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Vol. 19 Issue 01 APR-JUN 2023

BELACAN'S FISHY ORIGINS

p. 04

Director's Note

Mee siam. Sayur lodeh. Udang asam pedas. What these dishes have in common is that they use a secret ingredient that you can't see, but can definitely taste – *belacan*. Made from fermented shrimp that has been dried and salted, frying *belacan* may get you the stink eye from your neighbours, but there's a reason why versions of this flavouring ingredient are found throughout Southeast Asia: it adds a savoury punch that makes food delicious. Toffa Abdul Wahed's tour through an olfactory history of Southeast Asia is one that will undoubtedly tickle your taste buds.

From a tour of Southeast Asia, we turn to a part of Singapore few people have ventured to: Lim Chu Kang. Today, all manner of farms exist in the area. Its agricultural legacy is thanks in large part to one man: Neo Tiew. In the early 20th century, he began clearing the land, which led to farming villages springing up in area. Neo's life story is all the more amazing given that it was marked by unimaginable personal tragedy he was nonetheless able to overcome. The story by Alvin Tan is a great read with fascinating pictures about a colourful character in Singapore's history.

While life in prewar Singapore was hard, residents here managed to find time to unwind. Then, as now, one of the key forms of entertainment was sports. One sport that was popular before the war was tennis. Back then, two titans stood astride the Malayan tennis scene: Khoo Hooi Hye and Lim Bong Soo. Khoo actually played at Wimbledon (he lost in the second round, sadly), while Lim had a tennis racket named after him, the Lim Bong Soo Special. Abhishek Mehrotra serves up a wonderful story about two forgotten sporting heroes.

We take plenty of things for granted today but back in the 1880s, even something as basic as having a bath was a problem. If you lived in the city before water was delivered by pipes from the reservoir, taking a bath might mean washing oneself in a river or canal, in full view of anyone passing by. Jesse O'Neill's history of public bathhouses in late 19th-century Singapore offers an unsanitised look at how the Municipality attempted to solve a very human problem.

In addition, don't miss the story on Portugal's linguistic legacy in Southeast Asia, the interesting dive into Singapore's earliest courthouses, a jaunt through offices of old to see how typewriters liberated women and a trip to a unique housing estate that was set up by the Singapore Teachers' Union.

Singapore may be a small country, but as you can see, its history is nothing to sniff at.

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"Scooping for Shrimps" by Ong Seng Chew (undated). Silver gelatin print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm. Gift of the artist. Collection of National Gallery Singapore. *Courtesy of National Heritage Board.*

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)

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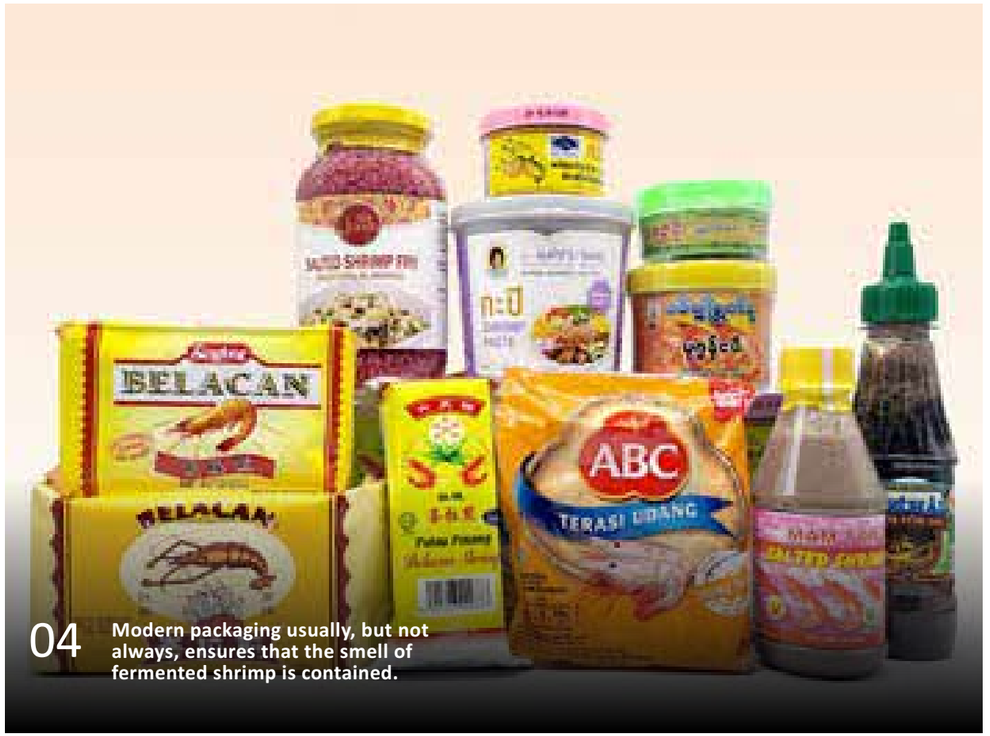
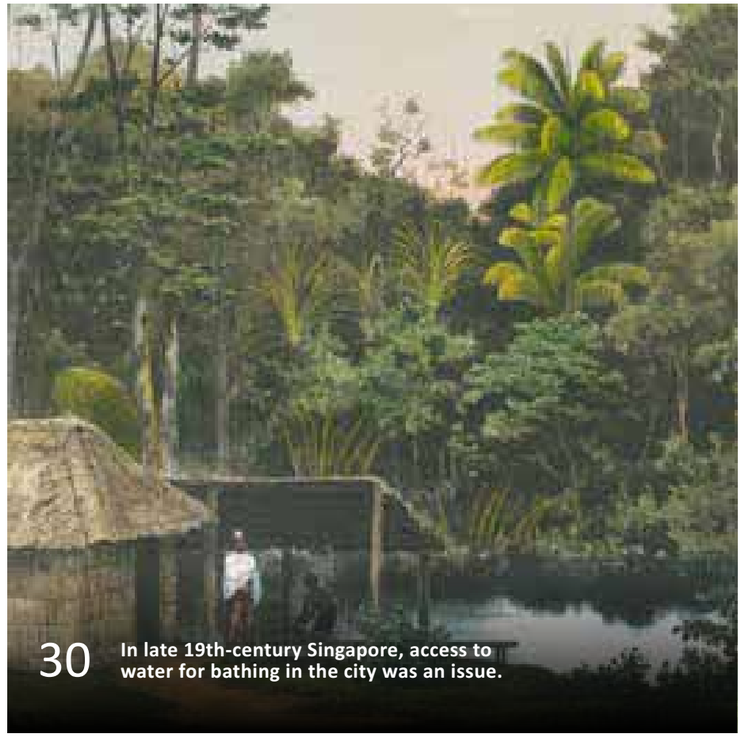
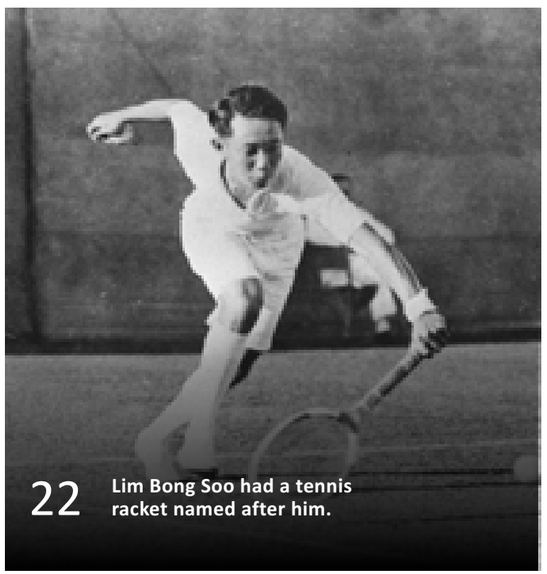


04 Modern packaging usually, but not always, ensures that the smell of fermented shrimp is contained.


30 In late 19th-century Singapore, access to water for bathing in the city was an issue.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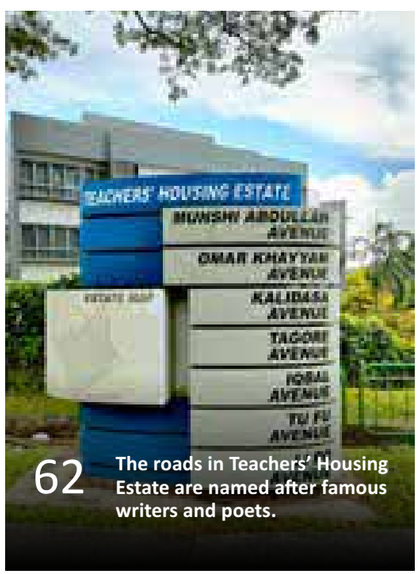

62 The roads in Teachers' Housing Estate are named after famous writers and poets.

Image credits, clockwise from top left: Jimmy Yap; National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board; Sharon Teng; *Coleman's Singapore* by T.H.H. Hancock, 1986; Singapore Sports Council.

BELACAN

Caviar? Or Vile and Disgusting?

Fermented shrimp is a staple in many cuisines of Southeast Asia, though it takes some getting used to.

By Toffa Abdul Wahed

(Above) *Belacan* sold in a market in Malaysia, 2007. Photo by Yun Huang Yong. *Image reproduced from flickr (Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic; CC BY-SA 2.0).*

(Facing page) Different types of shrimp paste from Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam. *Photo by Jimmy Yap.*

While there is friendly rivalry between Singapore and Malaysia over who makes better food, for one notable family in Singapore, the best *sambal belacan* (a spicy condiment made from shrimp paste) indisputably comes from Malaysia, though only from a very special source.

In 2019, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong conveyed his thanks to the Malaysian queen for regularly sending over her *sambal belacan* to his family. "Thank you for your warmth and kindness, sending my father (and me) your special sambal belacan all these years!" he tweeted on 28 October 2019. "I hope you enjoy making it as much as we enjoy eating it!" A few days before, Raja Permaisuri Agong Tunku Hajah Azizah Aminah Maimunah Iskandariah had shared on her Instagram account a letter written in July 2009 by former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. He wrote that the six packets of *sambal belacan* she had given him were delicious. "I shared them with my two sons. They have all been consumed. It is the best chilli belacan we have tasted. Can my family have a few more?"[1] Since then, she has been regularly sending her *sambal belacan* across the Causeway.

Sambal belacan is a regular accompaniment to rice in Malay, Eurasian and Peranakan meals. It is made by pounding toasted *belacan* with chillies and adding calamansi lime juice, salt and sugar to that mixture. While it is popular with many people, its key ingredient, *belacan*, has a somewhat malodourous reputation.

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A fisherman with his *sondong* (push-net) to catch *udang geragau* (small shrimps). *Image reproduced from T.W. Burdon, Fisheries Survey Report, No. 2: The Fishing Gear of the State of Singapore (Singapore: Printed at the Government Printing Office, 1959), unpaginated (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RCLOS 639.2095957 BUR-[JSB]).*

Hugh Clifford, who served as Governor of the Straits Settlements between 1927 and 1929, referred to *belacan* as "that evil-smelling condiment which [had] been so ludicrously misnamed the Malayan Caviare" in his 1897 account of the Malay Peninsula. He wrote that the coasts reeked of "rank odours" as a result of women villagers "labouring incessantly in drying and salting the fish which [had] been taken by the men, or pounding prawns into *blâchan*" throughout the fishing season. The stench was so strong that "all the violence of the fresh, strong, monsoon winds" would only "partially purge" the villages of it.[2]

In his book, *A Descriptive Dictionary of the Indian Islands & Adjacent Countries* (1856), John Crawfurd, the former Resident of Singapore, describes balachong (*belacan*) as:

> "[A] condiment made of prawns, sardines, and other small fish, pounded and pickled. The proper Malay word is bâlachan [*belacan*], the Javanese trasi [*terasi*], and the Philippine bagon [*bagoong*]. This article is of universal use as a condiment, and one of the largest articles of native consumption throughout both the Malay and Philippine Archipelago. It is not confined, indeed, as a condiment to the Asiatic islanders, but is also largely used by the Birmese [Burmese], the Siamese, and Cochin-Chinese. It is, indeed, in great measure essentially the same article known to the Greeks and Romans under the name of garum, the produce of a Mediterranean fish."[3]

Today, the Malay term *belacan* is commonly used in Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei and parts of Indonesia to refer typically to shrimp paste. In Thailand, Laos and Cambodia, it is called *kapi*, which is borrowed from the term *ngapi* (literally "pressed fish") used in Myanmar, while it is referred to as *mắm tôm* or *mắm ruốc* in Vietnam.

Because it is rich in glutamates and nucleotides, *belacan* imparts savouriness to any dish, what is often described as "umami". Other foods that are rich in umami include fish sauce, soya sauce, kimchi, mushroom, ripe tomato, anchovy and cheese.

