950, 12. (From NewspaperSG)
18 "It's Really a Hole," *Singapore Free Press*, 22 August 1950, 5. (From NewspaperSG)
19 "Thousand Apply to Buy Houses," *Singapore Free Press*, 22 August 1950, 5; "First Come First Served Allocation System," *Sunday Standard*, 18 February 1951, 2. (From NewspaperSG)
20 "Name Roads After Malayan Trees, MCs Tell Housing Estate Owners," *Singapore Free Press*, 23 June 1951, 5. (From NewspaperSG)
21 "'Personal' Names for New Roads," *Straits Times*, 27 September 1951, 7; "Sennett's Aim Is 1000 Houses," *Straits Times*, 19 August 1951, 3. (From NewspaperSG)
22 Julie Kwong, interview, 5 May 2022.
23 Julie Kwong, interview, 25 November 2021.
24 "Floods! Call for Action," *Singapore Free Press*, 27 July 1954, 7. (From NewspaperSG)
25 "Tempers Go Up With the Flood in Estate," *Straits Times*, 12 December 1954, 5. (From NewspaperSG)
26 "Drainage Works at Potong Pasir," National Heritage Board, last updated 2 April 2021, https://www.roots.gov.sg/Collection-Landing/listing/1117739.
27 "Homes Are Flooded Every Time It Rains."
28 "Flood Drains for Sennett Estate," *Straits Times*, 28 August 1964, 13. (From NewspaperSG)
29 Nature Lover, "Vanishing Parkland at Alkaff 'Gardens'," *Straits Times*, 23 May 1964, 17; Au Yee Pun, "When Trees Must Make Way for New Schools," *Straits Times*, 6 June 1964, 15. (From Newspaper SG); Gary Maurice Dwor-Frecaut, "Alkaff Lake Gardens," in *Singapore Infopedia*. National Library Board Singapore. Article published 2010.
30 Julie Kwong, interview, 25 November 2021.
31 Sandra Davie, "Some Schools in Older Housing Estates to Close," *Straits Times*, 17 December 1990, 23. (From NewspaperSG)
32 "Cedar Girls to Relive Memories Before Old School Is Torn Down," *Straits Times*, 31 October 1989, 17. (From NewspaperSG)
33 "Cedar Girls to Lose Its Track and Field," *Straits Times*, 6 September 1994, 25. (From NewspaperSG)
34 Annabel Leow, "School Mergers 2019: Merry-go-round of Mergers for Some Affected Primary Schools," *Straits Times*, 20 April 2017, https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/education/merry-go-round-of-mergers-for-some-affected-primary-schools.
35 "Relocation to Temporary Office from Tuesday, 7 September 2021," The Boys' Brigade in Singapore, accessed 25 April 2022, https://www.bb.org.sg/contact-us/address-n-map.
36 Alex Chow, "Bidadari Cemetery," in *Singapore Infopedia*. National Library Board Singapore. Article published 15 July 2015; Julie Kwong, interview, 25 November 2021.
37 Lim Beng Tee and Jackie Sam, "Dato Tells How He Was Kidnapped, Held and Freed After 14 Days," *Straits Times*, 30 November 1964, 13. (From NewspaperSG)
38 "Police Find Kidnap House," *Straits Times*, 8 December 1964, 1. (From NewspaperSG)
39 Maria Almenoar, "Sheng Siong Kidnapping: Singapore Was a Hotbed of Abductions in the 1950s and 1960s," *Straits Times*, 10 January 2014, https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/sheng-siong-kidnapping-singapore-was-a-hotbed-of-abductions-in-the-1950s-and-1960s.
40 Mushahid Ali, "Konfrontasi: Why Singapore was in Forefront of Indonesian Attacks," *RSIS Commentary*, no. 062, 23 March 2015, https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/co15062-konfrontasi-why-singapore-was-in-forefront-of-indonesian-attacks/.
41 Mohamed Effendy Abdul Hamid and Kartini Saparudin, "MacDonald House Bomb Explosion," in *Singapore Infopedia*. National Library Board Singapore. Article published 7 August 2014.
42 "Two on Bombing Charge," *Straits Times*, 12 May 1964, 4. (From NewspaperSG)
43 Julie Kwong, interview, 25 November 2021.
44 "New Alkaff Lake for Bidadari Estate," *Today*, 29 August 2013, https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/new-alkaff-lake-bidadari-estate.
45 "Bidadari Park," Housing & Development Board, last updated 18 November 2021, https://www.hdb.gov.sg/cs/infoweb/about-us/hdbs-refreshed-roadmap-designing-for-life/live-well/bidadari-park.
46 Christopher Tan, "Bidadari to Have Flood Prevention Lake," *Straits Times*, 14 March 2020, https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/environment/bidadari-to-have-flood-prevention-lake.
47 Julie Kwong, interview, 5 May 2022.
48 Julie Kwong, interview, 25 November 2021.

Negotiating Boundaries

Japanese and Chinese Photo Studios in Prewar Singapore

Photo studios such Yong Fong, Lee Brothers and Daguerre had to negotiate the politics of race, class and clan.

By Zhuang Wubin

Zhuang Wubin is a writer, curator and artist. He has a PhD from the University of Westminster (London) and was a Lee Kong Chian Research Fellow (2017–18) at the National Library, Singapore. Wubin is interested in photography's entanglements with modernity, colonialism, nationalism, the Cold War and "Chineseness".

In the 19th century, British and European firms such as Sachtler & Co. and G.R. Lambert & Co. dominated the photography business in Singapore and Malaya. But by the onset of the 20th century, Chinese and Japanese practitioners had made their presence felt in the trade. At the time, there were visible and invisible lines segregating the colonial society according to social class, race, ethnicity and dialect group. These dividing lines, in turn, affected those who worked in the photographic trade or patronised the photo studios, requiring them to negotiate these boundaries according to evolving situations.

Mapping Japanese Studios

According to a 1910 census by the Japanese government, there were 1,215 Japanese residents in Singapore. The community operated three photographic businesses that involved seven men and six women.[1] A 1917 publication, 馬來に於ける邦人活動の現況 (*Marai ni okeru hōjin katsudō no genkyō; Current Status of the Activities of the Japanese in Malaya*), included a listing of Japanese businesses in Malaya, with eight separate entries relating to the photographic trade in Singapore. Four were photo studios while two other entries each listed an individual photographer, one with the "specialisation of going out to photograph". It is possible that both photographers also maintained a photo studio each. The remaining two entries were traders of photographic supplies and equipment.[2]

Many of these Japanese businesses were located within the vicinity of what founding principal of Raffles Junior college, Rudolf (Rudy) William Mosbergen, had called "Little Japan" in Singapore, using it to highlight the Japanese presence along Middle Road, Queen Street, Prinsep Street and Selegie Road.[3]

Growing up on Queen Street, Mosbergen was neighbours with some of them, but did not mingle much. "There was no relationship because first, I didn't speak Japanese. And they were very insular people – they didn't mix very much with us," he said. Mosbergen also recalled several photo studios along Middle Road and North Bridge Road, including some very good Japanese ones. He still owned a photo taken by one such studio.[4]

(Facing page top) Daguerre Studio on Middle Road is partially obscured by a truck. The photo was taken by visiting American photojournalist Harrison Forman in around 1941, before the onset of World War II in Singapore. *From the American Geographical Society Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries.*

(Facing page bottom) Lee Brothers Studio at 58-4 Hill Street, 1910s. *Lee Brothers Studio Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

(Above) Members of the dance orchestra of the United Chinese Musical Association. This photo by Nakajima & Co. commemorates their participation at the charity dance event at Great World Cabaret on 9 December 1934. *All rights reserved, Roberto Pregarz. From PictureSG, National Library, Singapore.*

In the decades prior to World War II, nearly every town in Malaya had at least one Japanese studio. In Singapore, Nakajima & Co., established by S. Nakajima, was the most famous Japanese-owned studio then and was active at least since the start of the 1920s. The *Malaya Tribune* described it as "the best of the photographic establishments in Singapore".[5]

Headquartered in Kuala Lumpur, an advertisement in the *Straits Times* in 1923 indicated that the studio had opened a branch on Orchard Road in Singapore. It offered the services of "developing, printing, enlarging for amateurs", and provided outdoor photography for prospective clients. Besides the sale of photographic supplies such as film and glass plates, Nakajima & Co. also offered postcards and views of Malaya.[6]

Nakajima's photographs had earlier appeared in the souvenir guide of the Malaya Borneo Exhibition, the colonial spectacle held in Singapore in 1922.[7] His contributions include, among others, a photograph of the Orang Asli, or aborigines, of the Malay Peninsula using their blowpipes and an image of locals weaving sarong.

Nakajima's photographs added an exotic touch to the souvenir guide. Perhaps unintentionally, these photographs visualised the logic of colonial exploitation, which necessitated the organisation of the colonial fair in the first place. It is also possible that Nakajima's involvement in the fair facilitated his entry into Singapore. The studio was already well embedded within the colonial society in the 1920s. By the end of 1923, it had moved to a choice location: a unit at Raffles Hotel, fronting Bras Basah Road.[8]

Nakajima & Co. was often commissioned to take photographs of social functions and weddings, usually of the European community in Singapore. Many of these photographs were also published in the English newspapers of the time. Prior to the specialisation of press photography, photo studios were an important source of photographs for the press. Throughout the 1930s, the studio

(Clockwise from top left) Lee Poh Yan and Lee King Yan (standing third and fourth from the left respectively) with their family members, 1905–10. *Marjorie Lau Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore*; Photo of a Malay family, c.1920–45. *Lee Brothers Studio Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore*; Portrait of a Chinese boy taken at Yong Fong Studio, which was founded by Lee Shui Loon on South Bridge Road. *The Peranakan Association Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore*; Photo of a Eurasian family, 1910–25. *Lee Brothers Studio Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore*; Portrait of an Indian child, 1910–30. *Lee Brothers Studio Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore*.

was also frequently mentioned in the press during the Christmas festive season as the go-to place for photographic gifts.[9]

Chinese Studios and the Cantonese Dominance

According to a Chinese-language directory, 新加坡各业调查 [*Survey of Singapore's Different Industries*], published in 1928, there were 18 Chinese-owned photo studios in Singapore at the time. There were also four Chinese companies in 1922 dealing in photographic supplies and materials.[10]

In the first half of the 20th century, the Chinese photographic trade was dominated mainly by the Cantonese.[11] Like other Chinese businesses, the proprietors of photo studios tended to hire relatives as well as people from the same dialect group. The owners would zealously guard photographic knowhow and would not readily divulge their trade secrets to outsiders.

In 1935, a young and motivated Wong Ken Foo (more popularly known as K.F. Wong; 1916–98), who was born in Sibu, Sarawak, arrived in Singapore.[12] He had set his eyes on Brilliant Studio on South Bridge Road and offered to work as an apprentice for three years without pay. His offer was rejected, ostensibly because Wong was of Henghua descent while the studio was owned by a prominent Cantonese.[13] (Wong subsequently became famous for his photographs of the indigenous Dayak peoples of Sarawak.[14])

David Ng Shin Chong (b. 1919, Singapore), a Hakka photographer who began his apprenticeship in the photographic trade in 1938, noted that "[t]he situation in the past was different. Everyone [photo studio owners] was more selfish, secretive".[15]

One of the most famous Cantonese photo studios in Singapore was the Lee Brothers Studio, established by Lee King Yan (1877–1957) and Lee Poh Yan (1884–1960). The brothers were part of the extended Lee family, who was originally from the Nanhai district in Guangdong province. Much has been written about the chain of photo studios that the family had opened in Singapore, Malaya and Java. In Singapore, the family was responsible for establishing Yong Fong, Lee Brothers and Eastern Studio, among others.[16]

Lee Shui Loon (1864–1935), also known as Lee Yin Fun, was the most senior member of the family to sink roots locally, prompting art historian Daphne Ang to call him the "godfather of photography in Singapore".[17] He established Yong Fong, which was active as early as 1908, along South Bridge Road, just across from Mosque Street.[18]

Lee Shui Loon's nephews, Lee King Yan and Lee Poh Yan, who set up Lee Brothers, were effectively bilingual, speaking Cantonese at home and using English, if necessary, at work.[19] Their command of English enabled them to serve a different class of clientele by setting up shop on Hill Street, in the business district in around 1908.[20] Soon after, Lee Brothers became "one of the most expensive studios in Singapore".[21]

Beyond the network of photo studios that the Lee family had established, there were other Cantonese-owned studios catering to clients across the economic spectrum. However, the division among dialect groups seemed to discourage certain Chinese customers from patronising Cantonese studios.

Former bank manager Wong Kum Fatt (b. 1925, Singapore) grew up in his adopted uncle's photo studio off South Bridge Road and Spring Street. The studio was located on the Cantonese side of the Chinese quarter, with the Hokkiens generally occupying the area across South Bridge Road, towards Telok Ayer Street.

Despite the studio's proximity to the Hokkien community, it was frequented mostly by Indian and Cantonese customers. Said Wong in his oral history interview in 1984: "Usually Hokkien they will not come and patronise a Cantonese shop at that period... At that time the Cantonese they will only go to the Cantonese shop, eat... Cantonese food."[22]

It is unlikely that these divisions were strictly observed in practice, especially among non-Cantonese customers at the lower end of the economic spectrum. If people needed to have their formal portraits taken, they would inevitably have to patronise the Cantonese studios, unlike more affluent customers who enjoyed the luxury of choice.

Some aspiring non-Cantonese photographers managed to enter the trade despite the barriers of dialect and family.[23] David Ng Shin Chong, the Hakka photographer mentioned previously, started out as an apprentice at Natural Studio on North Bridge Road. The studio was owned by a Cantonese-Teochew couple. Since it was located within the Hainanese enclave, they had a lot of Hainanese customers although people from other dialect groups also patronised the studio.[24] By 1939, Ng had joined the Cantonese-owned Fee Fee Photographic Store, which traded in photographic supplies and provided developing and printing services.

A Hainanese Lineage

Daguerre Studio was the first Hainanese-owned studio to open in Singapore during the 20th century. The studio was established by Lim Ming Joon (c. 1904–91, b. Hainan) around 1931 and was named after the French artist and photographer Louis Daguerre, who invented the daguerreotype process of photography.[25]

Lim worked as a cook for almost a decade before becoming a photographer. One of his employers, an Armenian, had given him his first camera and for the next few years, Lim taught himself photography through reading and practice, using his savings to upgrade his equipment. By the time Lim thought of opening a studio, he had already bought a second-hand camera for $80 from Eastern Studio (established by Lee King Yan in 1922) and taken some wedding photos for his friends. At the time, there was a Japanese photographer who owned a studio in Katong. Lim wanted to be his apprentice, but the owner required him to pay a monthly fee of $15. The fee was too steep, and Lim attempted to bargain with him. The owner then asked to see his camera, prints and negatives. After inspecting his work, the owner was suitably impressed and allowed Lim to be his apprentice for free. For the next three to four months, Lim would go to the studio from around 1 pm to 3 pm each day while juggling his work as a cook.[26]

Lim could communicate with the Japanese photographer because both of them spoke Malay.[27] Later on, when Lim expressed his intention to open his own studio, the Japanese even helped him design and install the lights for free. (It was not possible to buy readymade lights at the time.[28])

Lim's photo studio tapped into the broader Hainanese network of cultural ties, kinship and business interests to facilitate its existence and survival. It was initially sited within the premises of China Book Company on North Bridge Road, which was owned by four Hainanese brothers from the Foo family.[29] The bookstore was located in the area where the majority of the Hainanese lived, worked and congregated, overlapping Little Japan. Middle Road, for instance, was colloquially known to the Chinese as "Hainan first street".

Business picked up quickly and in less than a year, Daguerre Studio moved to a third-floor unit along Middle Road. One day, an aged Japanese photographer turned up at the studio. Apparently, he used to rent the same unit to run his studio and was curious to find out who had taken over the space. Over time, the two men became good friends.

Although he had largely retired from the profession, the Japanese photographer still had a contract with the Police Depot off Thomson Road. Hence, whenever he needed to replenish his glass plate negatives, he would buy these from Daguerre. Later, when he realised that the Japanese invasion was imminent, he gave the police contract to Lim and tried to leave Singapore. However, he was arrested by the British authorities and exiled to India.[30]

Daguerre Studio was opened from 8 am to 9 pm daily. Lim was the main photographer and he had four people working with him, including a darkroom specialist and a retoucher.[31] They were all Hainanese and related to one another in terms of family or clan.[32]

Lim started taking in Hainanese apprentices, introduced by his relatives and friends. His nephew Lim Tow Tuan (b. 1916 in Hainan) arrived in Singapore in 1941 to work as an unpaid apprentice.[33] According to Lim Ming Joon, his former employees and apprentices subsequently went on to open eight photo studios in Singapore, Johor Bahru, Brunei and North Borneo.[34]

In the early days, the overwhelming majority of Daguerre's customers were Hainanese,[35] although there were also some Malay, Indian and British patrons.