Making Belacan

A 17th-century account gives a remarkably detailed description of making *belacan*. In 1688, the English privateer William Dampier encountered people making a paste of small fish and shrimps called *balachaun* during his visit to Tonkin (North Vietnam). He saw how this process produced *nuke-mum* or *nước mắm* (fish sauce) as well. His account, published in 1699, provides one of the earliest Western descriptions of making fish/shrimp paste:

> "To make it, they throw the Mixture of Shrimps and small Fish into a sort of weak pickle made with Salt and Water, and put into a tight earthen Vessel or Jar. The Pickle being thus weak, it keeps not the Fish firm and hard, neither is it probably so designed, for the Fish are never gutted. Therefore in a short time they turn all into a mash in the Vessel; and when they have lain thus a good while, so that the Fish is reduced to a pap, they then draw off the liquor into fresh Jars, and preserve it for use. The masht Fish that remains behind is called *Balachaun*, and the liquor pour'd off is called *Nuke-Mum*."[4]

While some versions of *belacan* use fish, it is held that the best ones are made from shrimp. In 1783, the Irish orientalist William Marsden, who worked for the East India Company in Bencoolen (now Bengkulu), wrote about the differences between black and red *blachang* in his book, *The History of Sumatra*:

> "Blachang [*belacan*]… is a species of cavear, and is extremely offensive and disgusting to persons who are not accustomed to it, particularly the black kind, which is the most common. The best sort, or the red blachang, is made of the spawn of shrimps, or of the shrimps themselves, which they take about the mouths of rivers... The black sort, used by the lower class, is made of small fish, prepared in the same manner."[5]

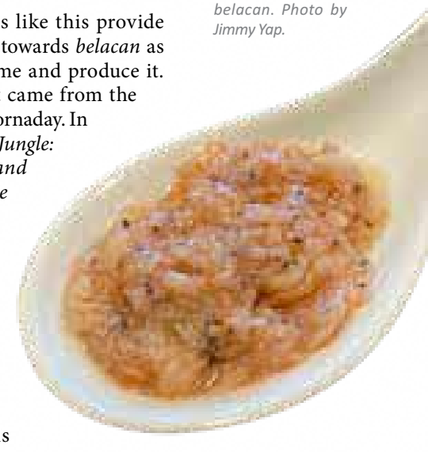
Fish and shrimp pastes have a very long history in Southeast Asia. Researchers believe that the techniques of fermenting fish most likely arose in areas on mainland Southeast Asia inhabited by communities who practised irrigated rice farming, had access to salt and faced seasonality in their fish stocks, which made preservation imperative. These techniques were then applied to the preservation of other raw ingredients such as shrimp and shellfish. They would later drift southwards throughout the rest of Southeast Asia.[6] A Mon stone inscription from the first century CE provides the earliest record of the importance of *ngapi* in the Burmese diet. *Ngapi* manufacturers were also found in the list of occupations on a 12th-century stone inscription and a 15th-century marble monument from Myanmar.[7] Inhabitants of the coastal cities of Pattani and Nakhon Si Thammarat (in present-day southern Thailand) used shrimp paste in their cooking as far back as the eighth century. These cities were then ruled by the Malay kingdom of Srivijaya from the island of Sumatra.[8]

"Evil", "Nauseating", "Noxious"

The smell associated with the making of *belacan* was noted by many observers. In the 1830s, the teacher, interpreter and writer Munshi Abdullah (Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir) visited a village market in Terengganu where he encountered what he perceived as a variety of "makanan yang busuk-busuk" (smelly, unwholesome foods), including *tempoyak* (fermented durian), different kinds of salted and fermented seafood products, *petai* (stink bean) and many types of *sambal belacan*. He criticised the lack of what he perceived as "makanan yang mulia" (wholesome foods) such as meat, ghee, eggs, butter and milk.[9]

In 1885, Scottish ornithologist Henry O. Forbes, wrote about his encounter with *terasi* and discovers, to his horror, that he had been eating it unknowingly for some time:

> "Having got up rather late one Sunday morning… I was discomfited by the terrific and unwonted odour of decomposition. 'My birds have begun to stink, confound it!' I exclaimed to myself. Hastily fetching down the box in which they were stored, I minutely examined and sniffed over every skin... but all of them seemed in perfect condition. In the neighbouring jungle, though I diligently searched half the morning, I could find no dead carcase, and nothing in the 'kitchen-midden,'... but at last in the kitchen itself I ran it to ground in a compact parcel done up in a banana leaf.
>
> 'What on the face of creation is this?' I said to the cook, touching it gingerly.
>
> 'Oh! Master, that is trassi.'
>
> 'Trassi? What is *trassi*, in the name of goodness!'
>
> 'Good for eating, master; – in stew.'
>
> 'Have *I* been eating it?'
>
> 'Certainly, master; it is *most* excellent (*enak sekali*).'
>
> 'You born fool! Do you wish to poison me and to die yourself?'
>
> 'May I have a goitre (*daik gondok*), master, but it *is* excellent!' he asseverated...
>
> Notwithstanding these vehement assurances, I made it disappear in the depths of the jungle... I had then to learn that in every dish, native or European, that I had eaten since my arrival in the East, this Extract of Decomposition was mixed as a spice, and it would have been difficult to convince myself that I would come by-and-bye knowingly to eat it daily without the slightest abhorrence."[10]



Cincalok in a Chinese soup spoon. *Cincalok* is a fermented shrimp product made from the same tiny shrimp (*Acetes* spp.) used in *belacan*. *Photo by Jimmy Yap.*

Detailed written accounts like this provide insights into people's attitudes towards *belacan* as well as the people who consume and produce it. A similarly degrading account came from the American naturalist William Hornaday. In his 1885 book, *Two Years in the Jungle: The Experiences of a Hunter and Naturalist in India, Ceylon, the Malay Peninsula and Borneo*, Hornaday remarked how the Chinese fishermen in a village at Sungei Bulu (most probably referring to Sungai Buloh), Selangor, "were engaged in catching prawns and making them up into a stinking paste called *blachang*". He wrote: "Every house in the village is

tumble-down, rickety and dirty beyond description, and the village smells even worse than it looks. The Chinamen live more like hogs than human beings; and, for my part, I would rather take up quarters in a respectable pig-sty than in such house as those are."[11]

Enraged by a late-16th-century description of food written by Antonio de Morga (then lieutenant governor of the Philippines), José Rizal – the Filipino nationalist whose political writings inspired the revolution against the Spanish colonial government – wrote in 1890: "This is another preoccupation of the Spaniards who, like any other nation, treat food to which they are not accustomed or is unknown to them with disgust… This fish that Morga mentions, that cannot be good until it begins to rot, is bagoong and those who have eaten it and tasted it know that it neither is nor should be rotten."[12]

Additionally, there were accounts about the supposed effects of *belacan* on health and sanitation leading to disease outbreaks. In *Picturesque Burma, Past and Present* (1897), British travel writer Alice Hart recounted that during a cholera epidemic in Yandoon, an English official imposed a ban on *ngapi* production because he was convinced that its stench exacerbated the situation. (At the time, some people still believed that diseases and epidemics were caused by miasmas or noxious vapours instead of pathogens or germs.) However, the order was so unpopular that it was eventually withdrawn, along with the officer involved.[13]

Hart also wrote that Catholic priests in Mandalay tested the theory that leprosy was caused by the consumption of decomposing fish. They conducted experiments in leper homes, which involved removing *ngapi* from the diet of the lepers in hopes that they might recover from the disease. The lepers, however, returned to their usual diet after a month as "their desire to taste ngapee again was greater than the hope of being cured".[14]

The Belacan Trade

In 1856, with the passing of the Conservancy Act, trades carried out within the municipality that were defined as offensive and dangerous (including melting tallow, boiling offal or blood, sago manufacture, running brick, pottery or lime kilns, and storing hay, straw, wood or coal) had to be registered and licensed. The new law did not affect the *belacan* trade for four decades, but the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements amended it in 1896 to include the "drying and sorting of fish, and the drying or sorting or storing of *blachan*". With that, the owner of a *belacan* factory or store would need to register for an annual licence as it was a "manufactory or place of business from which offensive or unwholesome smells arise".[15] There were reports in Singapore of people being fined for storing *belacan* for trade in buildings without a licence within the municipality. For instance, in December 1897, a Chinese man named Lee Pow was fined 50 dollars for storing 280 bags of *belacan* in a house on Cecil Street without a licence.[16]

Although the *belacan* industry in Singapore and Malaya might not have been as economically important as the rubber, tin or even dried and salted fish trades, it was still significant. *Belacan* was a cheap provision for tin miners living in the major tin-mining areas such as Perak, Selangor and Sungei Ujong (now known as Seremban). They ate it with rice to make the meal more flavourful. The traveller and orientalist Thomas J. Newbold wrote in 1839 that Melaka traded items like *belacan*, salted fish, opium, specie, fish roe and tobacco for rice, tin, gold dust, ivory and ebony with states located in the interior. He also noted that Melaka exported a "considerable quantity of *blachang*" along

Mak Piah dan laut seperti lagu dan irama

Sejak 35 tahun habiskan usia menyondong udang

Mak Piah uses a *sondong* (push-net) to catch *udang geragau* (small shrimps) for making *belacan*. *Source: Berita Harian, 9 July 1983. © SPH Media Limited. Permission required for reproduction.*

Detail from a 1937 survey map of Singapore showing three *belacan* factories in Kallang (circled). The Kallang River is seen along the left and bottom parts of the map. *Accession no. SP006035, Survey Department Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

with other commodities like hides, pepper, bricks and tiles as well as some ebony and ivory to Singapore.[17]

In his 1923 report, marine biologist David G. Stead states that *belacan* was "of very large importance" in the fish trade in many parts of Malaya. Stead had travelled along the Malayan coasts in the early 1920s to survey local fisheries and come up with recommendations for developing the industry. He explained that the fisheries in Province Wellesley (now known as Seberang Perai, a city in the state of Penang) and along the coasts of Perak and Selangor produced large quantities of *belacan*, whereas the growing fishery in Johor's Kukup produced considerable amounts. He highlighted Bagan Luar, a fishing village located across from Penang Island, as the most important place in Malaya in terms of *belacan* manufacture and export. The other major site along the Strait of Malacca was Bagan Si Api Api.[18] This town, which developed in the rich estuary where Sumatra's Rokan River meets the Strait of Malacca, was home to an industrial fishery that produced a yearly average of nearly 30 million kilograms of fish and *belacan* between 1898 and 1928.[19]

Belacan in Singapore

Singapore played a vital role regionally as an entrepôt for *belacan* as well as other products like canned and salted fish.[20] Singapore was the principal importer and exporter of *belacan* for the Straits Settlements. The bulk of the exports went to Java. Between 1920 and 1927, for instance, the Straits Settlements exported almost 16,000 tons of *belacan* to Java, amounting to almost $3,100,000. The next two largest amounts exported from the Straits Settlements via Singapore were to British India and Burma (about 8,400 tons), and Siam (about 6,700 tons) during the same period.[21]

Even after the dissolution of the Straits Settlements in 1946, Singapore continued its role as a major distribution centre for *belacan*; this time, it was for the Federation of Malaya.[22]

In 1900, there were 36 registered *belacan* factories within Singapore's Municipal Area. The number, however, decreased over time; by 1939, only three were left.[23] Maps produced between the 1930s and 1950s indicate three *belacan* factories at the Kallang Basin, with two located right by the Kallang River. Parts of these buildings appear to be submerged in water, suggesting that they were built on stilts. Each building also had an attached large wooden platform, most likely used for laying out and drying the shrimp paste.[24]

According to the *Annual Report of the Fisheries Department* for 1950 and 1951, the production of *belacan* in Singapore was negligible and much of the supply was imported from Malaya. The Federation of Malaya provided 600 tons of *belacan* for consumption within Singapore in 1950 alone.[25] Even so, Tampines had a thriving *belacan* industry in the early 1950s that catered to local demand. Sungai Tampines and Sungai Api Api, two rivers that flow through Tampines and Pasir Ris and into the Strait of Johor, were rich in fish and *udang geragau* (small shrimps used to make *belacan*) at high tide.[26]

Lubuk Gantang, the confluence of three Sungai Tampines tributaries, was once abundant with these shrimps. This was a popular spot for villagers looking to catch and sell the shrimps fresh or to make them into *belacan*. However, this place no longer exists due to land reclamation. Over time, the *belacan* industry in Tampines declined not only due to reclamation, but also because people moved away from the area. By 1986, more than half of the villagers had moved into flats in new housing estates like Bedok, Hougang and Tampines.[27]

RECIPE FOR BELACAN

In 1973, a *belacan* scandal rocked kitchens in Malaysia and Singapore. The authorities found *belacan* from Penang adulterated with a poisonous and carcinogenic dye, the prohibited substance Rhodamine B, which was used to give it an appealing reddish hue.

This may have motivated some people to make *belacan* at home, hence this recipe by a Mrs Tan Bee Neo that was published in the *New Nation* newspaper a few years later.

Ingredients:
Use a Chinese tea cup as a measure.
10 heaped cups of fresh shrimp (*udang geragau*) and a little less than one cup of salt.

Method:
1. Do not wash the shrimps unless it is with fresh seawater. Sort through the shrimp to remove small fish, seaweed or other foreign matter.
2. Drain the shrimp and mix thoroughly with salt. Spread evenly on a large tray and dry in the sun for one day, or till damp-dry.
3. Pound the shrimp. The shrimps will still be moist and will easily bind into a paste. Shape into small cakes, the size of an egg and flatten.
4. Dry these in the sun for at least two days. Pound once more to get a finer paste. Re-shape into cakes and dry in the sun for two more days or more depending on the sunshine.
5. Check the texture for smoothness, you would probably have to re-pound the *belacan*.
6. When satisfied that the *belacan* is suitably fine, that is, the shrimps are indistinguishable from each other, shape the paste into cakes and leave once more in the sun for at least four days until the cakes are quite dry.
7. *Belacan* keeps well indefinitely, but be sure to dry the cakes in the sun every now and then to remove moisture that may have collected in storage.

RECIPE FOR SAMBAL BELACAN

This recipe is taken from Rita Zahara's cookbook, *Malay Heritage Cooking* (2012).

Ingredients:
10g *belacan*
7 red chillies
3 red bird's-eye chillies
Salt to taste
Sugar to taste
2 limes, juice extracted, zest thinly sliced

Method:
1. Heat a small frying pan and dry-fry *belacan* for a few minutes until fragrant.
2. Using a mortar and pestle, pound *belacan* with chillies until well combined. Remove to small bowl.
3. Season with salt and sugar to taste. Add freshly squeezed lime juice and lime zest.