The Chinese customers were mainly from the working class who liked to take pictures to send home to China. They would usually come in their Sunday best. If they were unprepared, Lim would lend them suits and neckties. The studio also prepared spectacles without lenses for customers who wanted to look more serious in their portraits. Lim and his customers were clearly mindful of the impression that these photos would have on loved ones in China. At the very least, the customers would not want to give the impression that they could not even afford nice clothes, having made the difficult decision to come to Singapore.[36]

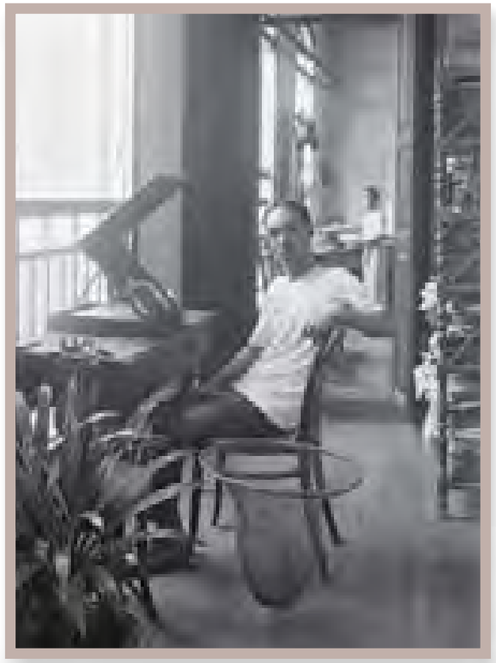
Lim also took on wedding shoots. Before the war, the trend, at least for the Hainanese, was to host a banquet for family and friends at one of the many coffeeshops near the studio. Lim would take group pictures of the couple and the guests.[37] Over time, Daguerre became well known for taking large group photos. These were often requested by schools, associations, guilds and unions, usually for the purpose of investiture, commemoration or graduation.

Lim began honing his expertise before the war, when camera technology made it challenging to photograph large groups of people. The biggest group that Lim had worked with occurred after the war when he was invited to photograph members of the Malaysian Chinese Association at a national meeting in Seremban, Malaya. Lim spent nearly one hour trying to position some 3,300 people.[38]

Lim was still working and taking pictures at large gatherings in the 1980s. In a 1983 interview with the *Straits Times* he said: "There are fewer group pictures of hundreds of people these days. But there are enough jobs in the studio and outdoors to keep me busy. Some of my old-time clients include ministers and members of Parliament. They are surprised to see me still turning up at community centres and other functions for group pictures."[39]

The emergence of the Hainanese-owned Daguerre Studio marked the gradual loosening of Cantonese dominance in the photographic trade of Singapore. Its establishment was made possible, partly through the help of Japanese photographers. Soon, more Hainanese photo studios began opening. One reason for the survival and longevity of Chinese photo studios was the myriad of Chinese associations and institutions in Singapore and Malaya, which provided a constant source of work and revenue for these studios.


Ming Joon is still clicking away at 85



(Far left) The graduating cohort of secondary four students from Catholic High School, taken in 1963 by Daguerre Studio. The studio's name is embossed on the bottom right corner. *Photo courtesy of Chong Wing Hong.*

(Left) A retoucher at his work table, 1900–30. *Lee Brothers Studio Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

(Below left) Lim Ming Joon of Daguerre Studio. *Image reproduced from To Chee Eng, "Ming Joon Is Still Clicking Away at 85," Weekend East, 19 June 1987, 3. (From NewspaperSG).*

Heading to War

As Japan stepped up its aggression in China, the Chinese communities in Singapore and Malaya responded with a series of boycotts against Japanese businesses. In June 1938, a Chinese couple who had patronised a Japanese photo studio at Kuala Lipis, Pahang, was nearly attacked by those who heard the news.[40] In Singapore, Lim Ming Joon contributed to the anti-Japanese movement by photographing the fundraising efforts and the rallies organised by the Chinese community.[41]

One day, the Japanese photographer who first helped Lim enter the trade came to see him. He knew it was time to leave Singapore but as he still had quite a lot of photographic equipment left, he hoped to sell these to Lim. Even though Lim considered the Japanese man his friend, he declined the offer. Lim knew that if the purchase was subsequently discovered, he would suffer the fate of having his ears cut off. In the end, Lim found a Peranakan (Straits Chinese) buyer for his old friend.[42]

By the end of 1941, the famous Nakajima & Co. in Singapore was forced to close down. The *Malaya Tribune* lamented its closure and commented that the "incident" (Japanese invasion) in China had "gradually weaned clients away from Japanese photographers".[43] On 8 December 1941, two days after the article was published, the first bombs fell on Singapore. ♦

NOTES

1 Regina Hong, Ling Xi Min and Naoko Shimazu, *Postcard Impressions of Early 20th-century Singapore: Perspectives from the Japanese Community* (Singapore: National Library Board, 2020), 115. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 959.57 HON-[HIS])

2 Mitsuharu Tsukuda, 馬来に於ける邦人活動の現況 (*Marai ni okeru hōjin katsudō no genkyō*) [*Current Status of the Activities of the Japanese in Malaya*] (Singapore: Nan'yō oyobi Nihonjinsha,1917), 37–48. (From Book SG; accession no. B29262852C). [Note: I would like to thank Mizuka Kimura and Miho Odaka for verifying my understanding of this source. This publication is part of the Lim Shao Bin Collection in the National Library, Singapore.]

3 Rudy William Mosbergen, oral history interview by Pitt Kuan Wah, 19 September 2005, transcript and MP3 audio, Reel/Disc 1 of 7, 28:25, National Archives of Singapore (accession no. 002983), 3.

4 Rudy William Mosbergen, interview, 19 Sep 2005, Reel/Disc 1 of 7, 2, 6.

5 "Japanese Go Out of Business," *Malaya Tribune*, 6 December 1941, 3. (From NewspaperSG); Daphne Ang Ming Li, "Constructing Singapore Art History: Portraiture and the Development of Painting and Photography in Colonial Singapore (1819–1959)" (PhD thesis, London, SOAS, University of London, 2017), 316, 393, https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/id/eprint/26662.

6 "Page 13 Advertisements Column 1," *Straits Times*, 21 February 1923, 13. (From NewspaperSG)

7 For a brief introduction on the involvement of studio and amateur photographers in the Malaya Borneo Exhibition, see Zhuang Wubin, "Exhibiting Photography in Pre-war Singapore," *BiblioAsia* 17, no. 3 (October–December 2021).

8 "Page 16 Advertisements Column 1," *Straits Times*, 24 November 1923, 16; "Page 5 Advertisements Column 3," *Malaya Tribune*, 30 November 1923, 5. (From NewspaperSG)

9 "Souvenir of Singapore," *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 1 November 1932, 15; "A Christmas Shopping Guide," *Straits Times*, 8 December 1935, 11; "A Christmas Shopping Guide," *Straits Times*, 5 December 1937, 17. (From NewspaperSG)

10 童子达 [Tong Zida], 新加坡各业调查 [*Survey of Singapore's Different Industries*] (Singapore: The Chinese Industrial and Commercial Continuation School, 1928), 119. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RRARE 650.58 TTT; microfilm no. NL9586)

11 李香南 [Li Xiangnan], 照相馆业广东人称雄 ["Cantonese Dominate the Photo Studio Business"], 联合早报 [*Lianhe Zaobao*], 22 March 1998, 46; 秦长春 [Qin Changchun], 新加坡照相业史话 ["A History of the Photographic Trade in Singapore"], 星洲日報 [*Sin Chew Jit Poh*], 7 July 1977, 16. (From NewspaperSG)

12 For a detailed biography of K.F. Wong, see Zhuang Wubin, "From the Archives: The Work of Photographer K.F. Wong," *BiblioAsia* 15, no. 2 (July–September 2019).

13 房汉佳 [Fong Hon Kah] and 林韶华 [Lim Shau Hua], 世界著名摄影家黄杰夫 [*World Famous Photographer K.F. Wong*] (福州:海潮摄影艺术出版社, 1995), 25.

14 Zhuang, "From the Archives: The Work of Photographer K.F. Wong."

15 David Ng Shin Chong, oral history interview by Ang Siew Ghim, 11 June 1986, transcript and MP3 audio, Reel/Disc 13 of 13, 28:50, National Archives of Singapore (accession no. 000670), 136.

16 For a history of Lee Brothers Studio, see Gretchen Liu, "Portraits from the Lee Brothers Studio," *BiblioAsia* 14, no. 1 (April–June 2018). [Note: In 1994, more than 2,500 excess or uncollected prints from Lee Brothers were donated to the National Archives of Singapore by Lee Hin Ming, the eldest son of Lee Poh Yan.]

17 Ang, "Constructing Singapore Art History," 240–41.

18 Kiang Ai Kim (Mrs) @ Lee Peck Wan, oral history interview by Jesley Chua Chee Huan, 12 October 1995, MP3 audio, Reel/Disc 1 of 22, 30:10, National Archives of Singapore (accession no. 001698).

19 It would be premature to discount, at this point, the possibility that Lee King Yan and Lee Poh Yan could also speak Malay.

20 Lee Hin Meng, oral history interview by Irene Quah, 17 May 1994, MP3 audio, Reel/Disc 1 of 3, 29:51, National Archives of Singapore (accession no. 001487).

21 Lee Hin Meng, interview, 17 May 1984, Reel/Disc 1 of 3.

22 Wong Kum Fatt, oral history interview by Yao Souchou, 6 October 1984, transcript and MP3 audio, Reel/Disc 1 of 6, 27:56, National Archives of Singapore (accession no. 000474), 7.

23 Elaine Chiew Peck Leng, "Self-Fashioning towards Modernity: Early Chinese Studio Photography of Chinese Women" (unpublished manuscript, 2021), PDF file. This manuscript is prepared for the fulfilment of the Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre grant.

24 David Ng Shin Chong, oral history interview by Ang Siew Ghim, 27 May 1986, transcript and MP3 audio, Reel/Disc 4 of 13, 29:26, National Archives of Singapore (accession no. 000670), 37–38.

25 韩山元 [Han Tan Juan], 如何为三千人拍照 ["How to Take a Photograph for Three Thousand People"], 联合晚报 [*Lianhe Wanbao*], 18 August 1986, 8. (From NewspaperSG)

26 Lim Ming Joon, oral history interview by Tan Beng Luan, 23 September 1983, transcript and MP3 audio, Reel/Disc 2 of 7, 28:07, National Archives of Singapore (accession no. 000334), 24–28; Lim Ming Joon, interview, 23 Sep 1983, Reel/Disc 3 of 7, 30–31.

27 Lim Ming Joon, interview, 23 Sep 1983, Reel/Disc 3 of 7, 34.

28 Lim Ming Joon, oral history interview by Tan Beng Luan, 30 September 1983, transcript and MP3 audio, Reel/Disc 1 of 7, 27:54, National Archives of Singapore (accession no. 000333), 5.

29 Song Chin Sing, ed., *Passage of Time: Singapore Bookstore Stories 1881–2016* (Singapore: Chou Sing Chu Foundation, 2016), 162–65. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 070.5095957 CHO)

30 Lim Ming Joon, interview, 23 Sep 1983, Reel/Disc 3 of 7, 35.

31 Lim Ming Joon, interview 23 Sep 1983, Reel/Disc 4 of 7, 44.

32 Lim Ming Joon, oral history interview by Tan Beng Luan, 14 October 1983, transcript and MP3 audio, Reel/Disc 4 of 7, 27:38, National Archives of Singapore (accession no. 000333), 49.

33 Lim Seng @ Lim Tow Tuan, oral history interview by Tan Beng Luan, 28 December 1983, transcript and MP3 audio, Reel/Disc 2 of 8, 27:53, National Archives of Singapore (accession no. 000089), 12–15.

34 Lim Ming Joon, oral history interview by Tan Beng Luan, 11 November 1983, transcript and MP3 audio, Reel/Disc 7 of 7, 26:58, National Archives of Singapore (accession no. 000334), 82–84.

35 莫美颜 [Mok Mei Ngan], 海南人最早的照相馆 ["The First Photo Studio of the Hainanese"], 联合早报 [*Lianhe Zaobao*], 15 February 1998, 42. (From NewspaperSG)

36 Lim Ming Joon, interview, 23 Sep 1983, Reel/Disc 3 of 7, 36–38, 40-41.

37 Lim Ming Joon, interview, 23 Sep 1983, Reel/Disc 3 of 7, 36.

38 Wang 王振春 [Wang Zhenchun], 话说密驼路 [*Speaking of Middle Road*] (Singapore: Xinhua Cultural Enterprises, 2021), 103. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. Chinese RSING 959.57 WZC-[HIS]); Han, 如何为三千人拍照.

39 Teo Han Wue, "Lim's in a World of His Own," *Straits Times*, 20 June 1983, Section Three, 1. (From NewspaperSG)

40 到敌人照相馆拍照 立卑一对男女几遭痛惩 ["A Couple at Lipis was Almost Severely Punished for Having Their Portrait Taken at the Enemy's Photo Studio"], 南洋商报 [*Nanyang Siang Pau*], 26 June 1938, 10. (From NewspaperSG)

41 Lim Ming Joon, interview, 30 Sep 1983, Reel/Disc 1 of 7, 9.

42 Lim Ming Joon, interview, 30 Sep 1983, Reel/Disc 1 of 7, 5.

43 "Japanese Go Out of Business."

HOW CHINESE BUDDHIST WOMEN

Shaped the Food Landscape in Singapore

Women who practised a particular form of Buddhism set up popular vegetarian restaurants in the 1940s and 50s that met the needs of local Buddhists and also helped promote vegetarianism.

By Kelvin Tan


本与佛教有深厚渊源而今随时代的进步

有益健康素食渐在我国流行

素食菜馆林立素菜好吃人人喜爱

(Above) Fut Sai Kai Vegetarian Restaurant (extreme right) was one of the pioneers in Chinese vegetarian food in Singapore. Pictured on the right is the founder Ko Tian-gu. *Image reproduced from 善华 [Shan Hua], 本与佛教有深厚渊源而今随时代的进步 有益健康素食渐在我国流行 ["Singapore and Buddhism Have Strong Ties and Evolve with the Times. Healthy Vegetarian Food Is Becoming Popular in Singapore"], 新明日报 [Shinmin Daily News], 11 August 1980, 5. (From NewspaperSG).*

(Facing page) Venerable Ho Yuen Hoe, abbess of Lin Chee Cheng Sia temple. *Image reproduced from Shi Chin Yam, Top 100 Vegetarian Delights (Singapore: Man Fut Tong Old People's Home, 1998). (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 641.5636 SHI).*

Impossible meatballs, oat-milk lattes and tempeh burgers. Whether it is from a desire to reduce their carbon footprint, improve their health or to avoid killing animals, more and more people around the world have started exploring a meat-free lifestyle.

Singapore is not immune to this trend either, as can be seen by the numerous plant-based restaurants that have sprung up recently. Vegetarian restaurants, however, are not a new phenomenon. One of the oldest vegetarian restaurants in Singapore is believed to be Ananda Bhavan, which serves Indian vegetarian food and opened its doors in 1924.

Chinese vegetarian restaurants, on the other hand, are of a more recent vintage. They date back to the 1940s, and a significant number were established by Chinese Buddhist women.

Kelvin Tan graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in history from the National University of Singapore. He was a research assistant for the project "Mapping Female Religious Heritage in Singapore: Chinese Temples as Sites of Regional Socio-cultural Linkage" funded by the National Heritage Board.

These women hailed from southeastern China and migrated to Singapore in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They observed a strict vegetarian diet and spent much of their time in temples. This piece focuses on three types of Buddhist women in particular: ordained nuns, lay women (*jushi;* 居士), and vegetarian nuns or *zhaigu* (齋姑).[1] Most of these women belonged to a tradition of Mahayana Buddhism, with some practicising a syncretic form that combined Daoism and Confucianism.

These women, in general, were opposed to animal slaughter and believed that a vegetarian diet would keep diseases and ailments at bay. They exercised Buddhist philanthropy alongside their faith. Through the food they produced in restaurants and temples, these women promoted their ideals to the community and contributed to Singapore's diverse culinary landscape.

The First Female Restaurateurs

In the late 1940s and 1950s, there were at least three Chinese vegetarian restaurants in Singapore founded and managed by these Chinese Buddhist women: Loke Woh Yuen Vegetarian Restaurant (六和园素食馆), Fut Sai Kai Vegetarian Restaurant (佛世界素食社) and Bodhi Lin Vegetarian Restaurant (菩提林素食馆).

Loke Woh Yuen was established in 1946 by a close group of five women, including Jian Daxian (简达贤居士), later known as Venerable Huiping (慧平法师). (She later founded the Tse Tho Aum Temple [自度庵] in Changi, which has since moved to Sin Ming Drive).

The women had the support of people like Venerable Cihang (慈航法师), a prominent monk from Fujian province who was also behind the first vegetarian restaurant in Penang, Phoe Thay Yuen (菩提苑素食馆), which opened in 1932.[2]

Located at 25 Tanjong Pagar Road, Loke Woh Yuen was well known among the Chinese Buddhist community because its food was of restaurant standard and the menu was varied. Set in a single-fronted shophouse, the restaurant was described as "bright and breezy" and was notable for its "clean yet not clinical look".[3]

For people who wanted plant-based alternatives to meat dishes, the restaurant offered dishes such as vegetarian

shark's fin made from maize, and fish fillet made from sugar cane flowers.[4] Vegetarian *mee siam* and curry were available on weekends.[5]

Loke Woh Yuen was entirely staffed by women, from the waiters to the cashiers and the cook. The restaurant operated for over six decades before the shutters came down for the last time in 2010.

The food served at Loke Woh Yuen was known to be tasty. Writing for the *Singapore Monitor*, Violet Oon wrote about her experience eating a 10-course vegetarian banquet priced at $150. For those new to Chinese vegetarian food, Oon recommended the dish of *loh mei* or "mixed meats", as it "truly represents the spirit of eating vegetarian style". She also liked the mixed cold items with its "artful simulation of mock oysters".

She wrote: "Some people may object to this simulation of non-vegetarian food flavours but I welcome it as it takes the boredom out of eating vegetables." Overall, she said, the "richness of flavours achieved without the aid of meats or seafoods and the visual impact that was created impressed me".[6]

The restaurant was popular with many people. In addition to Chinese Buddhists, tourists would walk over from Chinatown to eat at Loke Woh Yuen. It also attracted Indian customers as well. For a long time, the restaurant was so packed that it had to set up dining tents that stretched to the main road.[7]

One of the earliest trustees of Loke Woh Yuen was Qiu Yulan (邱玉兰居士), who later became one of the founders of the Bodhi Lin Vegetarian Restaurant. Bodhi Lin was set up in January 1954 and helmed by Yang Muzhen (杨慕贞居士),[8] who was known for her "unflagging affection" for charitable and educational causes.[9]

Yang was the abbess of Taoyuan Fut Tong (桃园佛堂), a temple that used to be in Tanjong Pagar but has since closed down. She was also a disciple of Venerable Cihang. With her savings, Yang bought an entire shophouse at 114 Neil Road to start Bodhi Lin restaurant.

One of her first acts was to organise a fundraiser for Nanyang University. She worked with the Singapore Buddhist Federation as well as prominent business people and religious leaders for the 10-day event in January 1954. The event welcomed diners for lunch and dinner, with each table priced at $100.[10] It managed to raise $11,170, a hefty sum for a small restaurant. Yang's act was hailed by the Chinese press as a breakthrough move for Chinese women ("此举, 施为妇女界破天荒擁").[11]

In March 1958, Yang organised a similar fundraiser to build wards for Kwong Wai Shiu Free Hospital (广惠肇方便留医院), where she was a trustee.[12] Banquet tables were priced at $50 and $100 for dining at Bodhi Lin, and these were quickly snapped up. The three-day event ended up raising $9,880.

For the event, Taoyuan Fut Tong prepared the food, while staff from Bodhi Lin served the dishes.[13] Qiu sponsored the Chinese tea, while the other vegetarian restaurant, Loke Woh Yuen, provided the dish "vegetarian pheasant" (斋雉).[14]

Bodhi Lin celebrated its 18th anniversary in 1972 and in a newspaper article of the period, the restaurant was described as one of the most famous vegetarian restaurants in Singapore.[15] In particular, it was known for its vegetarian mooncakes, which were so famous that it even attracted customers from Malaysia.[16] Bodhi Lin subsequently shuttered, but when this happened requires further research.

The third establishment set up by these women was Fut Sai Kai Vegetarian Restaurant. Set in an "unpretentious shophouse but with much more character than the average coffeeshop",[17] the restaurant was founded in 1953 by Ko Tian-gu (高添姑) and run by several vegetarian nuns.

Located on Kitchener Road, Fut Sai Kai was aimed at a more price conscious clientele, unlike the pricier Loke Woh Yuen. Dim sum was priced at 3 cents per plate, while noodles and dishes were between 6 cents and $1.50 respectively, similar to the prices of street food.[18] Fut Sai Kai was one of the first restaurants to employ Cantonese chefs from Hong Kong. It also advertised in the Chinese press.[19]

Ko was known to wake up early in the morning to buy the freshest ingredients from the market, and she also personally served customers at the restaurant. It operated from 11 am to 9 pm daily, and was packed on the 1st and 15th days of the lunar month as well as during major Chinese festivals.[20]

Like Loke Woh Yuen, the restaurant was also popular among non-Chinese and non-Buddhists. Tourist buses were occasionally spotted nearby as well. According to Ko, her restaurant was frequented by Christians on Fridays, and by Hindus looking for vegetarian food after temple worship.[21]

The food at Fut Sai Kai often received good reviews. Writing for the *New Nation* in 1972, Wendy Hutton was all praise for the corn soup. "I found the rather nutty, cereal flavour most enjoyable, and filled my soup bowl several times," she said. For her, the highlight of the meal were the sugar cane flowers. "We all speculated as to whether we were eating genuine flowers, but since I've eaten such things as banana flower and candied violets in the past, I imagine the sugar cane flowers were authentic. A rather soft, fleshy morsel was buried inside a thick ball of butter and deep fried. Eaten with a sweet sauce, it was marvellous," she added.[22]

The restaurant operated for 64 years before closing in 2017. Its closure was important enough to have warranted a news story in the *Straits Times*. According to the article, the owner of the restaurant had died earlier that year and the family decided to close the restaurant as there was no one to take over the cooking.[23]

Spreading Vegetarianism Through Temples

Restaurants were not the only way that these women promoted vegetarianism. At Choa Chu Kang's 12-milestone (十二英里) lies the temple Hai Inn See (海印寺), which was established in 1928. Its second abbess, a vegetarian nun named Yang Qincai (杨芹菜),[24] was well known for her vegetarian *soon kueh*. Like many temples, Hai Inn See grew vegetables and fruits on its grounds. In the 1950s, Yang Qincai discovered that bamboo plants grew well, and since the main ingredient for the *kueh* is bamboo shoots, she led the effort to make it regularly.[25]

As the fame of her *soon kueh* spread, the temple was invited to sell it in a nearby coffeeshop. At 5 cents a piece, it quickly became an essential breakfast item for residents. The *kueh* was sold from the 1960s right up till Yang's death in 1975, and till today, customers have fond memories of her *soon kueh*. (The recipe of this *kueh* was published in the temple's 90th anniversary commemorative book in 2018.[26])

Venerable Ho Yuen Hoe (何润好), the abbess of the Lin Chee Cheng Sia (莲池精舍) temple in Kovan, was another woman who used vegetarian food for fundraising. To raise funds for Man Fut Tong (万佛堂), her temple's new nursing home that opened in 1969, she sold vegetarian food to devotees attending dharma assemblies at the Khor Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery (光明山普觉禅寺). On average, Venerable Ho raised about $50 each day though on a good day, she could raise $80.[27]

When she wanted to expand the home, Venerable Ho came up with the idea of compiling her recipes into a book. Published in 1998, the book *Top 100 Vegetarian Delights* helped raise over

(From left) 双雄豪杰 (Stuffed Hot Chillies with Crunchy Gluten) and 金玉满堂 (Coconut Soup with Four Snacks). *Images reproduced from Shi Chin Yam, Top 100 Vegetarian Delights (Singapore: Man Fut Tong Old People's Home, 1998), 79, 88. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 641.5636 SHI).*

(Top photo) Loke Woh Yuen in 1991 with its current owners. Pictured here are (from left) Venerable Xingjing (性静法师), Venerable Zhishun (智顺法师) and Seck Seng Cheng (贤贞法师), disciples of the original founders. (Bottom photo) A vegetarian meal gathering of the original founders of Loke Woh Yuen in 1984. Seated at the table are Venerable Dajian (达坚法师; 3rd from left), Venerable Huicheng (慧成法师; 4th from left) and chief cook Mdm Wong Sin Fung (黄风仙; 1st from right), all of whom worked closely with Jian Daxian and had passed on by the time the newspaper report was published in 1991. *Image reproduced from 区如柏 [Ou Rubo], 素菜馆"老大"接搬迁令 六和园临别依依 ["The 'Master' of Vegetarian Restaurants Receives Relocation Orders, Loke Woh Yuen Bids a Reluctant Farewell"], 联合早报 [Lianhe Zaobao], 6 October 1991, 42. (From NewspaperSG).*


素菜馆"老大"
接搬迁令
六和园
临别依依


Zen Fut Sai Kai, one of Singapore's oldest Chinese vegetarian restaurants, closes after 64 years

佛世界
FUT SAI KAI

SINGAPORE - A vegetarian restaurant along Kitchener Road that first opened in 1953 has closed down after 64 years.

Zen Fut Sai Kai, said to be one of Singapore's oldest Chinese vegetarian restaurants, was known for its traditional dishes and Cantonese-style dishes.

The oldest vegetarian restaurants here are Indian eateries Annalkshmi Eleven and Komala Vilas, which opened in 1924 and 1947 respectively.

Vegetarian food blogger Luke Otter first broke the news of the closure of Fut Sai Kai Vegetarian Restaurant on 25 August 2017. *Image reproduced from "Zen Fut Sai Kai, One of Singapore's Oldest Chinese Vegetarian Restaurants, Closes After 64 Years," Straits Times, 4 September 2017.*

$100,000 to fund the expansion. Apart from fundraising, she also wanted to use the book to promote the health benefits of vegetarianism, drawing from her belief in "renewed vitality and concentration" as means of healthy ageing.[28]

Venerable Ho also started giving cooking classes at Lin Chee Cheng Sia in 1987 for the growing number of devotees eager to learn vegetarian cooking from her. A long-time believer that "vegetarian food and regular exercise deliver longevity", she hoped to share "her secrets" to "as many people as possible" while preserving her recipes.[29]

But Venerable Ho was not the first woman to have her vegetarian cookbook published. Jian Daxian, one of the founders of Loke Woh Yuen, and who later founded Tse Tho Aum, wrote a vegetarian cookbook in Chinese titled 素菜食谱 (*Vegetarian Dishes*) in 1974. The book was widely circulated in Singapore and Hong Kong, and proceeds from the sale were donated to the educational fund of the Singapore Girls' Buddhist Institute.[30]

During Jian's time at Tse Tho Aum, the temple developed a reputation for its tasty food. In February 1984, the *Lianhe Wanbao* (联合晚报) newspaper wrote that the dishes prepared by Jian during the Lunar New Year, including the vegetarian *yu sheng*, were "all but superior" to the Manchu imperial feast.[31] She also taught vegetarian cooking classes.

In many ways, women like Jian Daxian, Yang Muzhen, Yang Qincai and Venerable Ho Yuen Hoe were ahead of their time. Today, the vegetarian is spoiled for choice in Singapore. Apart from the mainstay of Indian and Chinese vegetarian restaurants, there are vegetarian eateries offering Indonesian, Peranakan, Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese cuisine. Most food courts, coffeeshops and hawker centres will also have at least one vegetarian food stall. Loke Woh Yuen, Fut Sai Kai and Bodhi Lin may have faded away, but their spirit lives on. ♦

Research for this essay was funded by the National Heritage Board's Heritage Research Grant under the project titled "Mapping Female Religious Heritage in Singapore: Chinese Temples as Sites of Regional Socio-cultural Linkage" (A-0003245-00-00). The author wishes to thank the principal investigator of the project Dr Show Ying Ruo from the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, for her guidance and comments on an early draft of this essay.

HAI INN SEE'S SOON KUEH RECIPE

Filling

500 g dried mushrooms, soaked
1 kg bamboo shoot
1 kg turnip
2 pieces firm beancurd
100 g sweetened beancurd sticks
2 tablespoons oil
1 tablespoon salt
1 tablespoon pepper
A dash of sesame oil

Dough skin

600 g wheat starch
300 g tapioca flour
Half tablespoon salt
Half tablespoon sugar
1200 ml boiling water
4 tablespoons oil

Method

1. Prepare the filling: Shred mushrooms, bamboo shoots, turnips, firm beancurd and sweetened beancurd sticks.
2. Heat oil in a wok and fry mushrooms till fragrant.
3. Add in bamboo shoots and turnips. Fry to mix well. Add in salt and pepper to taste.
4. Finally, mix in firm beancurd and sweetened beancurd sticks. Just before dishing the mixture out from the wok, drizzle a dash of sesame oil over the mixture. Set the mixture aside on a large plate to cool.
5. Prepare the dough skin: On a large plate, combine wheat starch, tapioca flour, salt and sugar.
6. Add in boiling water and stir the mixture constantly with a wooden ladle till well combined.
7. Mix in oil before using hands to knead the dough till smooth.
8. Divide the dough into smaller balls of equal portions. Flatten each ball of dough into a round disc to wrap a portion of the filling. Grease a steaming plate with oil before placing the *soon kueh* on it. Once the water starts to boil in the steamer, steam the *soon kueh* for about 10 minutes. After steaming, lightly brush the *soon kueh* with oil.

Soon kueh recipe reproduced from 海印古寺90周年特輯 [*Haiingu Temple 90th Anniversary Special*], Singapore: Hai Inn Temple, 2018, p. 145.

The vegetarian *soon kueh* of Hai Inn See and an undated portrait of Abbess Yang Qincai. *Images reproduced from 海印古寺90周年特輯 [Haiingu Temple 90th Anniversary Special] (Singapore: Hai Inn Temple, 2018), 143, 144.*

NOTES

1 Show Ying Ruo, "Virtuous Women on the Move: Minnan Vegetarian Women (Caigu) and Chinese Buddhism in Twentieth-century Singapore," 華人宗教研究 [*Studies in Chinese Religions*] 17 (2021): 138, 167–68, https://www.academia.edu/46956207/Virtuous_Women_on_the_Move_Minnan_Vegetarian_Women_caigu_and_Chinese_Buddhism_in_Twentieth_Century_Singapore.