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Sambal belacan is a popular condiment made of chillies, *belacan* and lime juice. It is a must-have accompaniment to Malay, Peranakan and Eurasian dishes. *Courtesy of Mrs Tan Geok Lin.*

The *udang geragau* were caught using *sondong* (push-net), also known as *selandang* and *sungkor*.[28] These used to be a familiar sight in nearshore areas like Siglap, Changi, Tampines and Seletar. Part-time or subsistence fishermen, including small boys, would typically use a smaller type of push-net. The *Fisheries Survey Report* (1959) describes the *sondong* as a net that is carried between two light wooden poles approximately five metres in length. "Shoes" made out of hardwood or coconut husk are attached to one end of the poles. The fisherman operates the *sondong* by standing between the poles and lowering the net into the water until the "shoes" reach the bottom. He then pushes it slowly along the seabed and lifts it after some time. With a few shakes, the catch goes into the bag-like end of the net. Longer poles were used by some fishermen who operated the net from boats in deep water.[29]

Despite ongoing urban redevelopment and reclamation, there was still a cottage industry of five households producing *belacan* in Kampong Tampines in the 1980s. In an interview with the *Berita Harian* newspaper in 1986, village resident 72-year-old Sapiah Osman, better known as Mak Piah, said that she had been catching shrimps since she was 35.

The widow started making *belacan* as part-time work to feed her family. She was usually at the shore by 6.30 am. Depending on the tide and weather, she might even be there earlier. On a good day, it did not take long for her *sondong* to be filled with shrimps. On other days, she would have to wait one to two hours to get a good catch.[30] Like her, other fisherfolk made and sold *belacan* as a means to earn extra income for their families. Mak Piah sold her *belacan* for $1.

While *belacan* production still endures in other parts of Southeast Asia today, scenes of people catching *udang geragau* with their *sondong* and making *belacan* are long gone from Singapore. The shores are now void of the smell of drying fish and *belacan*, although one can still catch the aromatic whiff of *belacan* being toasted from homes and eateries. ♦

NOTES

1 "PM Lee Expresses Appreciation to Malaysia's Queen for 'Royal' Sambal Belacan," *Today*, 29 October 2019, https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/pm-lee-expresses-appreciation-permaisuri-agong-royal-sambal-belacan.
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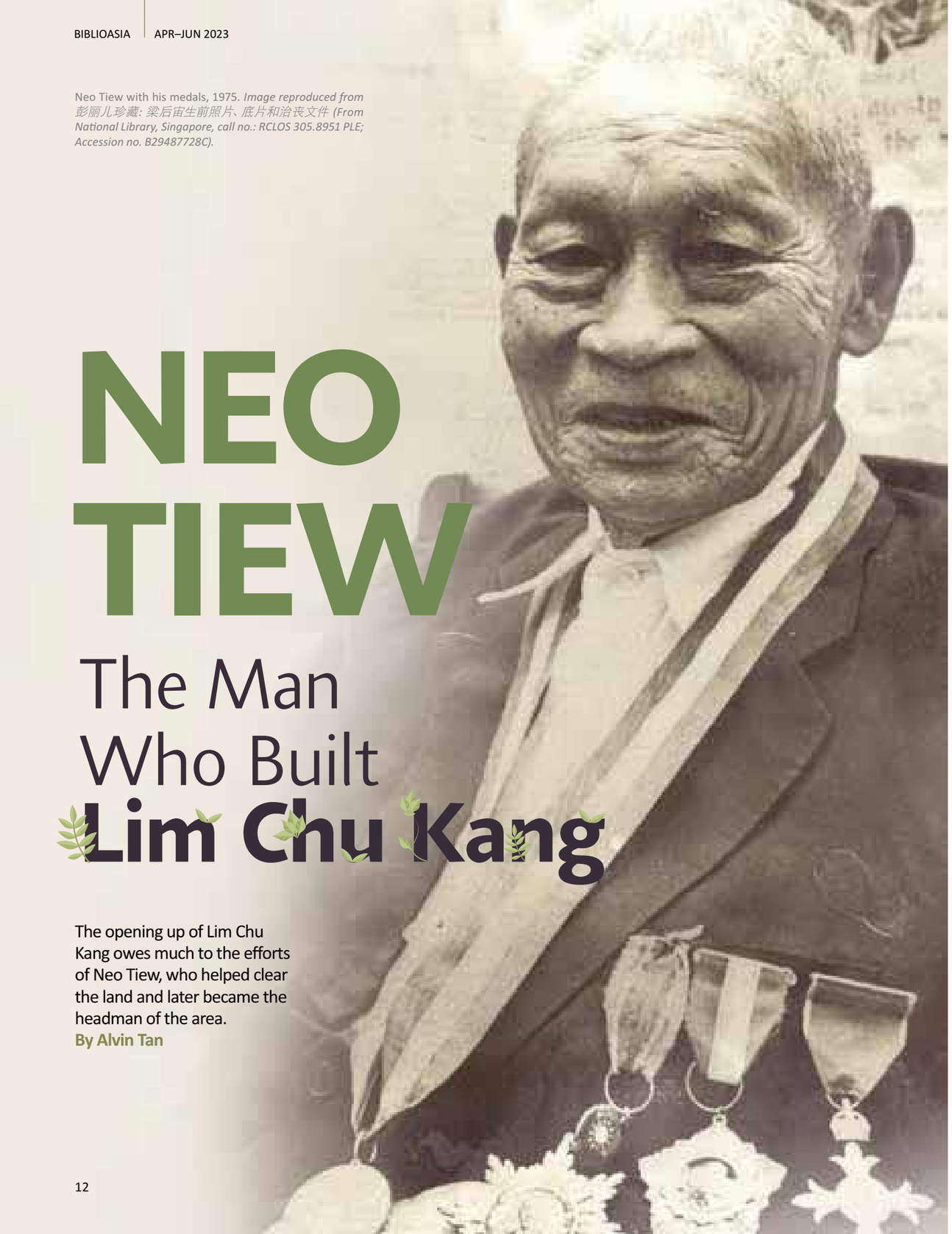

Neo Tiew with his medals, 1975. *Image reproduced from 彭丽儿珍藏: 梁后宙生前照片、底片和治丧文件 (From National Library, Singapore, call no.: RCLOS 305.8951 PLE; Accession no. B29487728C).*

NEO TIEW

The Man Who Built Lim Chu Kang

The opening up of Lim Chu Kang owes much to the efforts of Neo Tiew, who helped clear the land and later became the headman of the area.

By Alvin Tan

Neo Tiew Estate is a small housing estate in Lim Chu Kang.[1] It consists of three low-rise blocks of vacant flats, a disused market and food centre, and an abandoned children's playground. The residents were resettled in the late 1990s and early 2000s and the estate is now used for training by the Singapore Armed Forces.

Neo Tiew Estate, and the nearby Neo Tiew Road, Neo Tiew Crescent and Neo Tiew Lanes 1, 2 and 3 are named after a remarkable man by the name of Neo Tiew (梁宙; 1884–1975).[2] Neo played an instrumental role in the development of Lim Chu Kang. It is thanks to his energy and vision that the area was cleared and became used as farmland. While agriculture is no longer a large part of Singapore's economy today, the Lim Chu Kang area has an important role to play in the country's plans to become more self-sufficient in food. A century after Neo first began clearing the area, the impact of his work is still being felt.

A Meeting of Minds

It was 1914 and businessman Alexander W. Cashin (1876–1947) owned 800 acres of land in Lim Chu Kang that he wanted to develop.[3] He needed someone honest and trustworthy, and with experience in land clearance and plantation management. He found that man in the person of Neo Tiew.[4]

Born in 1884 in Nan'an county in Fujian province, China, Neo left his impoverished hometown in 1897 at the age of 13 in search of a better life in Singapore. He worked in various odd jobs after he arrived and eventually ended up managing a rubber plantation in Selangor until 1912.

That was also the year when he took over his uncle's brick-making business, Yuanshengfa, which was located on Holland Road. Through this business, Neo met Cashin, who was one of the customers Neo supplied bricks to. Cashin found Neo to be honest, hardworking and capable, and approached him to clear his land in Lim Chu Kang.[5] In 1914, Neo took up Cashin's offer and this decision put Neo on the path to reshaping the area.

Opening Lim Chu Kang

Neo approached the task like a military operation. Deploying 800 men to clear 800 acres of land was not simple. Getting to Lim Chu Kang, in the absence of roads from the town (and with only a sparse network of jungle tracks in the area itself), was a tedious undertaking that involved sailing from Telok Ayer to the Strait of Johor.[6]

With an advance party of eight men, Neo brought along boatloads of building materials. About 1.5 kilometres from their landing point, the team began clearing the secondary jungle and putting up huts, while spending their nights onboard their boats. After

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A map of Lim Chu Kang, with its network of roads named after Neo Tiew.

(Above) Neo Tiew and the road named after him, 1975. *Image reproduced from 新加坡宗乡会馆联合总会许云樵馆藏: 梁后宙生前照片 (From National Library, Singapore, call no.: RCLOS 305.8951 XJP-[HYT]; Accession no. B27705320D).*

(Right) Thong Hoe Village in Lim Chu Kang was named after one of the provision shops that Neo Tiew owned. He was also the headman of the village. Photo taken in 1975. *Image reproduced from 新加坡宗乡会馆联合总会许云樵馆藏: 梁后宙生前照片 (From National Library, Singapore, call no.: RCLOS 305.8951 XJP-[HYT]; Accession no. B27705320D).*

completing their temporary accommodation, Neo brought in the next wave of 40 men to augment his workforce. Over time, as the work advanced steadily inland, their beachhead became Neo's command centre.

It took five years for the men to clear the land and reach the upper tributaries of Kranji River where Neo decided to build a jetty to take advantage of the river as a communications artery. They also planted large numbers of coconut trees, pineapple plants and later, rubber trees. (Neo's methodical and systematic land clearance drew the attention of businessman Mirza Mohamed Ali Namazie, who approached Neo to clear 900 acres of his land in the area as well.[7])

Building Lim Chu Kang

This was when Neo's business took off. Together with Cashin's gift of 60 acres of land, Neo expanded his own land to 200 acres, centred around Nam Hoe Village and the jetty he built. (The village was named after its most prominent landmark, the Nam Hoe provision shop that Neo had opened.[8])

The Kranji River was Nam Hoe Village's only connection to the outside world. To get to Woodlands Road, which was the most direct route to the town, one would first have to traverse by boat down the river and disembark at Jalan Nam Huat. This inaccessibility also cut the area off from the growing traffic that came when the Causeway opened in 1923.[9]

Neo lobbied the colonial government to build a road to connect the Lim Chu Kang area to the rest of the island.[10] The government insisted on a co-payment model and left Neo to canvass and raise funds for this project. In total, more than $30,000 was raised for the 8-kilometre-long road.

On 4 October 1930, the Public Works Department opened a tender for the construction of "earthwork formation for new road at Lim Chu Kang".[11] By 1932, Lim Chu Kang Road was "open to within 1½ miles of the Johore Straits".[12]

The new road provided the impetus for the founding of another village, Thong Hoe, which was named after yet another provision shop owned by Neo.[13]

Lim Chin Sei, who used to be a farmer in Lim Chu Kang, recalled in his oral history interview that the provision shop was the centre of village life, a meeting point and the place where Neo arbitrated and resolved disputes and quarrels. According to Lim, Neo loved to regale his audience with stories – there were no airs about him despite his wealth – and he frequently attended weddings and funerals, keeping his pulse on things. When it came to crime though, Neo was firm and no-nonsense, and the village thugs were afraid of him.[14]

Seeing that Lim Chu Kang needed a proper school, Neo donated five acres of land and a sum of money to set up Kay Wah School (present-day Qihua Primary School) in 1938. Subsequently, Kay Wah School opened branches in Nam Hoe Village and the nearby Ama Keng Village (named after a temple dedicated to Mazu, goddess of the sea, which was built in the area in 1900).[15]

At Neo's behest, the government eventually opened a maternal clinic, staffed by a matron trained in midwifery, in the village in 1940. As a result, Neo no longer had to drive in the dark of night to send a woman in labour to the nearest hospital, which was what he used to have to do.[16]

In 1937, the *Nanyang Siang Pau* newspaper described the Lim Chu Kang area as a well-equipped model village of 5,000 that had acquired a distinctive character and atmosphere under Neo's astute direction and hard work.[17] Neo's philanthropy, tucked away in remote Lim Chu Kang, might have lacked prominence but its impact on the lives of the villagers, most of whom were farmers, was immense.

Lim Chu Kang's agrarian character began to change in the 1930s. In 1934, the government acquired 54 acres in Lim Chu Kang for the Royal Air Force (RAF) to build RAF Tengah. By December 1935, the airbase — which occupied 130 acres and had "one of the longest runways of any aerodrome in the Empire" – was declared ready for load testing. On 2 November 1936, the aerodrome was declared open after four aircraft, led by Air Commodore S.W. Smith, Commander of the RAF Far East, landed at 10 am.[18]

The War Years

World War II brought immense tragedy to Neo, who was deeply involved in anti-Japanese resistance activities from 1937. A key figure in the fundraising efforts, Neo was also a staunch supporter of Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang (KMT; Chinese Nationalist Party), with its capital in Chongqing in Sichuan, China.

In 1940, Neo was appointed by Chiang to head the Singapore branch of the KMT Youth League of the Three Principles of the People (三民主义青年团).[19]

(Top) The Nam Hoe provision shop owned by Neo Tiew in Nam Hoe Village (undated). *Image reproduced from 彭丽儿珍藏: 梁后宙生前照片、底片和治丧文件 (From National Library, Singapore, call no.: RCLOS 305.8951 PLE; Accession no. B29487728C).*

(Above) Medical services by the Ama Keng Maternity and Child Welfare Clinic, 1956. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

(Left) A class in progress at Kay Wah School in Ama Keng Village, 1986. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

(Left) Neo Tiew with the Singapore Rural Board (Western Region) Volunteer Police, c. 1950s. Neo Tiew helped establish this police force during the Malayan Emergency. *Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board. Gift of Mr Neo Ah Chap.*

(Below) Calligraphy scroll in memory of the massacre of 35 members of Neo Tiew's family during the Japanese Occupation, 1969. The scroll was signed by Gao Xin, chairman of the Chinese Government Overseas Chinese Affairs Committee, Republic of China. *Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board. Gift of Mr Neo Ah Chap.*

One of his missions was said to consist of setting up two clandestine wireless transmission stations in his coconut estates to provide intelligence to Chongqing.

On 13 February 1942, with the imminent fall of Singapore to the Japanese, Neo and one of his sons were evacuated to India and thereafter to China. The following day, tragedy befell Neo when his entire family of 35 left behind in Singapore was massacred by the Japanese.[20]

While in China, Neo enrolled in Chiang's "anti-bandit army and was instrumental in persuading many of the lawless to lay down their arms". Neo said he enjoyed a close friendship with Chiang. "When General Chiang died, I was invited to attend his funeral, but I sent my son as a representative," he told the *New Nation* newspaper in 1975. "We were in the same unit of the Chinese Army before the Cultural Revolution and Chiang was my junior."[21]

When the Japanese Occupation ended, Neo returned to Singapore and found out that his entire family had been killed. He rebuilt his life, remarried and settled down in Lim Chu Kang. However, the Malayan Emergency (1948–60) brought new problems and a price of $15,000 was reportedly put on his head. Neo was supposedly unperturbed by this and remarked that "[his] flesh is very expensive indeed".

Neo had good reason to be confident because he commanded the Singapore Rural Board (Western Region) Volunteer Police – which the government equipped with both arms and uniforms – for the Lim Chu Kang area. Neo was given six pairs of handcuffs and 14 shotguns, although the shotguns were more for dealing with tigers than criminals.[22]

Crime was rare as Neo had his own methods of dealing with offenders. Repeat and serious offenders were turned over to the government and repatriated to China, according to a *Straits Times* report. Those caught gambling had to buy and distribute biscuits to every household with an apology, while caught stealing were made to wear a huge paper hat with the words "I am a thief" and made to parade from house to house.[23]

That said, Neo did not take his safety for granted as was demonstrated in March 1953 when a reporter and photographer from the *Straits Times* decided to visit Neo at Thong Hoe Village.

"We stopped our car by the roadside, and asked where the headman was. 'He is waiting for you,' said the man, pointing to a big house in the centre of the village. We were startled. We had arrived unannounced. We walked into the house, followed by three silent men and were challenged by a grey haired man, who stared at us with silent hostility," wrote the reporter. "'I am Neo Tiew, and I own this village. Who are you, and what do you want with me?' he asked."[24]

Neo Tiew in a Chinese military uniform, 1910s. *Image reproduced from 彭丽儿珍藏: 梁后宙生前照片、底片和治丧文件 (From National Library, Singapore, call no.: RCLOS 305.8951 PLE; Accession no. B29487728C).*

When the reporter reached into his pocket for his press card, Neo immediately grabbed the pistol that hung from his hip. Introductions made, Neo explained his caution. "Forgive me, but I have many enemies. I do not intend to get caught off guard by strangers. I am a wanted man."[25]

Threats to his safety did not dilute Neo's concern for the welfare of the villagers. He was called "The Big Boss" by residents, and was regarded with affection and admiration. Neo was someone they could turn to for help and advice.[26] In November 1952, he donated a generator to provide Thong Hoe Village with basic electricity supply.[27]

Neo's work and contributions were recognised when he was admitted as a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) by Queen Elizabeth II in June 1954.[28] Neo Tiew Road was also named in his honour.[29]

In the 1950s, the colonial government expanded its efforts in developing the island. From 1952, the government began acquiring land to resettle squatters and develop Singapore's agricultural sector.[30]

Handicapped by a limited budget and high land costs, land acquisition did not take place on a large scale. Regardless, the government launched Operation

(Above) Medal with the accompanying certificate for the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) awarded by Queen Elizabeth II to Neo Tiew, 1954. *Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board. Gift of Mr Neo Ah Chap.*

(Left) A Chinese temple in Lim Chu Kang, 1986. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

Clean-up on 12 July 1956. With a budget of $5.5 million, more than 5,000 acres of old rubber plantations, swamp and scrubland in areas such as Lim Chu Kang, Kranji and Choa Chu Kang were cleared for resettlement. Within five years, 20 resettlement areas opened up and 2,000 people were relocated.[31]

Development and Resettlement

After Singapore attained self-government in 1959, the government began implementing infrastructure development programmes. In 1960, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew announced that a community centre – a modest, simple structure costing about $15,000 each – would be built at Thong Hoe Village, among other places.[32]

In May 1963, a new maternal and children's health clinic was opened in Thong Hoe Village to some fanfare. Life further improved with the arrival of electricity. In March 1963, the Public Utilities Board announced its rural electrification programme at a cost of $1.4 million, covering 42 kampongs, rural roads and benefiting 2,000 homes.[33]

As farming villages across Singapore emptied out in the 1980s, this spelled the end of a unique way of life in Lim Chu Kang. Bennett Neo, Neo Tiew's oldest grandson, grew up in Thong Hoe village in the 1970s. Bennett was born in in 1969 and lived in the village with his grandparents, uncles and their families. "We had a shop and I remember selling drinks and candy there," he recalled. "We also operated a cinema with both open-air and sheltered seats."

Bennett said that the family was quite self-sufficient as "we kept our own pigs and chickens and we also had fruit trees". His grandfather may have been Neo Tiew the headman, but as they were living in rural Singapore, they had to use coconut husks as fuel for the kitchen stove.

As a child, Bennett enjoyed the carefree existence afforded by living in a rural area. He spent his time climbing trees and catching fish. His childhood friends included Malays and Indians, who could speak Hokkien. The highlight of the year for Bennett was the Hungry Ghost Festival. It was "most memorable as there would be an elaborate celebration with a getai show, an auction and a big dinner".[34]

The highlight of the year for Bennett was the Hungry Ghost Festival. It was "most memorable as there would be an elaborate celebration with a getai show, an auction and a big dinner".

The area received a minor boost when the Housing and Development Board built Neo Tiew Estate at the junction of Lim Chu Kang Road and Neo Tiew Road in 1979. The estate provided neighbourhood amenities to people living around that part of Lim Chu Kang for about two decades until the estate was selected for the Selective En-bloc Redevelopment Scheme in 1998.[35] In 2002, the estate was taken over by the Singapore Armed Forces and turned into an urban warfare training facility that simulated fighting in a built-up environment.

The area's physical transformation was, however, far from complete. At the National Day Rally in 2013, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong unveiled plans to transform Paya Lebar with the relocation of Paya Lebar Air Base. This would free up 800 hectares of land for "new homes, new offices, new factories, new parks, new living environments, new communities" – in effect, a blank slate in a choice site in the heart of the island.[36]

While this was welcome news to many, the new policy had a knock-on effect on Lim Chu Kang. In 2017, it was announced that Lim Chu Kang Road would be realigned for the expansion of Tengah Air Base to accommodate the relocation of assets from Paya Lebar Air Base. Six farms had to be cleared and the Choa Chu Kang Chinese Cemetery was to be reduced by one-third of its current size.[37]

In a further twist of fate, the Covid-19 pandemic has given Lim Chu Kang a new lease of life. In March 2019, just months before the coronavirus first emerged, the government announced a "30 by 30" goal to produce 30 percent of Singapore's food needs locally by 2030.[38]

The plan attained a new urgency after the pandemic was declared and supply chains became severely disrupted. For a country that imports 90 percent of its food, the "30 by 30" goal was now a strategic imperative.

In October 2020, the Singapore Food Agency announced that Lim Chu Kang would be transformed into a "high-tech agri-food cluster" to strengthen Singapore's food security and create jobs for Singaporeans. The food cluster is expected to "produce more than three times its current food production when completed" and development works are slated to start in 2024.[39] Far from fading into irrelevance in increasingly urbanised Singapore, rural Lim Chu Kang is now poised for a bright new future. It appears that Neo Tiew's efforts over a century ago are still bearing fruit. ♦

Neo Tiew Estate consisted of three low-rise blocks of flats, a market and food centre, and a children's playground. The estate is now used for training by the Singapore Armed Forces. *Photo by Jimmy Yap.*

NOTES

1 Jean Lim, "Farmlands in Lim Chu Kang," in *Singapore Infopedia*. National Library Board Singapore. Article published 2009.
2 Also known as Neo Ao Tiew (梁后宙).
3 Alexander W. Cashin was the son of Joseph William Cashin. At the time of his death, Joseph William Cashin was the managing director of the Opium and Liquor Farms of Singapore and had a "large financial interest" in them. He was also known to have made a fortune in land speculation "some years ago", prior to his death. See "Death of Mr. J.W. Cashin," *Singapore Free Press*, 8 August 1907, 8. (From NewspaperSG)
4 Li Chengli 李成利, *Lianghouzhou yu lin cuo gang* 梁后宙与林厝港 [Neo Ao Tiew and Lim Chu Kang] (Singapore: Singapore Nan'an Association Arts and Culture Club, 2015), 41, 42. (From National Library Nan'an, Singapore, call no. Chinese RSING 305.8951 LCL)
5 Fang Baicheng 方百成 and Du Nanfa 杜南发, eds., *Shijie fujian mingren lu. Xinjiapo bian* 世界福建名人录. 新加坡编 [Prominent Figures of the World Fujian Communities: Singapore] (Singapore: Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan, 2012), 265. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. Chinese RSING 920.05957 PRO)
6 Li, *Lianghouzhou yu lin cuo gang*, 43.
7 Mirza Mohamed Ali Namazie was the founder of the firm M.A. Namazie and Sons. He was a Justice of the Peace and a member of the Singapore Municipal Commission for several years. He commissioned and financed the construction of Capitol Building.
8 Neo also leased 60 acres from Cashin. See Han Sanyuan 韩山远, *Wei yang lin cuo gang bendi chuanqi renwu lianghouzhou* 威扬林厝港本地传奇人物梁后宙 [The legend who reigned over Lim Chu Kang – Neo Ao Tiew] in Singapore Lam Ann Association Committee 新加坡南安会馆委会, *Xinjiapo nan'an xianxian zhuan* 新加坡南安先贤传 [Stories of Lam Ann Pioneers in Singapore], vol. 1 (Singapore: Singapore Nan An Association, 1998), 141–43 (From National Library, Singapore, call no. Chinese R959.570099 XJP-[HIS]). The naming of the village after the provision shop was a common practice that E.H.G. Dobby documented in his 1940 survey piece. See E.H.G. Dobby, "Singapore: Town and Country," *Geographical Review* 30, no. 1 (January 1940): 84–109. (From JSTOR via NLB's eResources website)
9 Han, *Wei yang lin cuo gang bendi chuanqi renwu lianghouzhou*, 151.
10 Han, *Wei yang lin cuo gang bendi chuanqi renwu lianghouzhou*, 151.
11 "Page 7 Advertisements Column 2: Government Notification," *Malaya Tribune*, 8 October 1930, 7. (From NewspaperSG). The tender notice was issued by Deputy Colonial Engineer R.I. Nunn.
12 "The Rural Board's Work," *Singapore Free Press*, 10 April 1931, 12; "The Annual Report," *Singapore Free Press*, 10 March 1932, 7. (From NewspaperSG)
13 Han, *Wei yang lin cuo gang bendi chuanqi renwu lianghouzhou*, 151; Li, *Lianghouzhou yu lin cuo gang*, 84–87. The village was officially named Thong Hoe in 1949. See Ah Dan 啊丹, "You shanghao de ming de jiedao yu xiangcun" 由商号得名的街道与乡村 [Streets and villages named after the business], *Lianhe Wanbao* 联合晚报, 28 January 1984, 2. (From NewspaperSG)
14 Lim Chin Sei, oral history interview by Jesley Chua Chee Huan, 20 April 1987, MP3 audio, Reel/Disc 3 of 9, 30:11, National Archives of Singapore (accession no. 000766-3). [Note: Interview is in Hokkien]
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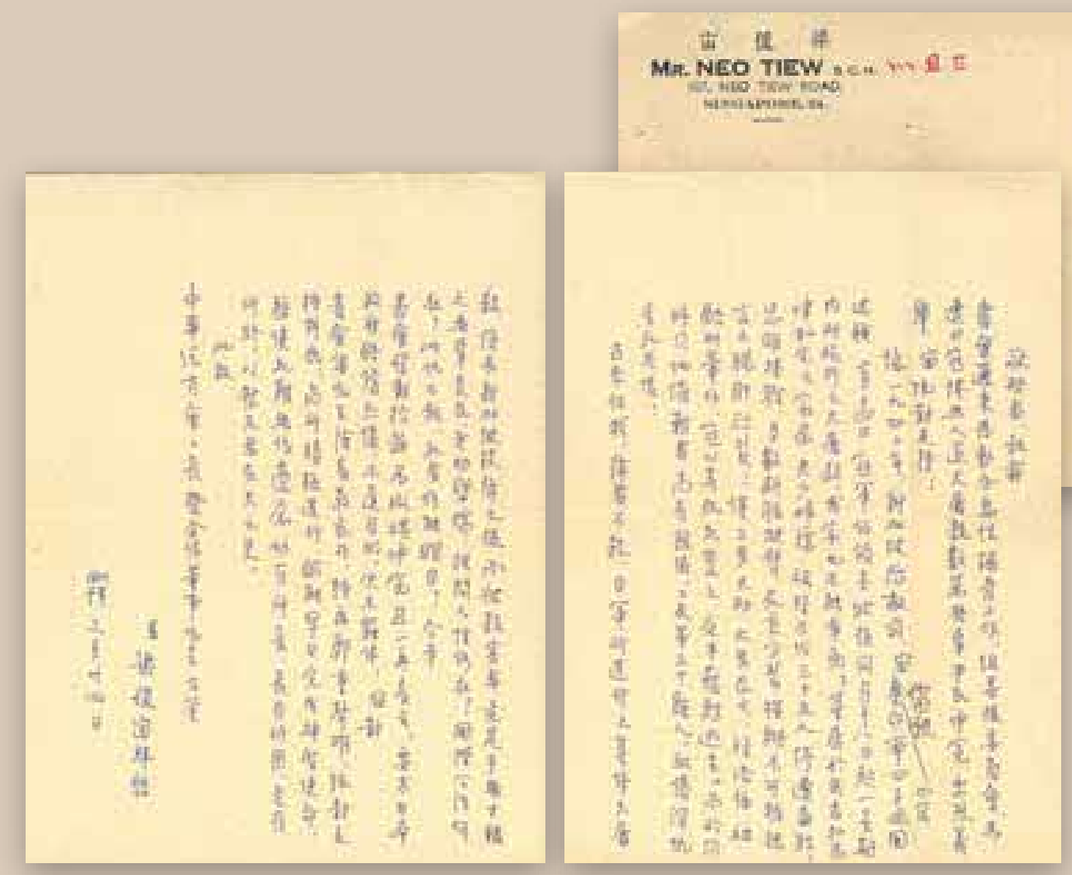
Mrs Neo Tiew (2nd from left), Neo Tiew (3rd from left), and their good friends, Mr and Mrs Peng Song Toh (undated). Peng Song Toh was a famous journalist and editor of several Chinese newspapers, including the *Nanyang Siang Pau*, from the 1950s to the 1970s. In 2021, Mdm Peng Lee Er, the daughter of Peng Song Toh, donated her father's collection of items relating to Neo Tiew to the National Library. *Image reproduced from 彭丽儿珍藏: 梁后宙生前照片、底片和治丧文件 (From National Library, Singapore, call no.: RCLOS 305.8951 PLE; Accession no. B29487728C).*

Neo Tiew with his medals and certificates of honour, 1975. *Image reproduced from 彭丽儿珍藏: 梁后宙生前照片、底片和治丧文件 (From National Library, Singapore, call no.: RCLOS 305.8951 PLE; Accession no. B29487728C).*

NEO TIEW'S PHOTOGRAPHS AND PERSONAL DOCUMENTS

The National Library of Singapore's Peng Lee Er Collection, Hsu Yun Tsiao Collection and Singapore Lam Ann Association Collection contain photographs and personal documents relating to Neo Tiew. These include photographs of the medals and certificates of honour awarded to Neo by the Chinese Kuomintang government and the British colonial government for his help defending Singapore during World War II and the Malayan Emergency as well as his contributions in developing Lim Chu Kang.