2 许源泰 [Xu Yuantai], 沿革与模式: 新加坡道教和佛教传播研究 [*Evolution and Model: The Propagation of Taoism and Buddhism in Singapore*] (Singapore: 新加坡国立大学中文系, 2013). (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 294.3095957 XYT)

3 Violet Oon, "Vegetarian Food for All," *Singapore Monitor*, 26 August 1984, 1. (From NewspaperSG)

4 洪錦棠 [Hong Jintang], 星洲唯一素食館六和園是佛教徒開辦是婦女界所鞏業 ["Singapore's Only Vegetarian Restaurant Loke Woh Yuen Was Opened by Buddhists and Managed by Women"], 南洋商报 [*Nanyang Siang Pau*], 23 June 1948, 6. (From NewspaperSG)

5 Oon, "Vegetarian Food for All."

6 Oon, "Vegetarian Food for All."

7 区如柏 [Ou Rubo], 素菜馆"老大"接搬迁令 六和园临别依依 ["The 'Master' of Vegetarian Restaurants Receives Relocation Orders, Loke Woh Yuen Bids a Reluctant Farewell"], 联合早报 [*Lianhe Zaobao*], 6 October 1991, 42. (From NewspaperSG)

8 菩提林素食館 昨日經開幕 ["Bodhi Lin Vegetarian Restaurant Opened Yesterday"], 星洲日報 [*Sin Chew Jit Poh*], 30 January 1954, 6. (From NewspaperSG)

9 菩提林素食館 十八週年紀念 本週五設素菜 招待各界嘉賓 ["In Commemoration of Its 18th Anniversary, Bodhi Lin Vegetarian Restaurant Runs a Vegetarian Banquet This Friday to Serve Guests"], 新明日报 [*Shinmin Daily News*], 18 January 1972, 4. (From NewspaperSG)

10 菩提林素食館訂二月廿日起義賣十天全部收入捐助南大基金預料售券所得可達一萬元 ["Bodhi Lin Vegetarian Restaurant Organises a 10-day Charity Drive from the 29th, All Proceeds Go to Nanyang University and Are Expected to Reach $10,000"], 南洋商报 [*Nanyang Siang Pau*], 18 January 1954, 5. (From NewspaperSG)

11 菩提林為南大義賣 獲義款一萬餘元 黃奕歡代表南大贈旗 ["Bodhi Lin Raises Over $10,000 in a Charity Drive for Nanyang University, Huang Yihuan of Nanyang University Presents Flag"], 星洲日報 [*Sin Chew Jit Poh*], 3 March 1954, 5. (From NewspaperSG)

12 義賣齋筵爲廣惠肇醫院募籌建病樓基金 ["Vegetarian Charity Drive Raises Funds for Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital to Build Wards"], 南洋商报 [*Nanyang Siang Pau*], 10 April 1958, 7. (From NewspaperSG)

13 楊慕貞居士慷慨發起定期義賣齋筵二百席全部收入充廣惠肇醫院慈善經費桃園佛堂報効齋料菩提林負責義賣 ["Yang Muzhen Jushi Kindly Organises Periodic Vegetarian Charity Drive, All Proceeds from a 200-table Banquet Go to Kwong Wai Shiu Free Hospital, Bodhi Lin Manages Its Costs"], 南洋商报 [*Nanyang Siang Pau*], 3 February 1958, 7. (From NewspaperSG)

14 桃園佛堂楊慕貞女居士 近舉行齋券義賣 爲廣惠肇留醫院籌款 ["Taoyuan Fut Tong's Yang Muzhen Jushi Recently Organised a Charity Drive to Raise Funds for Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital"], 星洲日報 [*Shin Chew Jit Poh*], 4 March 1958, 7. (From NewspaperSG)

15 菩提林素食館 十八週年紀念 本週五設素菜 招待各界嘉賓.

16 菩提林素菜館巧製純齋月餅 ["Vegetarian Mooncakes Made by Bodhi Lin Vegetarian Restaurant"], 南洋商报 [*Nanyang Siang Pau*], 30 September 1965, 6. (From NewspaperSG)

17 See Foon, "Vegetarian Food at Its Best," *New Nation*, 7 July 1973, 11. (From NewspaperSG)

18 佛世界 今日開業 ["Fut Sai Kai Opens Today"], 星洲日報 [*Sin Chew Jit Poh*], 31 March 1953, 6. (From NewspaperSG)

19 第6页 广告 专栏 2 ["Page 6 Advertisements Column 2"], 南洋商报 [*Nanyang Siang Pau*], 31 March 1953, 6. (From NewspaperSG)

20 善华 [Shan Hua], 本与佛教有深厚渊源而今随时代的进步 有益健康素食渐在我国流行 ["Singapore and Buddhism Have Strong Ties and Evolve with the Times. Healthy Vegetarian Food Is Becoming Popular in Singapore"], 新明日报 [*Shinmin Daily News*], 11 August 1980, 5. (From NewspaperSG)

21 Shan, 本与佛教有深厚渊源而今随时代的进步 有益健康素食渐在我国流行.

22 Wendy Hutton, "Chicken's Head? No, It Was Bean-Curd," *New Nation*, 28 January 1972, 11. (From NewspaperSG)

23 "Zen Fut Sai Kai, One of Singapore's Oldest Chinese Vegetarian Restaurants, Closes after 64 Years," *Straits Times*, 4 September 2017, https://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/food/zen-fut-sai-kai-one-of-singapores-oldest-chinese-vegetarian-restaurants-closes-after.

24 Yang Qincai (杨芹菜, 1904–75) came to Singapore from Quemoy (Kinmen), China, in 1924 and apprenticed under Hai Inn See's founder Yinxiu-gu. When she took over the temple's reins in 1955, Yang grew an assortment of vegetables and fruits, including peanuts and bamboo plants, in its backyard so that the temple could be self-sufficient.

25 海印古寺90周年特輯 [*Haiingu Temple 90th Anniversary Special*] (Singapore: Hai Inn Temple, 2018), 121.

26 海印古寺90周年特輯,145.

27 陈爱玲 [Chen Ailing], 57岁出家 61岁创安老院 88老尼有个心愿 要开第二间安老院 ["Ordained at 57, Opened a Nursing Home at 61, an 88-year-old Nun Has a Wish to Open a Second Nursing Home"], 新明日报 [*Shinmin Daily News*], 30 September 1996, 5. (From NewspaperSG)

28 Shi Chin Yam, *Top 100 Vegetarian Delights* (Singapore: Man Fut Tong Old People's Home, 1998), preface. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 641.5636 SHI)

29 Uma Rajan and G. Uma Devi, *A Life for Others* (Singapore: Man Fut Tong Nursing Home, 2007), 23. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 361.95957 RAJ)

30 许源泰 [Hue Guan Thye], 狮城佛光: 新加坡佛教发展百年史 [*The Buddha Lights of Lion City: The Hundred-year Development of Buddhism in Singapore*] (Hong Kong: 香港中文大学人间佛教研究中心, 2020), 222–23. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. Chinese RSING 294.3095957 HGT)

31 李若莲与蔡成才 [*Li Ruolian and Cai Chengcai*], 自度庵的素菜 ["Vegetarian Dishes of Tse Tho Aum"], 联合晚报 [*Lianhe Wanbao*], 22 February 1984, 5. (From NewspaperSG)

RED TERROR

THE FORGOTTEN STORY OF CPM VIOLENCE AND SUBVERSION IN NEWLY INDEPENDENT SINGAPORE

The 1970s are often remembered as a time of rapid economic transformation and progress for Singapore, but this period also saw communist bombings, assassination plots and covert information wars.

By Choo Ruizhi

Strange, red flags fluttered in the mid-day breeze. At a playground near 10½ Mile Changi Road, that was the only sign that something was amiss that Thursday afternoon on 23 April 1970. Intrigued by the unfamiliar sight, a 9-year-old boy and a 7-year-old girl wandered over to investigate. In doing so, the children unwittingly triggered a booby-trap bomb planted near the red flags, setting off an explosion that was heard by residents almost a kilometre away. The children were rushed to the nearby Changi Hospital. Hours later, the little girl died.[1]

That same evening, two homemade bombs, packed into red cylinders, were discovered on Haji Lane. Five days later, another explosive was discovered on an overhead bridge near Chinese High School. The Bomb Disposal Unit later detonated the explosive at a vacant site near National Junior College.[2] More red flags – bearing the hammer-and-sickle emblems – were recovered by the police along with the bombs. These were the banners and symbols of the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM, also known as the Malayan Communist Party).

In Singapore's history, communists often feature as dangerous antagonists of the 1950s and 1960s. However, what many have forgotten is that acts of violence continued into the 1970s. In fact, April 1970 marked the start of renewed communist violence on the island.[3] Newspaper articles, photographs, and government press releases from the 1970s tell of foiled assassinations, terrorist attacks and clandestine information wars.

A Broader Picture: Communists in Context

This resurgence of communist activity was not spontaneous. The April 1970 bombing in Changi was linked to the CPM's revival of its armed struggle in Malaysia in June 1968. This revival can be traced to broader regional and international situations at the time, such as the ongoing Vietnam War and Chinese support for the CPM.

The Malayan Emergency, a struggle between the CPM and Malayan, British and British Commonwealth forces, officially ended in July 1960. By then, the CPM had been using non-violent, "united front" tactics for some six years (from 1954 onwards).[4] Its main combat units had withdrawn to the Thai-Malayan border, where most were subsequently demobilised.[5] In Singapore, the Special Branch had successfully uprooted the CPM's "underground network throughout the island" by the early 1960s.[6] Although party cadres had fled to the Riau Islands prior to these security operations, the CPM's diminished presence did not mean that it had been eradicated.[7]

Key leaders like Chin Peng, CPM's secretary-general, fled to Beijing where they were given support and sanctuary by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Chinese leaders urged CPM leaders to renew their armed struggle as the CCP predicted that a wave of violent revolutions would soon sweep across Southeast Asia.[8] Lending further credence to this view was the ongoing Vietnam War between communist and anti-communist (largely American) forces, which only ended in 1975. When Cambodia, South Vietnam and Laos fell to the communists in 1975, Chin Peng asserted that "the tide was turning inexorably in the communist world's favour, particularly as far as South East Asia was concerned".[9]

With moral and material support from the CCP, the CPM revived its uprising in Malaysia. In June 1968, the CPM issued an official directive for cadres to "hold high the great red banner of armed struggle and valiantly march forward!" The document ordered CPM members to overthrow the Malaysia and Singapore governments "by taking up the gun and carrying out the people's war". Eight years after the end of the first Malayan Emergency, CPM forces launched an ambush near the town of Kroh in the northern state of Perak killing 17 Malaysian security personnel and injuring 18. Communist operatives began to infiltrate the states of Peninsular Malaysia from south Thailand (where they had fled to after the Malayan Emergency).[10]

Regarding Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore as one political entity, the CPM sought to establish Singapore as a base to support their insurgency in Malaysia, procuring equipment, funds and support from the city-state.[11] With these plans in mind, the renewed communist insurrection soon crossed into Singapore.

More Bombings and Banners

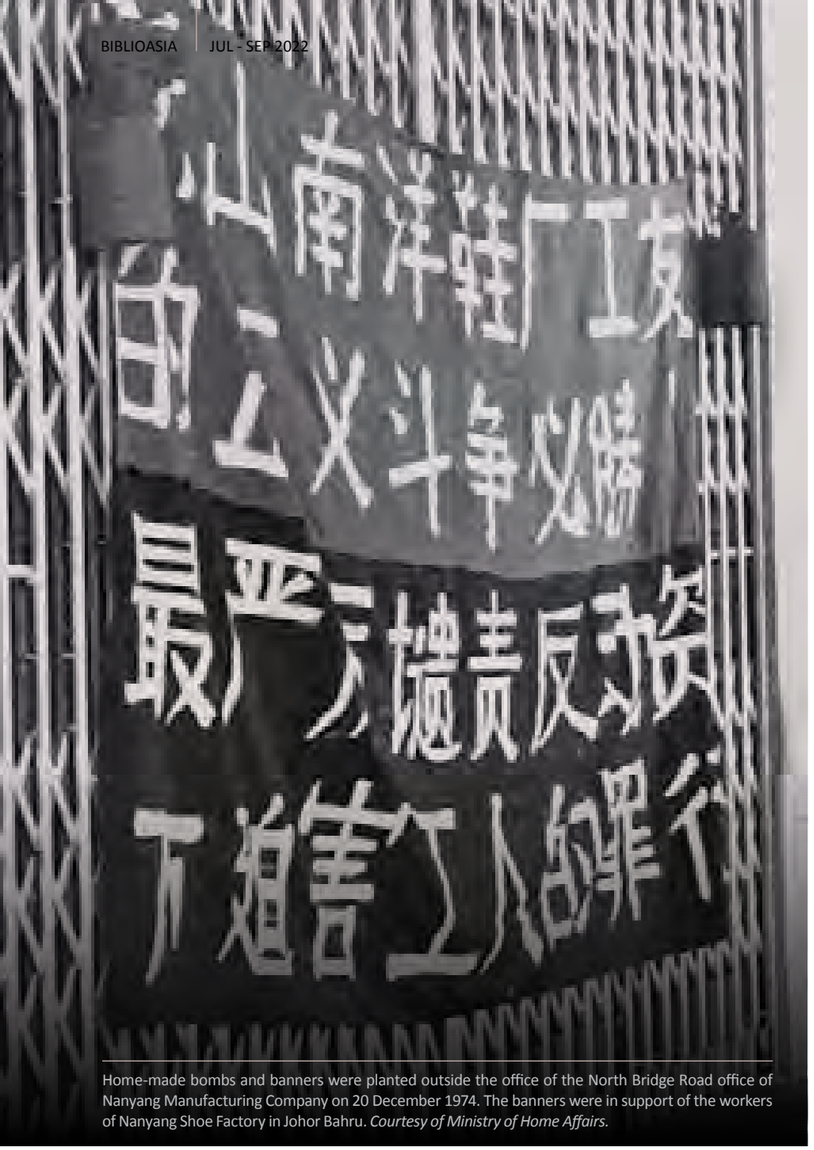
In addition to the fatal bombing in April 1970, 22 cases of arson and 11 bomb incidents were traced to the CPM between 1969 and 1983. In 1971, as a vivid reminder of its power and reach in Singapore, CPM operatives again planted communist banners, flags and dummy bombs across the island.[12]

In 1974, after a major split within the CPM itself, rival factions intensified

(Above) One of the flags of the Communist Party of Malaya attached to the bomb that exploded in Changi on 23 April 1970. *Courtesy of Ministry of Home Affairs.*

(Facing page) The communist peaked cap belonging to a member of the Communist Party of Malaya, 1950s. *Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*

Choo Ruizhi is a Senior Analyst with the National Security Studies Programme at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University. His other research interests include the environmental histories of Southeast Asia in the 19th and 20th centuries.



Home-made bombs and banners were planted outside the office of the North Bridge Road office of Nanyang Manufacturing Company on 20 December 1974. The banners were in support of the workers of Nanyang Shoe Factory in Johor Bahru. *Courtesy of Ministry of Home Affairs.*

their attacks in Singapore to prove their revolutionary zeal. In June, a homemade bomb attached to three communist flags exploded on an overhead bridge outside People's Park Complex. Throughout the year, Singaporeans were subjected to a succession of dummy bombs, banners, pamphlets and flags inscribed with communist symbols and slogans.[13]

Perhaps the most sensational incident of this period was the Still Road bombing, also known as the Katong bombing. Around mid-December 1974, Nanyang Shoe Factory managing director Soh Keng Chin received a letter wrapped around a live bullet. Written in Chinese, the threatening note condemned Soh's exploitation of workers at his Johor Baru factory, which had been shut down in July 1973, and warned him to "be careful".[14]

In the early hours of 20 December 1974, three CPM operatives set out to kill Soh. They drove a blue Austin car carrying four bombs, intending to detonate them at Soh's bungalow in Katong.[15] However, while waiting at a traffic junction near Still Road at 5.20 am, one of the volatile explosives in the car suddenly exploded.

The explosion sent glass and metal shards over a 100-metre radius. Witnesses saw "tongues of flames flickering from the mess that was the Austin", while the morning air was "pungent with the smell of gunpowder".[16]

The vehicle's driver, Gay Beng Guan, 37, was hurled out of the car by the force of the blast. He was found "writhing and groaning in agony from the burns and injuries all over. Blood oozed from… the opening where his left arm had been torn off". He died about two weeks later in Outram Hospital. Lim Chin Huat, 23, the front-seat passenger, was "smeared with blood, his abdomen ripped open and his arms severed by the blast". He died at the scene. The third man, Tan Teck Meng, who had been seated at the rear of the car, escaped with severe burns, but he was later caught and detained by police.[17]

That same morning, police found three more bombs strung across the North Bridge Road office of Nanyang Manufacturing (an affliate company of Nanyang Shoe Factory). The bombs were hung alongside banners that read "The Righteous Struggle of Johor Baru Nanyang Shoe Factory Workers Must Win" and for all to "Most rigorously condemn the persecution of workers by the reactionary management".[18]

The horrific deaths of the communist agents – described, photographed and published in vivid detail in newspapers – were perhaps the most sobering demonstration of the bloodshed the CPM was prepared to inflict. Yet these explosions were only the most visible manifestations of the CPM's operations in Singapore.

Throughout the 1970s, the police and the Internal Security Department (ISD, which succeeded the Singapore Special Branch) uncovered numerous CPM plots to infiltrate local organisations, attack key installations and assassinate government leaders. Although such schemes were fortunately prevented, they illustrate the sheer scale of carnage communist forces were planning to wreak.