There are also photographs of the scenery and amenities in Lim Chu Kang such as Kay Wah School (now Qihua Primary School) and the Nam Hoe provision shop. Other photographs include those of Neo's family and friends, his funeral in 1975 and the epitaph presented to him in 1946 by the Kuomintang government in memory of the massacre of 35 of his family members during the Japanese Occupation.



A letter written by Neo to the Chinese Chamber of Commerce during the exhumation of war victims in Singapore in 1962 describes the torture and killing of his family members.

Readers can make a request to view the following materials from the Reference Counter at Level 11 of the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library, National Library Building.

- 彭丽儿珍藏：梁后宙生前照片、底片和治丧文件 (Call no. RCLOS 305.8951 PLE; Accession no. B29487728C)
- 新加坡宗乡会馆联合总会许云樵馆藏: 梁后宙生前照片 (Call no. RCLOS 305.8951 XJP-[HYT]; Accession no. B27705320D)
- 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 (Call no. RCLOS 959.5703 XJP; Accession no. B32427005A)

The letter written by Neo Tiew to the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce during the exhumation of war victims in Singapore on 24 March 1962, which describes the torture and killing of 35 of his family members. The letter was addressed to Ng Aik Huan, who headed the Disposal of Remains Committee established by the chamber to locate, exhume and rebury the remains of war victims. *Image reproduced from 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 (From National Library, Singapore, call no. Lee Kong Chian Reference Library level 11, RCLOS 959.5703 XJP).*

KHOO HOOI HYE, LIM BONG SOO

AND THE HEYDAY OF MALAYAN TENNIS

Two remarkable athletes served up a storm to make Malaya a tennis power to contend with during the interwar years.

By Abhishek Mehrotra

(From left) Khoo Hooi Hye and Lim Bong Soo of Singapore, and Gordon Lum and Paul Kong of China during Singapore's 1929 tour of China. *Image reproduced from Lim Bong Soo, "Some Impressions of My Trip to China," in Straits Chinese Annual, 1930, ed. Song Ong Siang (Singapore: Kwa Siew Tee, Ho Hong Bank, 1930), 96. (From BookSG).*

The spectators seated in the pavilion looking out at the tennis courts on Hong Lim Green, home of the Straits Chinese Recreation Club (SCRC), could barely suppress their excitement. It was 24 April 1929 and two of the most talented tennis players ever seen in Malaya were about to go toe to toe in the club's championship final.[1]

The match was a replay. A few days earlier, Khoo Hooi Hye and Lim Bong Soo had run each other into the ground; the final had been tied at one set all when, overcome with cramp in the oppressive heat, both had collapsed on court.[2] Hong Lim Green, indeed all of Singapore, had rarely witnessed such sporting drama. Now, the two men were back at it.

Three-time defending champion Khoo was a household name, not just in Singapore, but throughout Malaya. Born in Penang in 1901, he had risen through the ranks of the Chinese Recreation Club there while still a teenager. By the age of 16, Khoo was playing exhibition matches with other celebrated players to raise money for the Red Cross during the first World War.[3] After dominating the Penang tennis circuit for a number of years, he moved to Singapore sometime in late 1922 or early 1923 and quickly became popular thanks to his sporting prowess and polite, unassuming ways.[4]

Across the net stood the left-handed Lim, an unlikely tennis player in more ways than one. Standing only five feet tall and slender of frame, he had taken to the game at a fairly advanced age of 18 after seeing Khoo play in the final of the inaugural Malaya Cup in 1921, against then Singapore champion Shunji Nakamura. By 1926, Lim – now a civil servant in the colonial Treasury – was challenging Khoo for the most prestigious tennis titles in Singapore, the Straits, the Malay Peninsula and beyond. The older man had had the final say in most of those early encounters, but today, 24 April 1929, would be his toughest test.

In the first set, Khoo was at his vintage best, mixing "terrific force" with guile, keeping the points short and displaying such mastery of the game that he "literally ran off with the first set", according to a breathless correspondent. Lim could not win a single game. When Khoo went up 4-2 in the second set, it seemed like all the crowd's breathless anticipation had come to naught; the defending champion was easily going to clinch yet another title.[5]

What Lim lacked in stature though, he made up for in unrelenting accuracy, unflagging stamina and steely nerves; the diminutive southpaw roared back to 4-4 and ultimately took the second set 8-6 after saving a match point. Almost spent, Khoo simply could not keep up with his younger opponent in the third set.

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Lim Bong Soo at the Singapore Cricket Club, c. 1930s. *Courtesy of Singapore Sports Council.*

He went down 5-0 and even though there was a tiny flicker at the end when he won two games in a row, it was Lim who ultimately prevailed at 0-6, 8-6, 6-2.[6]

"Hooi Hye Beaten. Heroic Struggle with Younger Challenger," screamed the *Malaya Tribune* the following day.[7] Even by the rarefied standards of Singapore tennis at the time, this had been a titanic clash between two legends – one established; the other, destined.

A Question of Identity

For almost six decades after the arrival of Stamford Raffles, there was barely any organised sport among the Chinese in Singapore. Sport, or physical activity for its own sake, was not permitted in China at the time. Even if it had been, life's daily struggles in an entrepot still in its infancy barely left any time for leisure. The New Year Sports Day was one of the few occasions in the year when all the "native" races took to the Padang for athletic competitions – mostly as objects of amusement and mockery for the European assemblage.[8]

However, as the local Straits Chinese community grew larger, more prosperous and financially secure in keeping with Singapore's rising stature in global colonial-capitalism networks, it started to feel the need to assert itself socially. Numerous clubs sprang up in response, one of the most notable being a debating forum called the Celestial Reasoning Society in 1882.[9] This need was personified by Lim Boon Keng

Competitors of the Singapore Cricket Club's Lawn Tennis Tournament, 1894. The club hosted the colony's first ever tennis tournament in 1875. *Courtesy of Singapore Sports Council.*

and Song Ong Siang – both prominent members of the Straits Chinese community and Queen's Scholars[10] – who returned from their undergraduate studies in the United Kingdom in the early 1890s bursting with reformist zeal.

The duo, taking their sporting cues from the West rather than the East, exhorted the local Chinese to become more physically active through their new quarterly journal – the *Straits Chinese Magazine* (the two men were the editors). An article titled "Physical Religion" in the inaugural issue in March 1897 stressed the need for physical as well as mental fitness.

"If you do not wish to live a physically virtuous life, that is a healthy life, you are an immoral being," it thundered. "Beauty of form, and physical strength and activity, as well as health, should be sought after and valued no less than beauty and power of mind."[11]

Song led by example, being an avid tennis player who twice finished runner-up in the SCRC tennis championship in 1906 and 1909.[12] And while there is scant evidence of Lim Boon Keng having played the game seriously, the good doctor was certainly an admirer. "Tennis might seem foolish to those who did not understand its science and art, but it was not so to experienced men,"[13] he said during the presentation ceremony following the 1915 SCRC final.

The SCRC had been founded in late 1884 by five prominent Straits merchants and had taken swiftly to imitating its Padang peers – the European Singapore Cricket Club (SCC) and the Eurasian Singapore Recreation Club (SRC).[14] The SCRC's first home was at an "open plain" below Pearl Hill but it was in the grander environs of Hong Lim Green where it moved to two years later that the club established itself as a prominent local institution. From the late 1880s, the green was home to regular cricket tournaments, a Chinese New Year Sports Day and an annual intra-club tennis tournament.[15]

Information on the club's early years is sparse. We know that the first ever tennis tournament, held sometime between 1885 and 1890, was won by Koh Tiong Yan – a founder of the club – before another merchant called Chia Hood Teck dominated the scene for some time.[16] During the first decade of the 20th century, Ong Tek Lim – a distinguished merchant who also served as municipal commissioner for the Central Ward – won the trophy five times.[17]

The SCRC championships continued apace during World War I. The club even expanded its reach, hosting Penang as well as travelling to the sister settlement to compete against its Chinese Recreation Club.[18] However, it was only after 1918 that tennis in the Straits, especially Singapore, truly became a force to be reckoned with, thanks to men like Khoo Hooi Hye and Lim Bong Soo.

Tennis Ace Khoo Hooi Hye

The years following World War I saw an explosion in the popularity of tennis in Singapore and Malaya. Since the sport had no umbrella body and no sponsorship, the tennis calendar was a dizzying potpourri of competitions, exhibitions and tours largely dependent on the whims of colonial administrators and wealthy philanthropists.

In its most simplified form, the season could be described thus: each of the clubs – SCC, SRC, SCRC (there were others too) – had their own in-house competitions stretching back to the late 19th century. The next rung was the Singapore Championship, inaugurated in 1921 – variously called Singapore Lawn Tennis Championship, Singapore Tennis Tournament, Singapore Open – in which all Singapore residents, irrespective of nationality, were eligible to play. Variations of this structure had also sprung up across the peninsular territories.

The highest rung was occupied by the regional tournaments where the best players from across Singapore and Malaya competed against each other. With the differentiated nature of political administration under the British (three Straits Settlements territories and four Federated Malay States), there was an almost unlimited number of ways by which regions and players could be pitted against each other in a tournament format.

The most storied of these tournaments was the Malaya Cup, first organised in Singapore in 1921, in which the champions of the domestic tournament in Singapore, Penang, Melaka, Selangor, Perak and Negeri Sembilan faced off to determine the overall winner. It was in this milieu, with an unparalleled abundance of competitive tennis, that Khoo Hooi Hye came of age.

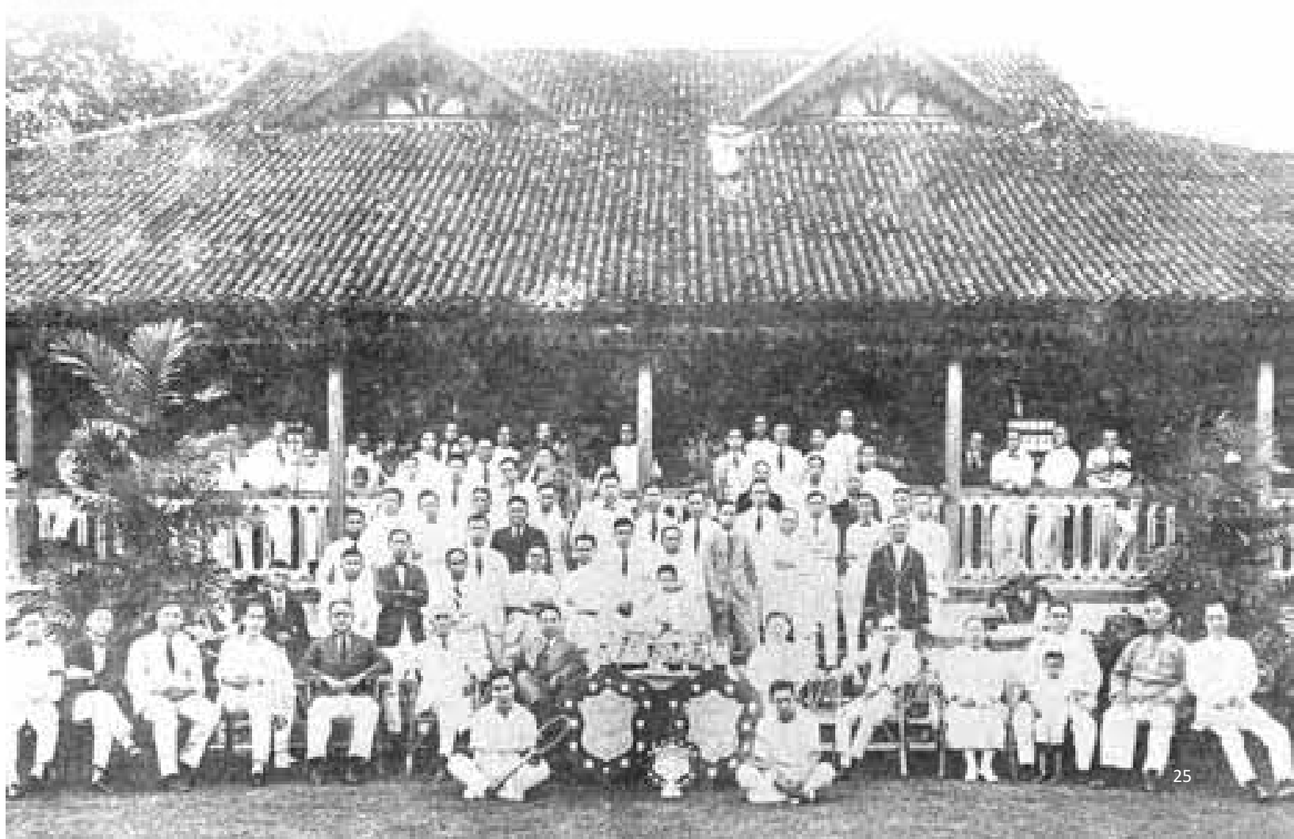
In the inaugural Malaya Cup, the 20-year-old Khoo, then playing for Penang, eased his way through the draw to make the final against Shunji Nakamura – an unknown Japanese resident in Singapore who had shocked all by lifting the Singapore Cup earlier that year. Both Khoo and Nakamura had beaten European opponents in the semi-finals of the peninsular competition. Of Nakamura's victory in the semi-final, the *Malaya Tribune* mourned: "I think it a sad reflection on present-day tennis in Malaya that a player confining himself to such purely stonewalling tactics should be able to carry off the highest honours. Oliver [referring to E.N.W. Oliver, the champion of Selangor] has shown what I have said all along to be the game to beat him; and not only beat him but rout him."[19]

In the other semi-final match, Khoo had easily disposed of a certain J.S. Johnstone of Negeri Sembilan. A correspondent for the *Malaya Tribune* wrote that "Johnstone was really a much better player than the score indicates. It was *merely another case of steadiness overcoming brilliant but erratic methods.* Johnstone's service was swift and hard to return, but owing probably to lack of practice he could not always pull it off"[20] (italics added for emphasis).

It was Nakamura who emerged victorious in the 1921 final. While Khoo did not win, the match was his stepping-stone to greatness. After moving to Singapore sometime in late 1922 or early 1923, Khoo won the Malaya Cup as its representative four times between 1923 and 1927 while holding his day job as an insurance agent of the Java Sea and Fire Insurance Co.[21]

The biggest feathers in Khoo's cap came in 1924. He became the first ever Malayan to play Wimbledon (he lost in the second round) and to participate in the Olympics in Paris, as part of a four-member Chinese contingent.[22] Three years later, in 1927, Khoo won both the singles and doubles gold while representing

The Singapore Chinese Recreation Club's Lawn Tennis Tournament, 1928. The club was formed in 1884 for the purpose of playing tennis and cricket. *Courtesy of Singapore Sports Council.*



Khoo Hooi Hye (left) and Lim Bong Soo (right) before the final of the Malaya Cup held at the Singapore Cricket Club on 6 August 1929. This would be the last time the two would meet in competitions, as Khoo moved to Shanghai in 1930. *Source: Malayan Saturday Post, 10 August 1929. © SPH Media Limited. Permission required for reproduction.*

China at the Shanghai Far Eastern Olympic Games (a precursor to the modern Asian Games).[23]

Apart from these tournaments, Khoo spent much of the 1920s winning accolades in Java, Manila and Hong Kong. There were also triumphs over the Calcutta and Thai singles champions and general acclaim that far from being merely *steady*, he was the most talented player the Straits had ever seen.[24]

Khoo's success came at a time when sporting accomplishments were not only admired but feted among the Straits Chinese. Newspaper reports of some of his best matches ran into hundreds of words while dinner parties and concerts were thrown in his honour. Films capturing some of his matches were also shown in popular venues of the time.[25]

Lim Bong Soo's Meteoric Rise

Lim Bong Soo's rise to prominence in the mid-1920s added further glamour to the game as he and Khoo battled it out in individual competitions while representing Singapore in team tournaments across the region. Their first meaningful encounter was the 1926 Singapore Championship final in which "almost every game was marked with dazzling rallies". Even though Lim lost to Khoo by two straight sets, a perceptive correspondent observed that "with a little more experience, however, Bong Soo should find his place somewhere near the top of the Malayan lawn tennis ladder".[26]

Later in the year, the two met yet again, this time in the semi-final of the Malaya Cup and once again, the veteran Khoo managed to hold off his younger challenger in a close encounter.[27] It would take two more years and that match on Hong Lim Green on 24 April 1929 for Lim to finally beat Khoo on the big stage.

In August 1929, the duo clashed again – this time at the SCC in the Malaya Cup final. In stark contrast to the earlier April match though, this one was an anti-climax. Lim, having played the singles and doubles semi-finals earlier that same day was forced to retire due to exhaustion, handing Khoo his fifth and final Malaya Cup.[28]

The year 1929 was one of the most memorable in Khoo's celebrated career. Between the two contrasting clashes with Lim, he had played another match for the ages, on 20 June, in the Singapore Championship final against the Frenchman Paul Clerc.[29]

Clerc had had Khoo's number in the previous year's final and when he led 6-1, 5-1 within 25 minutes of the match, "it was eclipse", as the *Malaya Tribune* vividly put it. But Khoo turned around this seemingly impossible situation to triumph 1-6, 8-6, 6-2. The same correspondent, nicknamed "Echo", who had written so disparagingly about Khoo eight years ago was at it again. "Looking back on the match, it has to be conceded that Clerc ought to have won, and that he beat himself."[30]

Such jibes notwithstanding, Khoo had overcome his April SCRC heartbreak by taking the two biggest trophies in the land – the Singapore Open and the Malaya Cup. These would be his final triumphs here.

In September 1929, Aw Boon Haw – who founded the Chinese ointment brand Tiger Balm – recognised that his salve and athletic endeavours made for natural allies. He decided to sponsor Singapore's elite tennis and swimming athletes on a trip to the Far East where they competed in a medley of competitive and exhibition matches. Lim established himself as an all-Asian force by winning the Hong Kong Open before partnering Khoo in Shanghai to win almost every match there despite playing in such cold conditions that Lim's "ear and lips split".[31]

Lim Bong Soo at the Hong Kong Open Championship with his trophies, 1929. *Image reproduced from Lim Bong Soo, "Some Impressions of My Trip to China," in Straits Chinese Annual, 1930, ed. Song Ong Siang. (Singapore: Kwa Siew Tee, Ho Hong Bank, 1930), 94. (From BookSG).*

The Far East trip was a roaring commercial success with thousands of people watching the talented duo in action. Lim later wrote that "in their excitement, some of the spectators interfered by blocking and shouting during the progress of the play, so that Mr. C.G. Hoh, the Secretary of the Federation, had twice to stop the game temporarily to allow excited feelings to cool down".[32]

The conclusion of this trip also brought the curtain down on Singapore tennis' most storied era. In 1930, the Chinese government invited Khoo to represent China at that year's Far Eastern Olympic Games in Tokyo – the same tournament where he had won gold for them in 1927. Khoo accepted and after the competition was over, he settled down in Shanghai. The paths of the two great friends and rivals would still cross occasionally – most notably when Lim beat Khoo in five enthralling sets in the final of the 1931 National Tennis Tournament organised by the Chinese National Amateur Athletic Foundation.[33]

With nobody to challenge him in Malaya now, Lim scaled new peaks. He racked up six straight Singapore Lawn Tennis championships between 1930 and 1935 to equal Khoo's record (1923, 1925–29) and won the Malaya Cup three times in a row (1931–33), once again emulating his former rival who won it in 1923, 1925–27 and again in 1929.

In an interview with the *Straits Times* in 1983, Lim revealed that when he was at the height of his tennis career in 1933, a wealthy philanthropist – he refused to reveal who – had offered to sponsor his trip to Wimbledon.

"If I had gone, I might have made it to the semi-finals or even the final. Not in the first year, but maybe in the third or fourth. I was an all-rounder in tennis. I had no weakness," he recalled wistfully.[34]

Back home though, the trophies kept coming and seizing on his unrivalled popularity, the storied English sports company Sykes released a line of rackets in his honour – the Lim Bong Soo Special – in 1936.[35] Lim was then 33 years old but with no serious challenger on the horizon, it seemed like he was set to dominate the game for years to come.

Unfortunately, it was not to be. Tired of being unable to earn a living from the game he loved, Lim shocked the tennis world by going professional in May 1936 to take up a position as tennis coach at the Tanglin Club. (Going professional in those days meant earning a living from the sport whether as a coach or as a player.) He was instantly disqualified from defending both his Singapore and Malayan Cup titles

Unfortunately, Singapore tennis began a gradual decline after Khoo's passing and Lim's turn to professionalism, a decline exacerbated by the Second World War.

(he had won the latter again in 1935 after missing out on the 1934 edition due to injury).

"We, as an Association are primarily concerned with the Amateur game, and we cannot encourage players to turn professional," was the Singapore Lawn Tennis Association's disapproving reaction. "But we can thank Mr Lim Bong Soo for the many pleasures which he has given us when we watched him play, and wish him the best of luck in his new venture."[36]

The media was even more critical. "That professionalism should be creeping into Malayan sports is a thing the majority of us would hardly credit and it was particularly disturbing to hear that the finest tennis player in the country had decided to join the ranks of the paid last week," sniffed the *Straits Times* sports correspondent. "Very often, however, one finds a person who is not quite top class a very excellent teacher. This is so at cricket and football and can also apply to lawn tennis."[37]

It was a churlish farewell to a sporting great, though to give a sense of the times, Fred Perry, who became Britain's greatest tennis star, turned professional that same year, also to widespread opprobrium.[38]

It would be 32 more years before the tennis world would allow, in 1968, those who played for prize money to compete with those who played as amateurs.

There was, however, a more poignant farewell in 1936. Khoo, who had spent the earlier part of the year playing in various exhibitions, died in July due to kidney complications. He was only 35 years old.[39]

Two days before Khoo's death, N.S. Wise became the first ever European to lift the Singapore Lawn Tennis Championship.[40] Between the two of them, Khoo and Lim had won 12 of 15 Singapore Championships and nine of the 15 Malaya Cups since both tournaments began in 1921. By keeping the Europeans at bay, they had shown the local Chinese that it was possible to not just play the colonial masters' game but to beat them at it.

Unfortunately, Singapore tennis began a gradual decline after Khoo's passing and Lim's turn to professionalism, a decline exacerbated by the Second World War. "Where are the young and promising?" grumbled a tennis expert in 1951 when tennis had restarted in earnest.[41] The writer was reacting to the fact that, quite incredibly, Lim, now 48 years of age and still playing tennis, had made it to the semi-finals of the Singapore Championships held that year.[42]

Tennis Champ Turned Golfer

The game's dying embers though, threw up a few final sparks. Ong Chew Bee, 26, became the first Singapore-born tennis player to play at Wimbledon's hallowed lawns in 1951, losing in the first-round to Englishman G.D. Oakley in three hard-fought sets.[43]

Born in 1924, Ong had grown up when Khoo and Lim were at the peak of their fame and success but took up tennis at an unpropitious time in 1939, with the war looming over the horizon. Encouraged by his father, an eminent doctor, who built a tennis court at home, Ong persevered through the lack of tournaments and even a shortage of tennis balls to emerge on the other side of the war as one of the region's most accomplished players. By 1950, Ong was striding across Malayan courts like a colossus in the mould of pre-war heroes Khoo and Lim. That year, Ong won the singles and doubles tournaments at both the Singapore Championship and the Malaya Cup. For good measure, he won the former's mixed doubles too.[44]

Ong's father rewarded him for these exploits with a trip to Wimbledon in 1951. While he was beaten in the first round, Ong would not lose to a Malayan player for the rest of the decade. By the time he hung up his racket, Ong had won eight Singapore Championships (1950, 1952–58), three Malaya Cups (1950, 1954–55) and travelled to Ceylon, the Philippines and India as a member of the Malayan Davis Cup team. There was an astonishing post-script as well. After retiring from tennis, the right-handed Ong took up golf – left-handed – and emerged as one of Singapore's most successful amateur golfers. He was also part of the team that won the 1967 Putra Cup.[45]

Meanwhile, as the 20th century drew to a close, Singapore tennis had some sporadic success. The men's team won silver in the 1981 Southeast Asian Games and two years later, national women's champion Lim Phi Lan won bronze in the same competition.[46] But when Lim Bong Soo died in 1992 at the age of 92 (birth dates in the early 20th century were unreliable so this may not be precise; for instance, a 1951 report refers to Lim as 48 years old, indicating that he was born in 1902 or 1903), independent Singapore had yet to send a player to Wimbledon, or indeed to any of the other Grand Slams.

In 2019, Singapore-born Astra Sharma did make it into the main draw of all four Grand Slams but she had moved to Australia in 2005 when she was 10 and played in these tournaments as an Australian citizen.[47]

Sadly, the tantalising hopes of Singapore as a tennis power created by the spellbinding duo of Khoo Hooi Hye and Lim Bong Soo and then, briefly, by Ong Chew Bee, have proven to be elusive thus far. ♦

Chew Bee wins triple crown

SINGAPORE, July 11.

G. CHEW BEE won his third title in the Singapore tennis championships held at the S.C.C. terday by beating H. Kamu in the men's singles l by 4—6, 6—3, 6—2.

Chew Bee won the doubles and mixed doubles its last week, his partners being Lim Hee Chin Mrs. A. Greenhill. Yadi and Mrs. Greenhill are only others who have won three titles at a Singapore L. T. A. Meeting.

Yesterday's final was a fitting close to the champion-

WATER-POLO LGE.

At the 1950 Singapore tennis championship, Ong Chew Bee won the men's singles, doubles (with Lim Hee Chin) and mixed doubles (with Mrs A. Greenhill) events. *Source: Straits Budget, 13 July 1950. © SPH Media Limited. Permission required for reproduction.*

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ORDER AND CLEANLINESS

SINGAPORE'S PUBLIC BATHHOUSES OF THE 1880S

Three public bathhouses at Ellenborough Market, Canton Street and Clyde Terrace were built by the Municipality in the late 19th century.