Arms, Ammunition and Assassination Plots

Security operations in 1974 uncovered communist banners, flags and simulated booby-traps, along with large troves of arms, ammunition and explosives, which included "42 bullets, one hand grenade, six grenade casings, 16 detonators, one compass, eight gelignite sticks, [and] three crude bombs".[19] Plans to establish a local assassination squad were also discovered, along with electrical diagrams of the homes of key government officials and buildings, drawn up by a CPM member who was an electrical subcontractor.[20]

These chilling assassination plots mirrored the CPM's ongoing surgical strikes on key police leaders in Malaysia. On 4 June 1974, Malaysia's Inspector-General of Police, Tan Sri Abdul Rahman Hashim, was killed by a CPM assassination squad. About 16 months later, in November 1975, Tan Sri Koo Chong Kong, the Chief Police Officer of Perak, was shot and killed in broad daylight in Ipoh, Perak. These same assassins later plotted to kill Singapore Police Commissioner Tan Teck Kim in 1976, but were arrested before they could execute their plan.[21] Although Singapore's security forces were able to narrowly foil such plots, the danger of CPM-fomented terror persisted.

In July 1975, a captured CPM agent led Singapore police officers to a cache of "189 hand grenades, 210 detonators, a .38 revolver, a .25 Colt automatic pistol, 75 rounds of ammunition and several communist books and documents."[22] Later that month, another 109 hand grenades were found in two earthen jars, buried in the grounds of another operative's house.[23] In numerous press releases, the Ministry of Home Affairs detailed the extensive involvement of captured agents with CPM cell leaders, which went as far back as the 1950s.[24]

Another ISD sweep captured four more communist cells in 1977, which comprised local construction workers and even a reservist SAF officer. One of these CPM units was a construction company involved in the building of drains in Tuas Village and Newton Road. These projects had raised $46,000 for the CPM.[25] That same year, a full-time national service police inspector was arrested for providing "confidential information", such as the car registration plate numbers and names of key ISD personnel.[26]

Taken together, such discoveries indicate that the CPM had planned catastrophic terrorist attacks on the island, so as to "oppose the reactionary rule" of Singapore's government and to "unyieldingly take the road of armed struggle".[27]

Yet CPM members alone could not "liberate… Malaya including Singapore".[28] To succeed, its agents needed to recruit people to their revolutionary cause. As communist banners and bombs mushroomed across the island, a parallel struggle for the hearts and minds of regular Singaporeans was also underway, one which played out in underground networks and across Singapore's airwaves.

Information War: Underground and Over the Airwaves

CPM operatives quietly sought out sympathisers through informal channels, cultivating disillusioned, well-meaning residents who wanted to build a more equal and just society. Under the guise of conducting Chinese tuition or discussing Chinese culture, CPM operatives slowly indoctrinated potential recruits with communist literature. These underground networks led by CPM elements enabled the party to not only gradually amass classified intelligence, funds and equip-

The wreckage of the car following the explosion near Still Road on 20 December 1974. *Courtesy of Ministry of Home Affairs.*

ment for their cause, but to also develop local satellite organisations, often led by indoctrinated "revolutionary youths".[29]

Concurrently, the CPM waged an information offensive over Singapore's airwaves. In November 1969, using powerful broadcasting equipment supplied by the CCP, the Voice of Malayan Revolution (VMR) began radio broadcasts from a mountainous region in South China, seeking to disseminate the "the revolutionary truth and news of our army's victories and of the people's struggle" to all listeners within range.[30]

Listeners in Singapore could tune in to VMR broadcasts twice daily on AM radio. On 29 July 1970, Singapore Telecoms began jamming these long-range transmissions, but with limited success.[31] VMR broadcasts continued until June 1981 when the station was shut down on the CCP's orders. Despite the VMR's closure, the CPM continued radio broadcasts from a new radio station called Suara Demokrasi (Voice of Democracy) from a new mobile transmitter on the Thai-Malaysian border until the signing of the 1989 Haadyai Peace Agreement.[32]

CPM Leader Chin Peng claimed that many communist sympathisers and cadres throughout Malaysia and Singapore "tuned in eagerly" to the radio broadcasts.[33] However, Eu Chooi Yip, a senior CPM cadre and who was also director of VMR's Chinese programming section, disagreed. In an oral history interview in 1992, Eu described many of VMR's programmes as simply a rehash of existing news reports from local newspapers with the addition of communist rhetoric. Eu recounted how cadres on the ground were in fact "not really willing to listen" to the programme, likening the broadcasts to serving "leftover rice" ("他们说连他们自己也不大愿意听, 打开电台听一下… 就不听了… 和炒冷饭一样").[34]

Adding to the challenge was that VMR had to compete for attention from the likes of the highly popular Rediffusion radio service. By 1975, Rediffusion boasted a Chinese adult listenership of about 229,000.[35] VMR's austere, often repetitive, revolutionary pronouncements offered no substantive rejoinder to Rediffusion's dazzling programming.[36]

The growing access to television in Singapore further blunted VMR's allure. A 1979 government survey revealed that nine out of 10 households owned a television and about one-fifth owned colour television sets, a statistic that also reflected the growing prosperity of Singaporeans. VMR's propaganda had to compete with programmes such as the first live, colour telecast of the World Cup football final in 1974 between the Netherlands and West Germany.[37]

The CPM's information offensive did succeed in enticing some Singaporeans, even people in authority. In 1979, two prison wardens at the Moon Crescent Detention Centre confessed to smuggling cassette recorders into the compound for inmates to tape VMR broadcasts and to passing VMR transcripts between detainees.[38]

Another View of the 1970s

Today, whether in local textbooks, museum exhibitions or personal accounts, the 1970s are primarily remembered as a period of economic growth in Singapore's history. On the surface, it appears as an uncomplicated, transitional decade: between the chaos of the 1960s and self-confidence of the 1980s.

However, newspaper articles, government reports, oral histories and scholarly studies reveal that the 1970s were far more volatile and uncertain than more conventional historical accounts let on. The April 1970 Changi bombing heralded the start of renewed communist violence and subversion in Singapore. Although the police and ISD successfully foiled most of these plans, the regular discoveries of these assassination plots, arms caches and cell groups point to a sustained, systematic CPM presence in Singapore, even after the chaotic upheavals of the 1960s.[39]

The vigilance of local security forces resulted in a significant drop in bombings and arson attacks in the 1980s. The government, however, remained alert to subversive efforts by CPM agents, aware that the "communists work with a long term view, gradually infiltrating political parties, unions, the armed forces and other major bodies".[40]

The communist threat, though diminished, persisted until 2 December 1989 when the CPM signed the Haadyai Peace Agreements at the Lee Gardens Hotel in the southern Thai city of Haadyai. Over 1,100 CPM guerrillas agreed to lay down their arms in an "honourable settlement" that brought the 41-year conflict to a formal close.[41] ♦

(Above) The Communist Party of Malaya signed the Haadyai Peace Agreements on 2 December 1989. This brought an end to the 41-year communist conflict that had begun in 1948. *Image reproduced from Tan Lian Choo, "Chin Peng Signs Peace Pacts with KL and Bangkok," Straits Times, 3 December 1989, 1. (From NewspaperSG).*

(Facing page) The communist khaki shirt belonging to a member of the Communist Party of Malaya, 1950s. *Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*

NOTES

1 "Bomb Victim Dies," *Straits Times*, 25 April 1970, 1; "Flag Bombs Go Off in S'pore Too," *Straits Times*, 24 April 1970, 1; John Tan, "Underground Network's Deadly Record," *Straits Times*, 30 November 1983, 22. (From NewspaperSG)

2 "Bomb Found on Bridge," *Straits Times*, 30 April 1970, 1. (From NewspaperSG)

3 Chua Sian Chin, "Communism – A Real Threat", in *Socialism That Works... the Singapore Way*, ed. C.V. Devan Nair (Singapore: Federal Publications, 1976), 12. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 335.0095957 SOC)

4 Lee Ting Hui, *The Open United Front: The Communist Struggle in Singapore, 1954–1966* (Singapore: South Seas Society, 1996), 6. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 959.5703 LEE)

5 Ong Weichong, "Securing the Population from Insurgency and Subversion in the Second Emergency (1968–1981)" (PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 2010), 59.

6 Chin Peng, Ian Ward and Norma O. Miraflor, *My Side of History* (Singapore: Media Masters, 2003), 439. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 959.5104092 CHI)

7 Fong Chong Pik, *Fong Chong Pik: The Memoirs of a Malayan Communist Revolutionary* (Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2008), 172. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 959.5704092 FAN-[HIS])

8 Chin, Ward and Miraflor, *My Side of History*, 428–30.

9 Chin, Ward and Miraflor, *My Side of History*, 453.

10 Aloysius Chin, *The Communist Party of Malaya: The Inside Story* (Kuala Lumpur: Vinpress, 1995), 164. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 959.51 CHI); Chua, "Communism," 12–13; Bilveer Singh, *Quest for Political Power* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish International Asia Pte Ltd, 2015), 165. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 335.4095957 SIN)

11 "For Ops across Causeway… Reds Want Singapore as Base, IGP Warns," *Straits Times*, 13 October 1978, 13. (From NewspaperSG)

12 Tan, "Underground Network's Deadly Record"; "Bomb Hoax, Pro-Red Banners Keep Police Busy," *Straits Times*, 3 January 1971, 1. (From NewspaperSG)

13 Leslie Fong and Paul Wee, "Booby-trap Escape," *Straits Times*, 21 June 1974, 1; "Red Banners Seized at Bridges," *Straits Times*, 5 November 1974, 1. (From NewspaperSG)

14 Bharathi Menon, "Bullet Warning from Bombers," *New Nation*, 24 December 1974, 1; "The Katong Bomb Incident," *Today*, 20 October 2011, 2. (From NewspaperSG)

15 "24-hour Police Vigil for Articles with Red Slogans," *Straits Times*, 28 December 1974, 7. (From NewspaperSG)

16 Paul Wee, "Riddle of Bomber No 3," *Straits Times*, 22 December 1974, 1; Paul Wee, "Hunt for Bomber No 3," *Straits Times*, 21 December 1974, 1. (From NewspaperSG)

17 Wee, "Hunt for Bomber No 3"; "Katong Blast Bomber Dies," *Straits Times*, 4 January 1975, 8; Lai Yew Kong, "Bombers' Link with Reds," *Straits Times*, 23 December 1974, 1. (From NewspaperSG)

18 Wee, "Hunt for Bomber No 3"; Lai, "Bombers' Link with Reds"; "Vital Clues in the Bombers' Warning Notes…," *New Nation*, 27 December 1974, 2; Leslie Fong, "'Red Doc' Is Back in Prison," *Straits Times*, 5 June 1976, 1; "Implications of the Bomb Blast," *New Nation*, 23 December 1974, 10. (From NewspaperSG); Teo Chee Hean, "Parliamentary Speech on the Internal Security Act", press release, 19 October 2011, https://www.mynewsdesk.com/sg/ministry-of-home-affairs/pressreleases/parliamentary-speech-on-the-internal-security-act-speech-by-mr-teo-chee-hean-deputy-prime-minister-coordinating-minister-for-national-security-695944.

19 P.M. Raman, "30 Detained in Security Raids," *Straits Times*, 22 June 1974, 1. (From NewspaperSG)

20 Tan, "Underground Network's Deadly Record"; "Communist Threat," *Straits Times*, 6 October 1975, 14. (From NewspaperSG)

21 Chin, *Communist Party of Malaya*, 164, 236–38.

22 Ahmad Osman, "Police Seize 298 Hand Grenades," *Straits Times*, 5 August 1975, 1. (From NewspaperSG)

23 Chua, "Communism," 17.

24 See, for instance, Osman, "Police Seize 298 Hand Grenades"; "Freed: Woman Who Was Plen's Courier," *Straits Times*, 23 June 1972, 6; "Ex-detainee: I Was Trained to Use Guns and Grenades," *Straits Times*, 21 May 1980, 9. (From NewspaperSG)

25 "39 Arrested in ISD Swoops," *Straits Times*, 16 October 1977, 1. (From NewspaperSG)

26 Singh, *Quest for Political Power*, 168; "Former Officer: I Leaked Secrets to Reds," *Straits Times*, 13 October 1978, 12. (From NewspaperSG)

27 "Voice of Malayan Revolution Broadcast, 1 May 1980" in *Voice of Malayan Revolution: The CPM Radio War Against Singapore and Malaysia, 1969–1981*, ed. Wang Gungwu and Ong Weichong (Singapore: RSIS, 2009), 218. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 322.4209595 VOI)

28 Raman, "30 Detained in Security Raids."

29 "Former Officer"; "Detainee Admits: I Was a Leader of Revolutionary Group," *Straits Times*, 20 November 1977, 7. (From NewspaperSG)

30 "Fifty Years of the CPM (Part VI), 28 June 1981" in *Voice of Malayan Revolution: The CPM Radio War Against Singapore and Malaysia, 1969–1981*, ed. Wang Gungwu and Ong Weichong (Singapore: RSIS, 2009), 87. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 322.4209595 VOI)

31 Original source figures given as 9590 kc/s and 7305 kc/s in the 31- and 41-metre bands. "Internal Security Department (Singapore) Files: The Voice of the Malayan Revolution, 26 May 1971" cited in Ong Weichong, *Malaysia's Defeat of Armed Communism* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 51. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSEA 322.4209595 VOI)

32 Chin, Ward and Miraflor, *My Side of History*, 460.

33 Chin, Ward and Miraflor, *My Side of History*, 450.

34 Eu Chooi Yip (余柱业), oral history interview by 林孝胜, 25 September 1992, transcript and MP3 audio, Reel 19 of 23, 30:32, National Archives of Singapore (accession no. 001359).

35 Eddie C.Y. Kuo, "Multilingualism and Mass Media Communications in Singapore", *Asian Survey* 18, no. 10 (October 1978): 1067–83. (From JSTOR via NLB's eResources website)

36 For more examples of the VMR's broadcasts, see *Voice of Malayan Revolution: The CPM Radio War Against Singapore and Malaysia, 1969–1981*, ed. Wang Gungwu and Ong Weichong (Singapore: RSIS, 2009). (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 322.4209595 VOI)

37 "S'poreans and Their Rising Affluence," *Straits Times*, 30 October 1979, 1; "Soccer 'Live' Colour Telecast was 'Superb'," *Straits Times*, 9 July 1974, 5. (From NewspaperSG)

38 Sit Meng Chue, "Two Who Were Won Over by Pro-Red Detainees," *Straits Times*, 2 June 1979, 7. (From NewspaperSG)

39 Leon Comber, *Malaya's Secret Police, 1945–60: The Role of the Special Branch in the Malayan Emergency* (Singapore, ISEAS Publishing, 2008), 6. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 363.283095951 COM)

40 "The Red Threat Is Very Real," *Singapore Monitor*, 28 January 1984, 17. (From NewspaperSG)

41 Tan Lian Choo, "Accord is An Honourable Settlement, Says Chin Peng," *Straits Times*, 3 December 1989, 16. (From NewspaperSG)

A GREAT WAY TO FLY

The Singapore Airlines Story

Established in 1972, Singapore Airlines has earned a reputation as a well-recognised brand known for its impeccable service standards and luxurious in-flight experiences.

By Ang Seow Leng

Today, Singapore Airlines (SIA) is regularly described as being among the best airlines in the world. And this is not a new phenomenon. In 2020, the *Business Traveller* Asia-Pacific Awards gave SIA the overall award for Best Airline and Best Asia-Pacific Airline for the 20th year running.[1]

It should come as no surprise that SIA consistently strives for excellence. From very early on, the company had been told that the stakes were high. In October 1972, about 10 months after SIA was incorporated, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew told the staff during the company's inaugural dinner: "I set up Singapore Airlines to make profits. If you don't make a profit, I am going to close down the airline."[2]

While SIA was officially incorporated in January 1972, the airline actually traces its history to the formation of Malayan Airways, which was set up in October 1937. That company was jointly owned by British Imperial Airways, Ocean Steamship Company of Liverpool and Straits Steamship Company in Singapore.

Malayan Airways was not the first local commercial airline to be set up in Malaya though. That honour belongs to Wearnes Air Services, a company owned by Wearne Brothers. When Kallang Airport was opened in June 1937 as Singapore's first purpose-built civil airport, Wearnes Air Services immediately launched flights to Kuala Lumpur and Penang. As air travel became more popular, the Singapore incorporated company extended its air service to more places such as Ipoh and Kota Bahru.[3]

With Wearnes already on the scene, and given the small size of the market, Malayan Airways decided to hold off operations. The subsequent outbreak of war and the Japanese Occupation meant that Malayan Airways only made its maiden commercial flight a decade after being set up. On 1 May 1947, an Airspeed Consul aircraft took off from Singapore and flew passengers to Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Penang.[4]

Malayan Airways was renamed Malaysian Airways in 1963 following the formation of the Federation of Malaysia with the merger of the Federation of Malaya with Singapore, North Borneo (Sabah) and Sarawak. Three years later, the airline's name was changed to Malaysia-Singapore Airlines after Singapore gained independence. At the time, the governments of Malaysia and Singapore had joint majority ownership of the airline.[5]

However, by 1971, the Singapore and Malaysian governments had developed differing aims for the airline. Singapore wanted Malaysia-Singapore Airlines to be a commercially viable international airline while Malaysia preferred to have a domestic airline. "The differences have become irreconcilable, and parting unavoidable," said Finance Minister Hon Sui Sen in Parliament.[6]

In January 1972, the Singapore government announced that the new name of Singapore's flag carrier would be Mercury Singapore Airlines.[7] Malaysia, however, objected to this because it would mean that Singapore would end up keeping the initials MSA, thus benefitting from the brand recognition of the predecessor company.