By Jesse O'Neill

In late 19th-century Singapore, people had few options for getting the water they needed for washing themselves. They might have wells in their home to draw water, or they would use public ones. Those with the means could pay the *tukang air* (Malay for water carrier) to deliver water, while others might venture out to nearby streams. Obtaining water was difficult and required effort, and there were noted distinctions in water access between the wealthy and the poor.

As one European resident noted in the *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* in January 1866, "we have fresh water poured into the capacious vessels which serve as baths, and perhaps not one amongst us, while enjoying the pleasures thereof, considers that, there is at the moment some hundreds of fellow men, who are unable to obtain even fresh water for the purpose".[1]

Because of the limited water supply system on the island at the time, it was common for many to bathe publicly in the open, making this a source of contention. Throwing ideas of race, hygiene and morality into the mix, the Municipality had to intervene, which only made accessing public washing places more difficult.

The imagined necessity of racial segregation while bathing exaggerated these problems of access. When it was suggested that merchant Cheang Hong Lim might extend his philanthropy by building a new public bathing place in Singapore in 1876, a reader wrote to the *Straits Observer* that this should involve separate baths, "some for Europeans, some for Eurasians and some for Natives".[2]

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"Bathing Place Near Selita" by Eugen von Ransonnet, 1869. *Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*

Widespread racial distinction in water access and the resulting complaints of Europeans finally prompted the Municipality to adopt a new programme of public bathhouses for the poor and labouring classes, aided by the new infrastructure of the town's Impounding Reservoir (now known as MacRitchie Reservoir).

This resulted in three public bathhouses being built by the Municipality in the 1880s. Located at Ellenborough Market, Canton Street and Clyde Terrace, these bathhouses relied on water piped in from the town's reservoir. While these bathhouses were only in use for about a decade, they offer an interesting glimpse into a little-known slice of Singapore's history.

Regulations and Restrictions

The ubiquity of public bathing produced a regular stream of reports in the local press complaining about semi-nude bodies washing in open view in places such as the Singapore River, Commercial Square and Orchard Road. "The Jury present that the public bathing in the rivulet skirting Orchard Road is a nuisance from persons being allowed to bathe in the view of the public in a state [of] nudity or nearly so, and they recommend that means should be taken to prevent this violation of public decency," said the *Straits Times* in April 1849.[3]

In January 1871, the *Straits Times Overland Journal* reported that many Indians "of both sexes not only may but must be seen here at all hours of the day, in unblushing nakedness, close beside one of our most fashionable thoroughfares, in full view from every carriage that passes". It added that "[c]leanliness is, in itself, doubtless a very good thing, but unless it can be attained without flagrant indecorum, ceases to be wholly desirable".[4]

Tensions reached an almost comedic height when the Ladies Lawn Tennis Club, a social centre for European women, was established in 1884 across from Dhoby Green, a well-known bathing place that had drawn complaints for decades.[5] In June 1886, two years after the tennis club was formed, four Chinese out of a group of 15 were fined 25 cents each by A.G.L. Minjoot, Inspector of Nuisances, for indecent bathing in public in Carrington Road, opposite the Ladies Lawn Tennis Club. "We understand that Mr Minjoot, in personally arresting the 4 Chinese, met with strong resistance from the rest, who attempted to free their comrades from his grasp, but he successfully brought them to the station," noted the *Straits Times*.[6]

There was an effort to enclose popular bathing spots with attap (nipah palm) screens or small washing rooms to obscure bathers from view. One of the earliest examples involved building brick and chunam enclosures around the wells near the Temenggong's Istana Lama in Telok Blangah in 1849. The *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* saw this as a sign of people accepting "European ideas of decency". This,

The Rochor River was a commonly used and approved bathing place, 1880. *Morgan Betty Bassett Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

Washing in a stream, c.1910s. *Lim Kheng Chye Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

A postcard from the early 20th century with the caption "Singapore: Natives bathing", c. 1905. *Lim Kheng Chye Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

the paper noted, was an improvement over what used to happen in the past. "In former days, anyone who extended his morning's ride to Tulloh Blangah [Telok Blangah], might see men, women, and children bathing at the numerous wells on the road side, without any screen between them and the road."[7] Over the following decades, more wells, tanks and streams were shielded from view with similar roughly built screens and structures.

In 1848, Singapore's first Municipal Committee was established in an attempt to remove the practical administration of the town from the powers of Governor William John Butterworth, who was then proving to be a divisive figure.[8] The role of the Municipality began with oversight of policing, including matters of public decency, thus leading to an involvement in questions of public bathing and water supply. From the early 1850s, Singapore's new commissioners gained more power to regulate the town's streets and public behaviour, and the practice of shielding bathers turned into the passing of laws to restrict and control them. The Municipality began limiting access to water for washing, designating only certain rivers and canals for bathing, and requiring every person washing there to remain decently dressed.[9] Fines were imposed for bathing in the streets, or at places that had not been designated as bathing spots.

These regulations were partly driven by the European community's ideas of morality, which saw public bathing as a nuisance, but which also responded to newer ideas about public hygiene. It was increasingly recognised that bathing bodies would contaminate drinking water and that it was similarly unhealthy to wash in polluted commercial waterways. The problem was intermingling water functions, and so the town sought to unpack and categorise Singapore's waterbodies based on principles that merged and confused views on hygiene and morality. From this point, Singapore's water sources were not all equal, and bathing was legally separated from other uses of water.

However, the municipal commissioners soon realised that the number of bathing places initially approved were too few, and asked the surveyor general to look into the matter in 1858. He advised establishing new bathing sites at Telok Ayer, Havelock Road, Government Hill (now Fort Canning), Orchard Road, Rochor Canal and South Bridge Road.[10] This was not a provision of new water sources but rather a reclassification of water, along with the construction of some new modesty barriers.

Not all sanctioned bathing places were in the town though. There was one in Seletar, illustrated in a print by the Austrian painter Eugen von Ransonnet in 1869 when he stayed nearby, and one in Bedok that was washed away in heavy rains in December 1870.[11] But bathing spots were determined by the concentration of people, so most were found in the town where they could also be most easily regulated.

Municipal Engineer W.T. Carrington's report on the Singapore River on 4 October 1875 noted 42 public baths along the banks of this river alone, with the Rochor Canal and Kallang River also having their own official bathing places.[12] And whether these were at wells, canals or in specialised tanks, the laws regulating public washing also made each of these places the responsibility of the municipal commissioners; by 1876, the town was paying $5,000 annually to maintain them.[13]

New Bathhouses

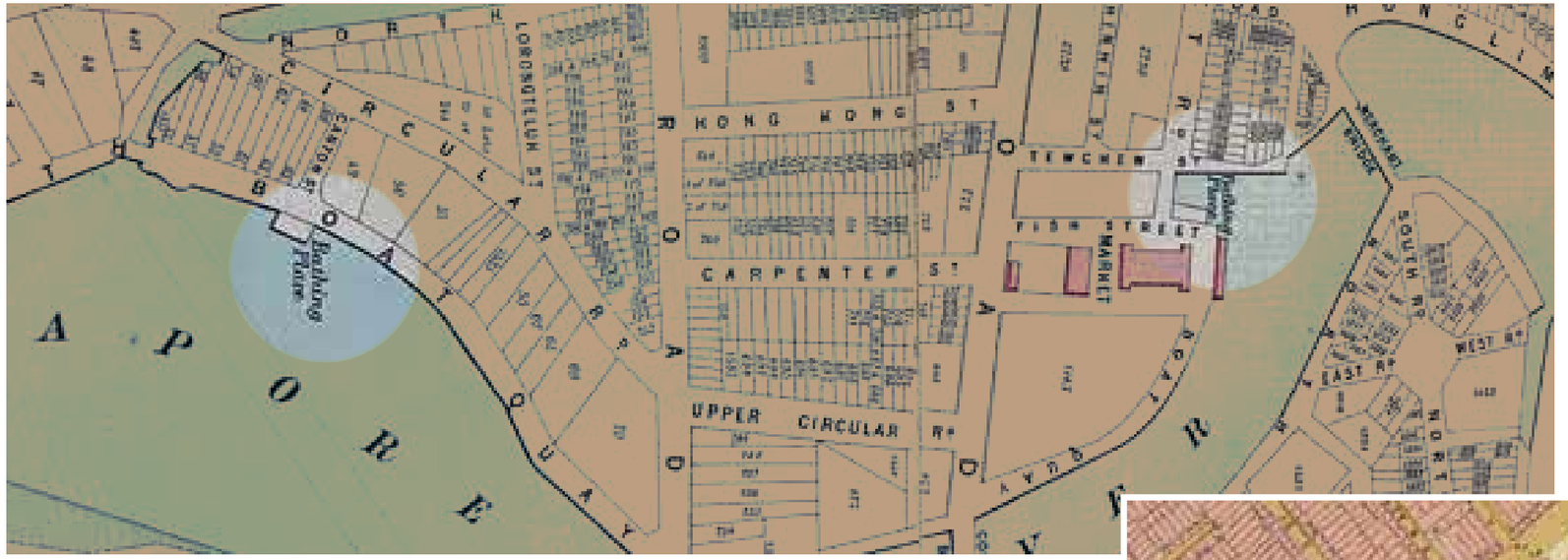
In 1878, the new municipal engineer, Thomas Cargill, was instructed to solve the perennial problem of public bathing.[14] After decades of planning and construction, the Impounding Reservoir finally became operational that year. This meant that Cargill could plan a new public bathing system that used piped municipal water, rather than relying on water boats or natural sources.

It seemed that the reservoir would bypass all of the concerns about water hygiene that had plagued the municipal commissioners in recent years, which had led them to outlaw bathing in places that drinking water could be collected and consider plans for filling the polluted canals adjacent to the Singapore River.[15]

Cargill's proposal for a new kind of public bathhouse was approved in December 1878. The first would be constructed at Ellenborough Market, replacing an older bath from 1874 that relied on water delivered by boats.[16] The Municipality also planned a second bathhouse at Upper Cross Street, going so far as to accept construction tenders for it in 1879, before realising that the government had already reserved the land for police accommodation.[17] The municipal commissioners would have to find another site for their second bathhouse, but in the meantime, the one at Ellenborough Market went ahead.

The Ellenborough Market bathhouse was opened to the public at the beginning of 1880. In February that year, its manager, Low How Chuan, asked for two gas lamps to be installed "for the convenience of persons bathing after sunset".[18]

Clyde Terrace Market, c.1900. A bathhouse was built beside it in 1881. *Collection of Children's Museum Singapore.*



Detail from a map showing the locations of the Ellenborough Market and Canton Street bathhouses. *Images reproduced from Map of Singapore Town, Shewing Building Allotments & Registered Numbers of Crown Leases, sheet 2 (Singapore: Surveyor General's Office, 1881). (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RRARE 912.5957 MAP-[LKL]).*

The municipal commissioners quickly took issue with the amount of water that bathers at this bathhouse were using though. There were an estimated 1,126 people using the bathhouse daily, each of whom used 17 gallons of water, or about 77 litres.[19] The town water service only ran 12 hours a day to conserve water.[20] Now that bathing water came from the municipality's own underperforming reservoir, frugality needed to be enforced and a bathhouse watchman was hired to prevent wastage. This proved effective and by July 1880, water usage at the Ellenborough Market bathhouse had been reduced from 554,800 gallons in May to 414,400 gallons in June.[21]

Meanwhile, Cargill was planning two more bathhouses, one on Jalan Sultan and another on Canton Street over the Singapore River. The first encountered problems in acquiring land, but the second (which was the replacement site for the Upper Cross Street bathhouse) made progress.[22]

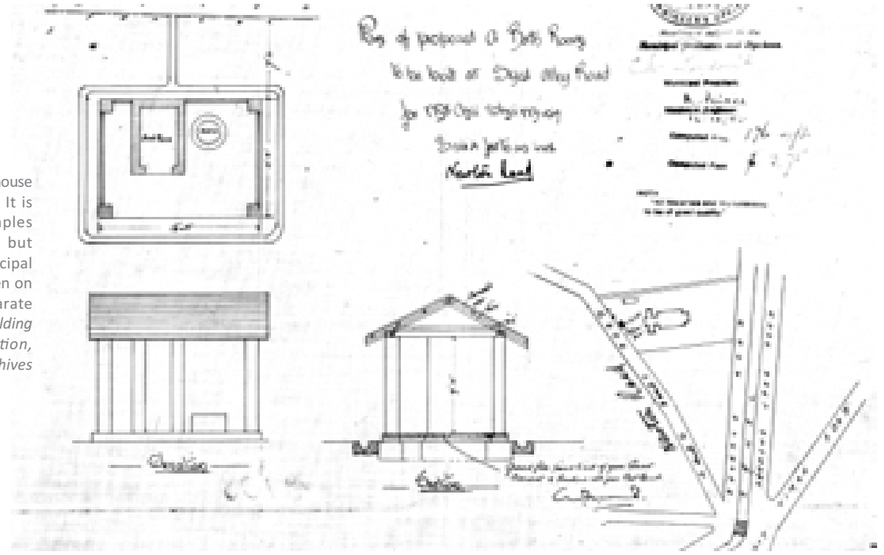
The Canton Street (Boat Quay) bathhouse was completed in early 1881 and received a glowing review in the *Straits Times Overland Journal* in February that year: "The substitution of tastefully designed buildings for the former rough plank partitions, and the interior arrangement of a large oblong tank, supplied with water from the waterworks, is at once such a vast improvement upon former constructions as to awaken admiration of the taste and ability of the Municipal Engineer, and the public spirit of the Commissioners, in providing such elegant public conveniences," the paper noted. "We should be glad to see many such tasteful structures wherever convenient throughout the town."[23]

Map showing the public bathhouse at Clyde Terrace Market, 1893. *Image reproduced from Survey Department, Singapore, Plan of Singapore Town Showing Topographical Detail and Municipal Numbers, map, 1893. (From National Archives of Singapore, accession number SP002988).*

The Ellenborough Market and Canton Street bathhouses were large wooden rooms with tiled roofs and painted, whitewashed walls. These were supplied by taps connected to the municipal waterworks, and each held a single iron tank for communal bathing.