The matter was eventually settled out of court in June that year. Under the agreement, Singapore would not use the name Mercury Singapore Airlines or the initials MSA. But the airline of each country could overprint its name as the Malaysian or Singapore successor in MSA advertisements so long as each airline paid the advertisement costs.[8]

In July 1972, Singapore announced that the new name of its airline would be Singapore Airlines and on 1 October, the airline's first flight, SQ 108, bound for Kuala Lumpur, took off at around 6.15 am.[9]

A New Beginning

After Malaysia-Singapore Airlines was split up, SIA absorbed more than $180 million of its assets, including the Boeing fleet of five 707s and five 737-112s, and two Fokker F-27 Friendships. SIA also took over the Robinson Road headquarters, the Kriscom IBM computer reservation system, the engineering base and the airport flight kitchen in Paya Lebar, as well as the ramp servicing and transport equipment, and most of the overseas offices. The new airline operated the majority of the international routes of the former Malaysia-Singapore Airlines.[10]

Ang Seow Leng is a Senior Librarian with the National Library, Singapore. Her responsibilities include managing the National Library's collections, developing content as well as providing reference and research services.

(Above) A Malayan Airways stewardess in a collared blouse, jacket and pleated skirt, 1947. *Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

(Left) A Singapore Airlines A380 landing at Sydney Airport, 2021. *Photo by Troy Mortier. Image from Unsplash.*

SIA's first managing director was Lim Chin Beng. His vision was for SIA to appeal to international travellers since Singapore did not have a domestic market. He said: "At that time, we consciously did not have local food on board because it was for the international travellers, not for Singapore travellers... So, the décor, the aircraft, the food, everything should be for the international travellers but with the Asian courtesy and the Asian touch."[11]

The management under Lim immediately began negotiating for landing rights to ensure minimal disruptions to services. Two of the earliest landing rights agreements obtained were with Indonesia in September 1972 and Pakistan the following month.[12]

To expand and fly to new destinations, SIA needed more planes. In 1978, the airline made headlines because it signed a $2.1 billion agreement with Boeing in one of the largest ever single civilian aircraft deals at the time. The agreement was to purchase 10 Boeing 747s with an option to acquire three more, and four 727s with options to buy another two. In 1992, SIA showed that it was still willing to make big investments when it signed a contract for 20 Airbus Industrie A340-300 airplanes at a cost of $4.34 billion.[13]

All this has resulted in the airline consistently having a large, but young fleet of airplanes. Today, the SIA Group (including subsidiaries) has a combined passenger network covering almost 100 destinations.[14]

Branding and the Singapore Girl

The SIA logo was conceptualised by San Francisco design firm Landor Associates in 1972. The logo of a golden bird, against a deep midnight blue tail, was chosen to "[reflect] the modernity and sophistication" of SIA. All SIA aircrafts have been carrying this distinctive livery ever since with only a subtle change in 1987 when new gold, blue and yellow accents were introduced.[15]

Arguably the most distinctive trademark about SIA is the form-fitting batik sarong kebaya uniform worn by its stewardesses. The uniform was designed by French couturier Pierre Balmain in 1968 for Malaysia-Singapore Airlines. In 1974, Balmain made minor revisions to the uniform, retaining the air stewardess sarong kebaya but introducing new three-piece outfits for the ground stewardesses and female ticketing staff. The sarong kebaya – with its vibrant coloured floral motifs and patterned border batik print – is tailor-made for each crew member.[16]

Batey Advertising developed SIA's memorable branding, focusing on its key inflight service, the iconic "Singapore Girl" and the airline slogan "Singapore Airlines – A Great Way to Fly". The agency has won several international awards for this campaign.[17]

Such was the fame of the Singapore Girl that when Madame Tussaud's wax museum in London wanted to have a waxwork figure to reflect the growing popularity of international travel, it chose to use an SIA stewardess, modelled after stewardess Lim Suet Kwee.[18] A refresh of the Singapore Girl wax figure in 2015 featured Nur Surya Mohamed Ambiah, who was selected from among 4,500 female crew members.[19]

Airline food is typically a punchline for many a joke. SIA, however, takes food seriously and places an emphasis on the preparation, choice of cuisine and presentation of meals. In 1998, the airline pioneered the concept of assembling an international cast of chefs on the Singapore Airlines International Culinary Panel to create up-to-date menus reflecting the latest food trends.[20] In 2021, SIA won the Skytrax World Airline Award for Best Economy Class Airline Catering.[21]

Trials and Tribulations

In the early years, SIA had to work hard to obtain traffic and landing rights, which were not easily attainable. Initially, the British government did not allow SIA to land in London. Managing Director Lim Chin Beng recalled that the negotiations went on "for months and months and months".[22] SIA eventually took a huge gamble, with support from the Singapore government, to serve notice to terminate its agreement with the British Overseas Airways Corporation (now known as British Airways) that allowed the airline to land in Singapore.

Lim explained that "under all air services agreement, there is a clause to say that you can give 12 months' notice of termination... So, in 12 months' time, if there is no agreement, they have to stop operating to Singapore".[23] The unions at the airport also applied pressure by going slow on British Overseas Airways Corporation aircrafts.

The British high commissioner to Singapore, Arthur de la Mare, went to see Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew about this and the latter told him "to get his government to be reasonable. A British airline could land in Singapore but a Singapore airline was denied landing rights in London". Within weeks, SIA finally managed to obtain landing rights in London to fly on one of the main trunk routes of the world: London-Singapore-Sydney. "Once we did that, all the European countries got in line," said Lim. "So, we got London, we got Paris."[24]

The newly established airline was also labelled as an upstart, a maverick and a pirate.[25] In 1981, West Germany waged a campaign against SIA for selling discounted tickets. SIA offices in Frankfurt and Dusseldorf were reportedly visited by German tax officials on five occasions, and there were also increased frequencies of checks on SIA flights, resulting in delays and embarrassed passengers. Talks between Singapore and West German civil aviation officials eventually put an end to the disturbances.[26]

Not all of SIA's challenges were from abroad. In 1980, members of the Singapore Airlines Pilots Association (SIAPA) sought to exert pressure on the airline to accede to their demands for higher wages, allowances and other benefits by resorting to work-to-rule, go-slows and unnecessary medical leave. These caused disruptions to flight schedules and harmed SIA's reputation and operations.[27]

During that period, 30 pilots disrupted 16 scheduled flights through their refusal to work beyond the 12-hour duty time limit laid down under the company collective agreement. After the dispute was referred to the Industrial Arbitration Court, two further flight delays continued.[28]

On 1 December 1980, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew intervened and warned the SIAPA executives, telling them that he did not want to do them in but he "won't allow anyone to do Singapore in". Subsequently, some of the SIAPA officials were charged with illegal industrial action and SIAPA was deregistered.[29]

In 2003, some 23 years later, another major dispute over wages broke out and Lee, now Senior Minister, stepped in again. He warned SIA management and the pilots that if the matter continued to escalate, there would be "broken heads."[30] The Ministry of Manpower and the Industrial Arbitration Court mediated between SIA and the Airline Pilots' Association Singapore to eventually reach an agreement on wage cuts, no-pay leave and compensation payment.[31]

On 26 March 1991 – in an event that gripped the nation – flight SQ 117 was hijacked shortly after departing Kuala Lumpur after 9 pm. Carrying 114 passengers and 11 crew members, the Airbus A310 landed at Changi Airport at 10.24 pm. The leader of the four hijackers demanded to speak with the Pakistani ambassador to Singapore and former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, as well as the release of jailed members of the Pakistan People's Party in Pakistan.

They also demanded that the plane fly to Sydney after refuelling. The destination was later changed multiple times to Iraq, Libya, Brunei and Indonesia. By early dawn, the hijackers threatened to kill one passenger every 10 minutes if their demands were not met.[32]

As the negotiations showed signs of breaking down, an elite rescue team stormed the plane and in a decisive 30-second sweep, killed all four hijackers without injuring any of the hostages.[33]

Passengers boarding a Singapore Airlines plane at Changi Airport, 1981. *Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

(Above right) A Singapore Airlines baggage tag, 1970s. *Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*

(Right) Singapore Airlines stewardess See Biew Wah with French designer Pierre Balmain, creator of the sarong kebaya uniform, and Madeleine Kohler, Balmain's Director of Creations and Special Projects, c. 1972. *Singapore Airlines Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

Business Class tray service in an A350. At the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, all cabin crew were required to wear goggles and masks. But goggles are no longer necessary today. *Courtesy of Singapore Airlines.*

SIA had to deal with fatal accidents as well. The first serious accident occurred on 31 October 2000 at Chiang Kai-shek International Airport (now Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport) in Taipei. Flight SQ 006 was on its way to Los Angeles from Singapore via Taiwan when it crashed on a closed runway, destroying the aircraft and killing 83 people.[34]

This, however, was not its most serious incident involving the company. That had taken place three years prior, when a plane from SIA's regional arm, SilkAir, suffered a fatal crash. Flight MI 185 was on its way to Singapore from Jakarta on 19 December 1997 when it lost altitude from 35,000 ft and nosedived into the Musi River near the city of Palembang in South Sumatra, Indonesia. That crash killed all 104 people on board.[35]

Adapting to Circumstances

In the late 1990s, budget airlines became popular and airlines like Malaysia's AirAsia and Australia's Jetstar ushered in a new era of air travel by offering cheaper tickets.[36]

SIA dipped its toes into the water by setting up its own low-cost subsidiary, Scoot, which began flying in June 2012. Budget airline Tiger Airways, which began operating as an independent airline in September 2004, also became a subsidiary of SIA Group in 2014.[37] In July 2017, Tigerair merged with Scoot, operating under the Scoot brand.[38] SIA's subsidiary SilkAir, which served the regional routes, merged with SIA in September 2021.[39]

In 2020, SIA encountered what can be described as one of the most challenging moments in its history. The Covid-19 pandemic forced global travel to a standstill, and the airline reported its first net loss of $212 million in its 48-year history for the financial year ending in March 2020.[40] To help cope with the short-term liquidity risk, SIA reached out to an unprecedented number of sources for funding and raised $22.4 billion in liquidity between April 2020 and May 2022, including $15 billion from shareholders.[41]

In October 2020, with most of the planes grounded, SIA transformed several A380 double-decker superjumbo jets into "Restaurant A380" offering Singapore residents a unique dining experience, and also provided the airline's signature meals delivered to homes. Singapore residents could also go for guided tours at the SIA training facility where they had a chance to interact with pilots and cabin crew, and even check out the flight stimulators at an extra charge.[42]

Flying Once Again

With the easing of restrictions and borders opening, air travel has begun to pick up. In December 2021, SIA announced a net profit of $85 million during the third quarter since the onset of the pandemic, thanks to expanded vaccinated travel lane arrangements and cargo revenue.[43] In May 2022, the airline reported a lower net loss of $962 million for the financial year ending in March 2022, compared with $4.3 billion a year earlier. Revenue also increased to $7.6 billion, from $3.8 billion.[44]

SIA cabin crew stand ready to welcome diners on board Restaurant A380 @Changi in October 2020. *Courtesy of Singapore Airlines.*

In an interview with the *Straits Times* in May 2022, chief executive officer of SIA, Goh Choon Phong, said that in the second quarter of 2022, the airline was at about 61 percent of pre-pandemic capacity compared to an average of 20 percent of pre-pandemic capacity for the other airlines in this region. He told the newspaper he was confident that the rapid growing economies in Asia would foster strong demands for business travel.[45]

The opening of SIA's new flagship SilverKris and KrisFlyer Gold lounges at Changi Airport Terminal 3 in May 2022 also showed SIA's "confidence in Singapore's future as a pre-eminent global air hub".[46] So long as SIA sticks to its guiding principle of striving for excellence, it will undoubtedly continue to be a great way to fly.♦

NOTES

1 "Business Traveller Asia-Pacific Awards 2020 Results," Business Traveller Asia-Pacific, 13 October 2020. https://www.businesstraveller.com/awards/business-traveller-asia-pacific-awards-2020-results/; "World's Best Airline Cabin Crew," Skytrax World Airline Awards, accessed 16 June 2022, https://www.worldairlineawards.com/worlds-best-airline-cabin-crew-2021/

2 Lim Chin Beng, oral history interview by Patricia Lee, 5 September 2000, transcript and MP3 audio, Reel/Disc 2 of 3, National Archives of Singapore (accession no. 002358), 20.

3 Allen, *SIA: Take-off to Success*, 21–22; Christopher Fyfe, *Wheels in Malaya: The Wearne Brothers and Their Company* (Claremont, W. Aust.: Lana Press, 2002), 121–30. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING q629.2220922 FYF)

4 "Ten Proud Years: Great Day in the History of Malayan Airways, 1947–1957," *Straits Times*, 1 May 1957, 12; "Malayan Air Service Daily From May 1," *Malaya Tribune*, 12 April 1947, 5. (From NewspaperSG); Allen, *SIA: Take-off to Success*, 19.

5 "Malaysian Airways: New Name of Your National Airline," *Straits Times*, 30 November 1963, 17; "Up Goes the Flag," *Straits Times*, 17 September 1963, 1; "MAL Is Now MSA," *Straits Times*, 31 December 1966, 1. (From NewspaperSG)

6 "MSA Split Unavoidable," *Straits Times*, 23 March 1971, 3. (From NewspaperSG)

7 "MSA It Is!," *Straits Times*, 29 January 1972, 1. (From NewspaperSG)

8 "Singapore Drops 'MSA'," *Straits Times*, 28 June 1972, 1; "Goodwill at Last," *Straits Times*, 28 June 1972, 12. (From NewspaperSG)

9 Arthur Richards and Rita Loong, "Big Champagne Party by Union to Mark the Birth of SIA," *Straits Times*, 1 October 1972, 7. (From NewspaperSG)

10 Goh Yong Kiat, *Where Lions Fly: 100 Years of Aviation in Singapore (1911–2011)* (Singapore: Straits Times Press Reference, 2012), 95. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 387.7095957 GOH); "MSA It Is!"

11 Lim, interview, 5 Sep 2000, 21.

12 "SIA-Garuda Air Rights Signing Today," *Straits Times*, 14 September 1972, 28; "SIA Will Fly to Karachi This Month," *Straits Times*, 10 October 1972, 10. (From NewspaperSG)

13 Bill Campbell, "SIA's $2 Bil Wingspread," *Straits Times*, 10 May 1978, 1. (From NewspaperSG); Goh, *Where Lions Fly*, 108, 136.

14 "SIA Group Cuts Full Year Net Loss By 78%, Posts Second Half Operating Profit As Travel Demand Returns," Singapore Airlines, 18 May 2022, https://www.singaporeair.com/saar5/pdf/Investor-Relations/Financial-Results/News-Release/nr-q4fy2122.pdf; Natasha Ganesan, "SIA Group's Passenger Traffic Continues to Rise in May Amid Strong Recovery in Air Travel," *Channel NewsAsia*, 15 June 2022, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/singapore-airlines-scoot-passenger-traffic-may-2022-covid-19-travel-2748461.

15 Nancy Byramji, "Boeing 707 Gets First SIA Logo of Golden Bird," *Straits Times*, 5 August 1972, 8; Martin Soong, "SIA Shows Its New Flying Colours," *Business Times*, 29 April 1987, 2. (From NewspaperSG)

16 "SIA Airgirls to Put on That MSA Look," *Straits Times*, 27 July 1972, 2; "Balmain Keeps It Down to Earth," *Straits Times*, 18 August 1974, 8. (From NewspaperSG); Danielle Wightman-Stone, "Singapore Airlines Celebrates 50 Years of Pierre Balmain," FashionUnited, 19 November 2018, https://fashionunited.uk/news/fashion/singapore-airlines-celebrates-50-years-of-pierre-balmain/2018111940028.

17 "S'pore Firm Wins 12 International Ad Awards," *Straits Times*, 1 April 1987, 16; "SIA's Stopover Ad a Winner," *Straits Times*, 20 May 1987, 14. (From NewspaperSG)

18 "Singapore Girl in Wax for Madame Tussaud's," *Straits Times*, 21 March 1993, 1. (From NewspaperSG)

19 Jocelyn Lee, "New Singapore Girl Wax Figure Modelled After Yummy Mummy Chosen Out of 4,500 SIA Stewardesses," *New Paper*, 4 March 2015, https://www.tnp.sg/news/others/new-singapore-girl-wax-figure-modelled-after-yummy-mummy-chosen-out-4500-sia.

20 Sylvia Tan, *Above & Beyond: A Collection of Recipes from the Singapore Airlines International Culinary Panel* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Cuisine, 2010), 13. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 641.59 ABO)

21 "World's Best Economy Class Airlines 2021," Skytrax World Airline Awards, accessed 16 June 2022, https://www.worldairlineawards.com/worlds-best-economy-class-airlines-2021/.

22 Lim, interview, 5 Sep 2000, 15–16.

23 Lim, interview, 5 Sep 2000, 16.

24 Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story, 1965–2000: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (Singapore: Times Editions: Singapore Press Holdings, 2000), 229. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 959.57092 LEE); Lim, interview, 5 Sep 2000, 16.

25 Ken Hickson, *Mr SIA: Fly Past* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2014), 83–84; Lim, interview, 5 Sep 2000, 17.

26 Lim, interview, 5 Sep 2000, 18; Agnes Wee, "Germany Accuses SIA of Undercutting," *Business Times*, 13 November 11981, 1; "An End to the Turbulence," *Straits Times*, 12 December 1981, 16. (From NewspaperSG)

27 "Time to Cool Frayed Nerves," *Business Times*, 2 December 1980, 6; "Troubled Sky," *Straits Times*, 5 November 1980, 14. (From NewspaperSG)

28 Ahmad Osman, "SIA Dispute: PM Steps In," *Straits Times*, 27 November 1980, 1. (From NewspaperSG)

29 "Shades of the Past," *Straits Times*, 21 December 2003, 8. (From NewspaperSG); Hickson, *Mr SIA*, 56.

30 "Shades of the Past"; Lydia Lim, "Govt Acting to Prevent 'Broken Heads' at SIA," *Straits Times*, 2 December 2003, 1. (From NewspaperSG)

31 Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, "In Principle Agreement Mediated by MOM Reached Between Singapore Airlines Ltd (SIA) and the Air Line Pilots Association Singapore (ALPA-S)," press release, 30 June 2003, National Archives of Singapore (document no. 2003063003); Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, "Improving Labour Relations in Singapore Airlines (SIA): Prime Minister's Office Press Statement," press release, 30 November 2003, National Archives of Singapore (document no. 2003113001).

32 Bilveer Singh, *Skyjacking of SQ 117: Causes, Course and Consequences* (Singapore: Crescent Design Associates, 1991), 41, 48. (From National Library. Singapore, call no. RSING 364.154095957 BIL)

33 "Thunderbolt: The SQ117 Story," Public Service Division, Prime Minister's Office, accessed 16 June 2022, https://www.psd.gov.sg/heartofpublicservice/our-people/4-24-7/thunderbolt-the-sq117-story/.

34 Singapore. Ministry of Transport, *Analysis of the Accident to Singapore Airlines Flight SQ 006, Boeing 747-412, 9V-SPK at Chiang Kai-Shek Airport, Taipei, Taiwan, on 31 October 2000* (Singapore: Ministry of Transport, 2002), iv. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 363.124650951249 SIN); "Crash Tarnishes Clean Record," BBC News, 1 November 2000, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/1001007.stm.

35 National Transportation Safety Committee, *Investigation of Aircraft Accident SilkAir Flight MI 185 Boeing B737-300, 9V-TRF, Musi River, Palembang, Indonesia, 19 December 1997: Final Report* (Indonesia: Department of Communications, 2000), 1. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 363.12465 INV)

36 Mike Eggleton, "The Surge of Low-cost Carriers in Asia," Advito, accessed 17 June 2022, https://www.advito.com/resources/the-surge-of-low-cost-carriers-in-asia/.

37 Karamjit Kaut, "Tiger Airways Picks New Chief – An Airline Veteran," *Straits Times*, 11 November 2006, 6; Steve Thomson, "Get Outta Here with Scoot," *Straits Times*, 11 June 2012, 6. (From NewspaperSG); Singapore Airlines, *The Path of Progress: Annual Report FY2014/15* (Singapore: Singapore Airlines, 2015), 13, https://www.singaporeair.com/saar5/pdf/Investor-Relations/Annual-Report/annualreport1415.pdf.

38 Ann Williams, "Tigerair to Operate Under Scoot Brand from July," *Straits Times*, 15 June 2017, https://www.straitstimes.com/business/companies-markets/tigerair-to-operate-under-scoot-brand-from-july-25.

39 Singapore Airlines, *Annual Report FY2021/22* (Singapore: Singapore Airlines, 2022), 50, https://www.singaporeair.com/saar5/pdf/Investor-Relations/Annual-Report/annualreport2022.pdf.

40 "Singapore Airlines Posts First Annual Net Loss in 48-year History After COVID-19 Cripples Demand," *Channel NewsAsia*, 14 May 2020, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/business/singapore-airlines-sia-q4-full-year-results-covid-19-coronavirus-940016.

41 Ven Sreenivasan, "Exclusive Interview with SIA CEO: How the National Carrier Powered Through the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Straits Times*, 31 May 2022, https://www.straitstimes.com/business/all-set-to-fly-high-how-sia-powered-through-an-unprecedented-crisis-during-the-covid-19-pandemic.

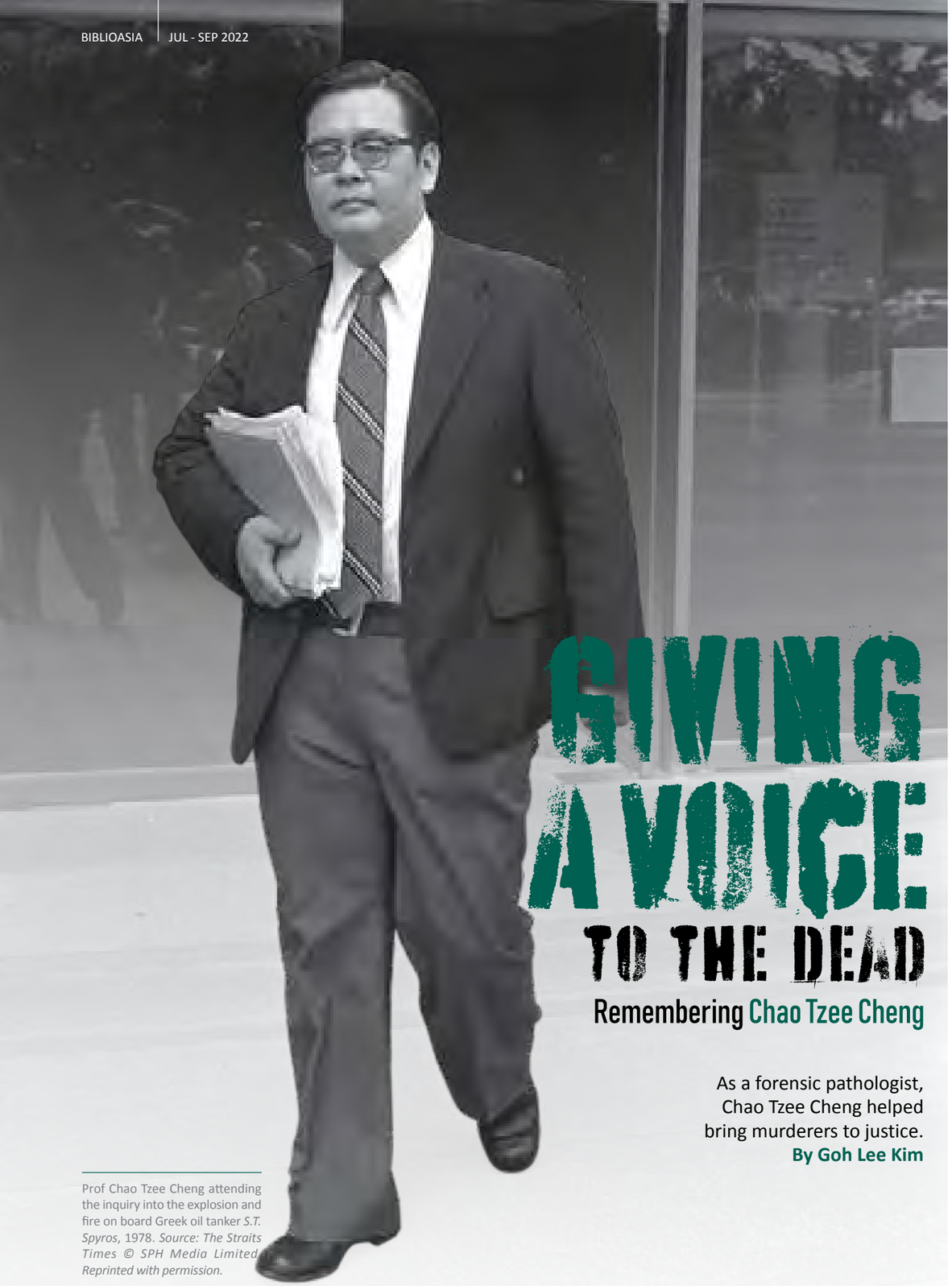
42 Lau Kong Cheen, "A Great Way to Fly – Will SIA's Brand Be Affected by Its New Dining Service and Tours?" *Today*, 9 October 2020, https://www.todayonline.com/commentary/great-way-fly-will-sias-brand-be-affected-its-new-dining-service-and-tours.

43 Claudia Tan, "SIA Posts First Quarterly Net Profit of S$85m Since Onset of Pandemic," *Business Times*, 24 February 2022, https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/companies-markets/sia-posts-first-quarterly-net-profit-of-s85m-since-onset-of-pandemic.

44 Sreenivasan, "Exclusive Interview with SIA CEO: How the National Carrier Powered Through the Covid-19 Pandemic."

45 Karamjit Kaur, "Plan Early to Avoid Peak Prices: SIA CEO Goh Choon Phong," Youtube, 29 May 2022, https://youtu.be/N-siNYaxQoA.

46 "Exceptional Experiences Await Singapore Airlines Customers at All-new SilverKris and KrisFlyer Gold Lounges," Singapore Airlines, 30 May 2022, https://www.singaporeair.com/en_UK/at/media-centre/press-release/article/?q=en_UK/2022/April-June/ne0522-220530.



GIVING A VOICE: TO THE DEAD

Remembering Chao Tzee Cheng

As a forensic pathologist, Chao Tzee Cheng helped bring murderers to justice.

By Goh Lee Kim

Prof Chao Tzee Cheng attending the inquiry into the explosion and fire on board Greek oil tanker *S.T. Spyros*, 1978. *Source: The Straits Times © SPH Media Limited. Reprinted with permission.*

Most people shy away from facing the aftermath of violent deaths. Fortunately for Singapore, however, the late Professor Chao Tzee Cheng was not like most people. Over the course of a career spanning more than 30 years, he would help ensure that justice was served.[1]

During that time, Chao played a pivotal role in raising the standards of forensic medicine, both in Singapore and the region. Along the way, he worked on some of the most high-profile crimes and mass disasters in Singapore.

Blazing the Trail in Forensic Pathology

Chao became a forensic pathologist by accident, literally. After completing his medical degree at Hong Kong University in 1961, he returned to Singapore where he had initially aimed to specialise in surgery.[2] However, while on honeymoon in Johor, the car that he and his wife were travelling in plunged into a ravine. The accident put him in a week-long coma and also weakened his right hand. This dashed his hopes of becoming a surgeon.[3] Undaunted, Chao trained himself to use his left hand and set his sights on pathology instead.

In 1966, Chao left for Hammersmith Hospital in London to obtain a diploma in clinical pathology under a one-year Colombo Plan Scholarship. His boss back in Singapore suggested that he specialise in forensic pathology and as a result, Chao's scholarship was extended by another year and a half so that he could obtain his diplomas in forensic pathology and medical jurisprudence.

Chao returned to Singapore in 1969 where he established the first dedicated forensic pathology section within the Department of Pathology at Singapore General Hospital. Two years later, he was appointed to the position of Forensic Pathologist.

Before Chao, there were no professionally trained forensic pathologists in Singapore. In an oral history interview, he recalled that Coroner's cases used to be handled by ordinary pathologists with no specialised training. As a result, standards varied from person to person. Upon his return to Singapore, Chao revamped the entire system. Under his watch, forensic pathologists began visiting crime scenes as a matter of course. Prior to that, pathologists would simply examine dead bodies in the mortuary. "One by one, you just carry on the work, finish the post-mortem and give a report and that's all. But I thought there is much more than that," he said.[4]

A 15-year-old Chao Tzee Cheng (right) with his friend Wong Sin Eng in Punggol, 1949. *Wong Sin Eng Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

Solving Unnatural and Violent Deaths

Chao's work as a forensic pathologist involved conducting autopsies in cases of sudden, unnatural or violent deaths, using his forensic skills to reconstruct the cause of death and give the dead a voice.

In a piece penned for the *Law Gazette* after Chao's death in 2000, Clinical Professor Chee Yam Cheng, Master of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore, wrote that Chao had "the knowledge of a medical doctor, the sharp eyes and instinct of Sherlock Holmes, and the oratorical skills and confidence of a lawyer in court".[5]

"[S]ometimes, in murder cases, the accused always gives you a story that is advantageous to themselves," Chao had said, "but you got to prove that they are wrong… by… what we called the 'silent' witnesses… all the trace evidence that is on the scene, the injuries that the deceased person, the victim has and so on… we got to build up from all these evidence to prove that the story is not correct. And we have done that many, many times."[6]

Chao was put to the test in his first case after his return from London when he testified in the trial of Ng Yio Gee in 1970. Ng was accused of killing his fiancée, Lim Aye Siok. Not only did Chao have to interpret another pathologist's findings without conducting the autopsy personally, he was also a rookie who had yet to make his mark then.

While it appeared to be a classic case of drowning, Chao determined the cause of death as strangulation due to the butterfly-shaped bruises on Lim's neck. He also cited new research, which showed that the frothing in her mouth could be the result of strangulation. This contrasted with the findings from the original pathologist as well as Ng's claim of a double suicide. Later, aware that his testimony would not square with Chao's findings, Ng admitted to lying about the suicide pact and was eventually found guilty of causing grievous hurt.[7]

Chao subsequently worked on some challenging cases, such as that of K. Rajendran in 1972. Rajendran had been assaulted and his body laid across railway tracks to make his death look like a suicide or accident.[8] In 1985, Chao's testimony also helped convict Michael Tan and his accomplice in the murder of Tan's landlady and her two children. Tan claimed to have stabbed her by accident, but this account

Goh Lee Kim is a Librarian with the National Library, Singapore. She is part of the team that curates and promotes access to the library's digital collections.

was disproven in court by Chao.[9] In 1995, he was also involved in the high-profile case of Briton John Martin Scripps, a skilled butcher, who was convicted of murdering and dismembering South African tourist Gerard George Lowe.[10]

The late criminal lawyer Subhas Anandan recalled that Chao once saved a man from the gallows even though Chao was testifying for the prosecution. "Only once, in all these years, did he ever agree with my arguments, and I got a murder charge reduced," said the veteran lawyer who had known Chao since 1971. "[E]very time I heard he was going to be called up for my cases, I would go, 'Alamak! Not this fella again!'"[11]

Anandan was likely referring to the trial of Karnan Arumugam for the death of brothel caretaker Lim Kar Teck in 1992. Arumugam's murder charge was reduced to wrongful confinement and causing grievous hurt after the judge agreed with Chao that Lim's suffocation due to gagging was "fortuitous" as gagging was "seldom intentionally homicidal" and not necessarily fatal.[12]

One of Chao's most best-known cases concerned Filipino domestic helper Flor Contemplacion, who was hanged in Singapore in 1995 for the murder of fellow domestic helper, Della Maga, and her young charge, Nicholas Huang. The Philippines National Bureau of Investigation had disputed the findings of Singapore's Institute of Science and Forensic Medicine (ISFM) that Maga had been strangled. Instead, they alleged that her body showed signs of a savage beating inflicted by a man. This case attracted intense attention in the Philippines, and there were widespread protests in the country that threatened bilateral relations.[13] In the face of overwhelming pressure and scrutiny, Chao stood firmly by the ISFM's findings. ISFM was eventually exonerated when two independent panels of experts corroborated Singapore's findings.[14]

Chao was often invited by other countries to consult in difficult cases. These included the Ipoh *loh shee fun* (rice noodles) food poisoning incident in 1998 in which noodles contaminated with aflatoxin claimed 14 lives.[15] He also helped with the 1984 inquiry into the death of Ponniah Rajaratnam, a retired Singaporean Deputy Commissioner of Police and former Director of the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau. Rajaratnam was then heading Brunei's Anti-Corruption Bureau, and it was alleged that he had been kidnapped and strangled while in Brunei. However, Chao determined that Rajaratnam died of drowning and no foul play was suspected.[16]

Investigating Mass Disasters

Along with criminal cases, Chao was also reputed for his forensic prowess in investigating some of the worst disasters in the modern history of Singapore. These include the explosion on board Greek oil tanker *S.T. Spyros* in 1978, the Sentosa Cable Car tragedy in 1983, the collapse of Hotel New World in 1986, the explosion at Ginza Plaza in 1992 and the crash of SilkAir Flight 185 in 1997.[17]

An explosion occurred on board Greek oil tanker *S.T. Spyros* on 12 October 1978. Prof Chao Tzee Cheng was instrumental in bringing to light how the accident had happened. *Image reproduced from Paul Wee, et al., "48 Die in Ship Blast Horror," Straits Times 13 October 1978, 1. (From NewspaperSG).*


Death toll likely to rise

48 DIE IN SHIP BLAST HORROR

Search goes on for the missing

In a time before DNA analysis was possible, Chao and his forensics team often worked round the clock to identify the large number of dead bodies, which were often ravaged beyond recognition.

Senwan Jamal, Senior Medical Technologist at the Department of Pathology, Singapore General Hospital, recalled his experience working with Chao on the Hotel New World disaster: "[T]he bodies from Hotel New World came in a trickle because of the demanding rescue work. In the end, it was not 100 bodies, but about 33. Even then I remember our supervisor Prof Chao Tzee Cheng's quick thinking. It was in the 1980s and we were using film cameras. With so many bodies, we needed to be fast and could not wait for the photos to be developed, so he told us to buy two Polaroid cameras from Chinatown, using his own money, so that we could photograph the bodies right away."[18]

The *Spyros* incident on 12 October 1978 was described as the "worst peacetime disaster in Singapore", killing 76 people and injuring 69 others.[19] Chao was instrumental in bringing to light how the explosion had occurred.

He began to sort the dead into groups, based on how they died. Some had severe burns, while others had less severe burns or died from carbon monoxide poisoning. "So from then, I plotted the position on the plan [of the *Spyros*] and found that actually you can trace the path of fire. [T]hose in the direct path of fire would be burned very severely, those outside would be less… we went to the scene and found out [that] the origin of the fire was from the fuel tank," explained Chao.[20]

Advocating Safety

Because of his work, safety was an issue close to Chao's heart, and he often emphasised the importance of accident prevention. As Deputy Chairman of the Home Safety Committee of the National Safety First Council (NSFC), Chao actively advocated for safety through studies, videos and campaigns in Singapore, particularly those concerning home accidents.[21]

"It grieves me to know there is more than one case of people getting burnt or scalded every day and 40 per cent of these cases involve people below the age of 11," he said in a 1986 interview when his book, *How to Prevent Home Accidents*, was launched.[22]

Chao also devoted time to other safety initiatives. He was a member of the Toy Safety Authority of Singapore[23] and helped form the Venom and Toxin Research Group in 1985.[24] In the 1980s, he supported an awareness drive on the dangers of lightning.[25]

Chao also helped to usher in new regulations to save lives. In the course of his work, he uncovered a defect in a brand of gas water heater that resulted in the deaths of seven people between 1965 and 1974. They had died because the defect caused a build-up of carbon monoxide in poorly ventilated rooms. That particular brand was subsequently recalled and new regulations were implemented to ensure adequate ventilation in homes.[26]

Chao's report on road traffic deaths between 1969 and 1973 also prompted the NSFC to recommend a compulsory medical test for suspected drunk drivers in 1974, which consequently led to the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill of 1976.[27]

Honouring and Remembering

In addition to his regular work as a forensic pathologist, Chao also taught generations of medical professionals as well as helmed local and international medical associations. He was president of the Indo-


Prof Chao Tzee Cheng receiving an award from then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong at the 30th Singapore-Malaysia Congress of Medicine in 1996. The award was in appreciation for his contributions as the former Master of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

NOTES

1 Sng Ewe Hui Jimmy, *The Science of Medical Detection: 100 Years of Pathology, 1903–2003* (Singapore: Department of Pathology, Singapore General Hospital, 2003), 52, 85. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING q616.0095957 SNG)

2 Chao Tzee Cheng, oral history interview by Lee Liang Chian, 14 October 1995, transcript and MP3 audio, Reel/Disc 1 of 7, National Archives of Singapore (accession no. 001573), 1–5.

3 Chao Tzee Cheng, oral history interview, 14 Oct 1995, Reel/Disc 1 of 7, 8–10.

4 Chao Tzee Cheng, interview, 14 Oct 1995, Reel/Disc 1 of 7, 13–14.

5 Gregory Vijayendran, "Dead Men do Tell Tales," *Law Gazette: An Official Publication of the Law Society of Singapore*, June 2000, https://v1.lawgazette.com.sg/2000-6/focus2.htm.

6 Chao Tzee Cheng, interview, 14 Oct 1995, Reel/Disc 2 of 7, 27.

7 Chao Tzee Cheng and Audrey Perera, *Murder Is My Business: Medical Investigations into Crime* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 1999), 17–26. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 364.152095957 CHA); T.F. Hwang, "Fiancee Murder Trial: Defence Surprised," *Straits Times*, 21 March 1970, 4; "The Case of the 'Butterfly' Death," *New Paper*, 5 March 2000, 9. (From NewspaperSG)

8 Chao and Perera, *Murder Is My Business*, 94–106; "Injuries Made a Doctor Suspect Foul Play," *Straits Times*, 18 July 1972, 17. (From NewspaperSG)

9 Chao and Perera, *Murder Is My Business*, 44–53; Sit Yin Fong, "Two Get Death for Killing Mum, Kids," *Singapore Monitor*, 10 April 1985, 1. (From NewspaperSG)

10 Tan Ooi Boon, *Body Parts: A British Serial Killer in Singapore* (Singapore: Times Book International, 1996), 14–15, 147–150. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 364.1523095957 TAN); Chao and Perera, *Murder Is My Business*, 132–146.

11 Ernest Luis, "Doctor Who Learned From the Dead," *New Paper*, 5 March 2000, 9. (From NewspaperSG)

12 "Man Escapes Death After Murder Charge Is Reduced," *Straits Times*, 16 October 1992, 31. (From NewspaperSG)

13 *Flor Contemplacion: Facts of the Case* (Singapore: Ministry of Information and the Arts, 1995), 14–15. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 364.1523095957 FLO); "Singapore Medical Experts Dispute Manila Findings," *Straits Times*, 1 April 1995, 20; Zuraidah Ibrahim, "Singapore Pathologists '100 Per Cent Correct'," *Straits Times*, 15 July 1995, 1. (From NewspaperSG)

14 *Flor Contemplacion*, 14–15; "Singapore Medical Experts Dispute Manila Findings"; Zuraidah Ibrahim, "Singapore Pathologists '100 Per Cent Correct'."

15 Yaw Yen Chong, "S'pore Experts in Ipoh to Help Probe Poison Deaths," *Straits Times,* 26 October 1988, 40; Yaw Yan Chong, "Poisoning of Liver the Cause," *Straits Times*, 28 October 1988, 17; "Aflatoxin Likely Cause of Seven Deaths in Perak," *Straits Times*, 31 May 1989, 16. (From NewspaperSG)

16 Elena Chong, "'Alive When He Entered the Water'," *Straits Times*, 12 September 1984, 12; Elena Chong, "Coroner: No Foul Play in Ex-CPIB Man's Death," *Straits Times*, 23 September 1984, 1. (From NewspaperSG)

17 "Eight of Nine Who Died Could Have Been Saved," *Straits Times*, 6 February 1974, 8. (From NewspaperSG); Chee Yam Cheng, "Citation of 1998 SMA Honorary Membership, Prof Chao Tzee Cheng," SMA News 30, no. 5 (1998), https://www.sma.org.sg/sma_news/3005/news/3005n7.htm; Committee of Inquiry, *Report on the Explosion at Ginza Plaza* (Singapore: Subordinate Courts, 1993), 1, 164. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 363.11969095957 SIN); Karamjit Kaur, "Three Passengers Identified from Ring, Hair and Fingerprint," *Straits Times*, 6 January 1998, 29. (From NewspaperSG)

18 Ministry of Health Singapore, *Caring for Our People: 50 Years of Healthcare in Singapore* (Singapore: MOH Holdings Pte Ltd, 2015), 116–17, https://www.mohh.com.sg/Documents/book/caring-for-our-people-50-years-of-healthcare-in-singapore.pdf.

19 "Spyros Last Major Tanker Blast CID Investigated," *New Paper*, 16 March 1990, 4. (From NewspaperSG)

20 Chao Tzee Cheng, interview, 14 Nov 1995, Reel/Disc 6 of 7, 88.

21 "Beware the Killers in Your Home," *New Nation*, 30 August 1975, 18/19. (From NewspaperSG); National Safety First Council of Singapore, *10th Anniversary Souvenir Magazine, 1966–1976* (Singapore: The Council, 1976), 87–100. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RCLOS 614.80605957 NAT)

22 Yeo Kim Seng, "Prof Chao: 'My Heart Bleeds…'," *Straits Times*, 26 July 1986, 2. (From NewspaperSG); Chao Tzee Cheng, *How to Prevent Home Accidents* (Singapore: Federal Publications, 1986), 1–3. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 614.853 CHA)

Pacific Association of Law, Medicine and Science between 1983 and 1992, and he proposed the establishment of Singapore's Medico-Legal Society in 1972.[28] Awards he received include the Public Administration Meritorious Service Medal in 1995 for the Flor Contemplacion case and the Singapore Medical Association Honorary Membership, its highest honour, in 1998.[29]

While Chao's work was undoubtedly morbid, he did not let that define him. Chao was a charismatic man known for his wit, joviality and larger-than-life personality, and one who enjoyed various interests and hobbies. His love for singing had bagged him numerous trophies in competitions, such that he was even called the "Pavarotti of the Medical Alumni Karaoke" because he could sing in Italian.[30]

Chao was also a connoisseur of good food and drink, especially fine whisky and XO brandy, hence his other nickname, "Fat Chao", among his friends.[31] Even after having visited the mortuary or a crime scene, he could still eat without feeling queasy. He even admitted to taking his meals in the mortuary. "Well of course you have to! For instance, when Spyros happened, we had 76 bodies all at once! You can't go home!"[32]

In 1999, Chao co-authored *Murder Is My Business: Medical Investigations into Crime* – a book based on his better-known cases – with journalist Audrey Perera.[33]

Chao reached the pinnacle of his career when he was appointed head of the Institute of Science and Forensic Medicine.[34] Even after his retirement in 1997, Chao continued to serve tirelessly as the institute's Special Forensic Advisor until his sudden demise due to heart disease while visiting his sister in New York in February 2000.[35] Such were Chao's accomplishments and reputation that after his death, accolades and tributes poured in far and wide from friends, colleagues and those who knew him.[36]

In his eulogy, Chao's nephew Dr Wong Chiang Yin, who was also the Honorary Secretary (37th to 40th Councils) of the Singapore Medical Association, noted: "[T]he job does not make a man great; it is the substance of the man that fills and defines the post. For all intents and purposes, [Prof Chao] was [the forensic medical practice] of Singapore."[37] ♦

Prof Chao Tzee Cheng passed away in New York in February 2000. *Image reproduced from Karen Wong, "Top Forensic Pathologist Chao Dies in New York," Straits Times, 23 February 2000, 3. (From NewspaperSG).*

Top forensic pathologist Chao dies in New York

23 "'Magic Egg' Could Spell Danger If Swallowed," *Singapore Monitor*, 17 February 1984, 6. (From NewspaperSG); Chan Chee Seng, "Speech by Mr Chan Chee Seng, Senior Parliamentary Secretary (Trade and Industry), and Member of Parliament for Jalan Besar, at the Official Inauguration of the Toy Safety Authority of Singapore (TSAS) at Shangri-La Hotel on 24 March '82 at 12.00 Noon," transcript. (From National Archives of Singapore, document no. ccs19820324s)

24 Chua Chin Chye, "What to Do When Bitten," *Straits Times*, 15 August 1986, 25; "The Pong Pong and Other Forbidden Fruit," *Straits Times*, 17 November 1986, 15. (From NewspaperSG)

25 T.C. Chao, J.E. Pakiam and J. Chia, "A Study of Lightning Deaths in Singapore," *Singapore Medical Journal* 22, no. 3 (1981): 150–57, http://smj.sma.org.sg/2203/2203smj10.pdf; "Stay Safe When It Rains," *Straits Times*, 21 November 1982, 6; David Miller, "Greater Chance of Being Struck by Lightning in S'pore," *Straits Times*, 2 August 1993, 24. (From NewspaperSG)

26 "PUB's Safety Ruling on Gas Heaters," *Straits Times*, 1 December 1975, 15. (From NewspaperSG); Chao Tzee Cheng, "Forensic Medicine in Singapore," *The American Journal of Forensic Medicine and Pathology* 9, no. 2 (1988): 179–81, https://journals.lww.com/amjforensicmedicine/Citation/1988/06000/Forensic_Medicine_in_Singapore.19.aspx; Seah Han Cheow and Chao Tzee Cheng, "Carbon Monoxide Poisoning in Singapore," *Singapore Medical Journal* 16, no. 3 (1975): 174–76, http://smj.sma.org.sg/1603/1603smj3.pdf.

27 Leslie Fong, "Move to Curb Drunken Driving," *Straits Times*, 8 November 1974, 1; "Drinking and Driving: The Real Danger," *Straits Times*, 11 August 1975, 11; "Drunken Driving Arrests: Now Blood Test Is Obligatory," *Straits Times*, 26 March 1976, 9. (From NewspaperSG)

28 Chao Tzee Cheng, 14 Oct 1995, Reel/Disc 1 of 7; Christina Cheang, "Move to Form a Society for Lawyers, Doctors," *Straits Times*, 19 May 1972, 19. (From NewspaperSG)

29 Chee, "Citation of 1998 SMA Honorary Membership, Prof Chao Tzee Cheng."

30 Lingam Ponnampalam, "Joker, Eater, Singer…," *New Paper*, 23 February 2000, 8. (From NewspaperSG)

31 Ponnampalam, "Joker, Eater, Singer…"

32 Carol Leong, "Dead Line," *Straits Times*, 12 October 1990, 9. (From NewspaperSG)

33 Ponnampalam, "Joker, Eater, Singer…"

34 "Forensic Science Gears Up for Future," *Straits Times*, 21 January 1990, 20; "Inside the World-class Forensic Institute," *Straits Times*, 24 August 1995, 2. (From NewspaperSG)

35 Pauline Leong, "Mister Autopsy Lives on in 'Chaozy Bears'," *Straits Times*, 10 April 2000, 48. (From NewspaperSG)

36 Karen Wong, "Top Forensic Pathologist Chao Dies in New York," *Straits Times*, 23 February 2000, 3; Ponnampalam, "Joker, Eater, Singer…"

37 Wong Chiang Yin, "In Memoriam: Prof Chao Tzee Cheng (1934–2000)," *SMA News* 32, no. 2 (2000), https://www.sma.org.sg/sma_news/3202/eulogy.pdf.

#SGStoryTellers Series

Introducing videos about Singapore, about the people who lived, the food we love, and the way things were. From our collections come your stories.

From Book to Cook

Find out what old recipes can tell us about local history and food heritage!

Watch now!
go.gov.sg/nlb-frombooktocook

stories from biblioasia

Stories about buried secrets, lost loves, new legacies.

Watch now!
go.gov.sg/nlb-biblioasia

The Time Travelling Trio

Rediscover classic games, snacks and places from Singapore's past.

Watch now!
go.gov.sg/nlb-timetravellingtrio

LAB-25 Libraries and Archives Blueprint 2025

NLB | National Library Board Singapore