There were two key distinctions between these structures and earlier municipal bathing spots. The first was that these bathhouses received clean water piped directly from the reservoir, rather than relying on water carriers collecting from sometimes questionable sources. The second was their build quality, which the *Straits Times Overland Journal* had described as "tasteful". These weren't the earlier rudimentary attap structures, but were actual examples of town architecture – no less a concealment of naked bodies, but also well built and pleasant to look at, forming part of the architectural vista of the Singapore River.

Although the proposal to build a bathhouse on Jalan Sultan was soon abandoned, plans for a third bathhouse went ahead, and in 1881, the municipal



Floorplan of a private bathhouse on Newton Road, 1905. It is similar to earlier examples of private bathhouses, but different from the municipal examples in that it is open on one side and has a separate bathing area and well. *Building Control Division Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (8012/1905).*

commissioners requested government land at Clyde Terrace, next to the police station and close to the market.[24] The land was granted in May 1881 and construction began soon after.[25]

Unfortunately, an incident occurred during the building works, which damaged Cargill's reputation. During a violent storm in August 1881, the half-finished Clyde Terrace bathhouse structure collapsed, killing two men who sheltered there from the rain. On hearing the crash, Sergeant Ramsamy ran from the neighbouring police station and saw Ngeo Tin, a revenue officer, pinned under heavy beams. He also saw an unnamed Malay fruit-seller lying nearby. Ramsamy lifted the beams from the Chinese man and discovered that he was dead. The Malay man was sent to hospital but died from head trauma 10 minutes after admission.[26]

At the inquest on 25 August 1881, Cargill was called to explain and defend his design and construction methods. He argued that this building used the same materials and techniques as did many other houses and municipal buildings across the town.[27]

The contractor for the Clyde Terrace bathhouse was Cheah Keow (also spelt as Cheah Kiow), who had also built the Ellenborough Market and Canton Street bathhouses. Cheah had installed most of the roofing tiles at the bathhouse before planning to finish the building's side framing. This was his usual practice, he said, so that there would be shelter while the works were underway. Ultimately, this is what made the building unable to withstand the storm.[28]

Superintendent of Works J.H. Callcott also suspected that the supporting struts were removed early so that they could be used for another job, further weakening the structure. While the coroner reprimanded Cheah for this, he eventually ruled the deaths an accident.[29]

There was much unhappiness over the verdict. Discussions surrounding the evidence and the potentially conflicting roles of people involved continued in the press and in municipal meetings.[30] One letter to the newspaper thought that the accounts given by Cargill and his deputy were incongruous, suggesting they had neglected their public duty to safety.[31]

While the Clyde Terrace bathhouse was eventually finished in December 1881 and Cheah bore the additional costs for completing it, some members of the public were increasingly questioning if Cargill and his assistant were really to blame for the tragedy.[32] Cargill eventually sued two writers of the *Straits Intelligence* for libel in February 1883, shortly before leaving his position in August that year.[33] He did, however, remain in Singapore, establishing a civil engineering office and going on to contribute to the design and construction of the third Coleman Bridge in 1886.[34]

A Decade of Decline

The three bathhouses designed by Cargill were in use for another decade, but newspapers made no announcements of new bathhouses after the Clyde Terrace inquest.

Throughout the 1880s, these bathhouses drew attention because of the amount of water they used, or because of the occasional tensions between the municipality and the bathhouse operators. When completed, the right to manage these places was contracted out. The bathhouse operator then had rights to charge a fixed entry fee and run the place as a business, but he also had to pay agreed rates for town water. The role was re-tendered each year.[35]

In April 1881, Seng Yong Cheng, who managed the bathhouses at Ellenborough Market and Canton Street, asked to have his water rates reduced but was rejected.[36] Although he claimed a loss on the business, the Municipality argued that there was disparity in the water used between the two bathhouses. In the previous month, Ellenborough Market attracted 15,339 bathers, who each used 16 gallons, while Canton Street drew only 3,687 people, each using 24 gallons.[37] The municipal commissioners argued that if bathers at Canton Street could be encouraged to only use as much water as those at Ellenborough Market, then the business would begin to turn a profit. The town was keen not to lose any revenue on their very expensive water system.

Every bather who visited these places was charged an entry fee of one cent, in comparison to the five- or 10-cent bath options at private bathhouses like the Waterfall Club at the foot of Pearl's Hill.[38] (The Waterfall Club, also known as the "Singapore Waterfall" was described in the press as being largely unknown to Europeans, but popular with Chinese, Malay and Indian residents. In addition to being a place for washing, it also boasted a billiard table and a bar, providing a social function that was very different from the municipal bathhouses.[39] The Waterfall Club opened in 1878 but it is not known how long it lasted.)

The fixed pricing of municipal bathhouses limited the operators's ability to build revenue, but also shows that these places were imagined as a public service to provide clean and affordable bathing for the large local working population. When the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company requested town water for a bathhouse on their land, the Municipality placed the same one-cent fee as a condition.[40]

The Municipality also appeared to use its power to prevent direct competition affecting their bathhouses. Low How Chuan, the first operator of the Ellenborough Market bathhouse, complained of water boat operators taking his business. An older bathing stage on the river nearby had been removed, but the boatmen installed planks for people to bathe on their boats. There was no use of town water supply here, so the municipal commissioners pushed the complaint onto the master attendant.[41]

The municipal commissioners did, however, reject a request from a Peter Ryapen asking for municipal water for his private bathhouse on Victoria Street, and took issue with a man in Tanjong Pagar who built his own bathing box and charged one cent for washing.[42] It was deemed that municipal bathhouses had the right to regulate washing places that distributed reservoir water, and the municipal commissioners clamped down on anyone else who tried to profit from the town's water supply.

By the end of the 1880s, the profits of municipal bathhouses were diminishing; people became less likely to visit bathhouses as the domestic service of piped water improved. On 8 May 1889, the municipal commissioners reported that the municipal revenue from these bathhouses was only $600, which was outstripped by the $800 running costs, resulting in a loss of $200.[43]

In 1890, bathhouse operator Tan Beng Wan asked the commissioners why he was facing decreased revenue. The response was that more members of the "coolie class" now had piped water for washing at home.[44] That he even asked this question suggests that Tan was not pleased about having bought into a failing endeavor, but both he and the Municipality were then facing a change in public attitude that was finally starting to accept reservoir supply and the payment of water bills.

The Clyde Terrace bathhouse was better utilised by the public, so Municipal Engineer James MacRitchie suggested closing the two at Ellenborough Market and Canton Street. However, the municipal commissioners preferred keeping them a while longer. The bathhouse on Canton Street would be repaired while the one at Ellenborough Market would be maintained for at least another year; it was going to be demolished when the market was rebuilt anyway.[45] The municipal commis-

A kampong in Singapore, early 20th century. People used the same water source to clean themselves, do the laundry, wash vegetables and rear poultry. *Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*

This studio image by Lambert & Co. is of three local women preparing to bathe, 1890. However, it is a heavily stylised European image of the activity. *Image reproduced from G.R. Lambert, Fotoalbum Singapur. (From BookSG).*

sioners were gradually accepting that, as the *Straits Times* reported, "in the heart of the town it was now impossible to make bathing-houses pay".[46]

There were no further press references to the bathhouses after this. An 1893 map of Singapore town shows the bathhouses at Canton Street and Clyde Terrace Market, but not the one at Ellenborough Market.[47] Unfortunately, there were no further town surveys of Singapore in the 19th century, so it is unknown when precisely the remaining bathhouses were removed. It is clear that both were being left to deteriorate before their removal; most likely, both were gone by 1895 at the latest.

From 1892, as municipal bathhouses were in their final decline, the press began once more paying increased attention to illegal public bathing, with cases being reported on Hill Street, Selegie Road, Anson Road and elsewhere on the island.[48] In March 1896, the *Mid-day Herald* reported that there was a need for a bathhouse near Telok Ayer Market to prevent the common practices of informal public bathing.[49] This harks back to the kind of language used in the press before the introduction of municipal bathhouses, and suggests that by this time, bathing options had been significantly reduced.

By the mid-1890s, the Municipality also uncovered more places using public water to operate illegal bathhouses. Tap water was charged on fixed rates then, so there were no additional costs for keeping it running. Most of these were coolie lodging houses or rickshaw depots, where large groups of men lived or congregated.[50]

Illegal bathhouses were found on Cross Street, Tanjong Pagar Road and Craig Road. The expansion of domestic piped water connections had prompted the closure of public bathhouses, but this in turn encouraged illegal operations to fill the continuing need for bathing, especially after the Municipality also began investigating and closing contaminated wells.[51]

By the end of the 19th century, Singapore's water sources were changing, but there was still conflict between those who supplied the new infrastructure and those who had their old access to water cut off.

Cargill's public bathhouses are only part of a wider story about how people in Singapore accessed water in the 19th century.[52] Even as these public bathhouses operated, older-style bathing places with simple screens and non-piped water continued in places such as Short Street, along the Singapore River, in Bukit Timah and at water pipes in Serangoon.[53] And as long as these bathing spots remained, so did the complaints in the press about public indecency.[54]

The municipal bathhouse programme produced only three defined structures, and the fact that they lasted little more than a decade shows them as a transitional feature in Singapore's history of water access. These bathhouses came from a time when public and open bathing was common, where racial and colonial discourse maligned the sight of the naked poor who tried to clean themselves. The bathhouses were part of a longer policy that tried to obscure public washing, and which fused morality with ideas of hygiene to try to permanently separate and classify the functions of different bodies of water.

Municipal bathhouses also brought early access to the town's reservoir, which aimed to provide centralised water distribution. But as the reservoir scheme gradually succeeded and more homes were connected to the town supply, these municipal bathhouses became less important. By the mid-1890s, Singapore's public bathhouses had faded into oblivion. ♦

A now-defunct well in the inner courtyard of an 1860s shophouse in Tanjong Pagar, 2022. *Photo by Jesse O'Neill.*

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PORTUGAL'S LINGUISTIC LEGACY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

A Mardijker couple in Batavia. Mardijkers were the descendants of freed slaves of the Portuguese in India, Africa and the Malay Peninsula. They spoke a Portuguese-based creole. *Courtesy of Ian Burnet.*

While Portugal may not have had a large presence in this region, remnants of the Portuguese language continue to linger on, in some places more than others.

By João Oliveira

Learning a new language opens your mind to new experiences. Sometimes, though, it can open your mind to old ones as well. I began learning Bahasa Indonesia a few years ago, first on my own, and then later under a teacher. Along the way, I kept encountering Indonesian words that sounded a lot like Portuguese words, mainly because those Portuguese words had entered the Indonesian language.

An Indonesian person wakes up in the morning when the sun comes through the *jendela* (from the Portuguese *janela*, or "window"). He gets out of bed, and after completing his morning routine, he takes his business *kemeja* (*camisa*; "shirt") out of his *almari* (*armário*; "closet") and gets changed for work.

He goes to the kitchen, sits down at the *meja* (*mesa*; "table") and has bread with *mentega* (*manteiga*; "butter") or maybe some *keju* (*queijo*; "cheese") for breakfast. Later, he puts on his *sepatu-sepatu* (*sapato*; "shoes") and goes to work in his *kereta* (from the archaic *carreta*; "car"). On his way to the office, he sends his daughter, who is holding a *boneka* (*boneca*; "doll") in her hands, to *sekolah* (*escola*; "school"). On the weekend, that is, on *sabtu* (*sábado*; "Saturday") and *minggu* (*domingo*; "Sunday"), he goes to a *pesta* (*festa*; "party") with his friends.

I have since taught Portuguese to Indonesians, and I always begin with those words that are common between the two languages. I believe that this is a great way to break the ice and get acquainted with one another.

The presence of Portuguese loanwords in Bahasa Indonesia and other Southeast Asian languages is a legacy of Portugal's presence in this region. Southeast Asia has been a major commercial and cultural hub for many centuries and, as a result, it attracted people from neighbouring regions and further afield. Among them have been the people from Portugal, my country.

Portugal has always been a small and relatively powerless state, except for a period in the 15th and 16th centuries when the Portuguese became the first European power to explore the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific oceans. Despite the relatively short time that they were in Southeast Asia, they left behind linguistic and cultural footprints that are still visible (or audible) today.

The extent of Portugal's linguistic and cultural legacy in this region can be seen from different angles. Portuguese loanwords have entered local languages and become part of the local lexicon, as we see in the

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case of Bahasa Indonesia. Where the level of cultural intermingling has been deeper, it resulted in the creation of contact languages (also known as creole languages) such as Papia Kristang in Melaka, as well as new cultures that reflect the hybridisation. There also exists the seemingly unique situation of Timor Leste (formerly East Timor), where Portuguese (rather than a creole) continues to be used as a working language.

Portuguese Loanwords

We often hear of purists who insist on keeping the traditions of their languages and do not want them "contaminated" by other languages. Nevertheless, as human cultures do not exist in a bubble, languages have always integrated borrowings (also called loanwords) from neighbouring as well as distant languages. In 1913, Sebastião Rodolfo Dalgado unearthed Portuguese loanwords in more than 50 Asian languages in his book, *Influência do Vocabulário Português em Línguas Asiáticas*.[1] A skilled and encyclopaedic missionary and linguist from Goa, Dalgado used his skills to recreate an imagined Portuguese empire and to inflate the influence of the Portuguese language and culture in Asia, as he felt that the linguistic and religious legacy of the Portuguese in Asia was evidence of the superiority of Portuguese civilisation.[2]

Mainly relying on dictionaries, Dalgado identified Portuguese loanwords in Southeast Asian languages such as Burmese (seven), Khmer (25), Thai (35), southern Vietnamese (15), northern Vietnamese (eight), Malay (431), Acehnese (51), Batak (29), Sundanese (100), Betawi (10), Javanese (104), Madurese (48), Balinese (21), Dayak (41), Makassarese (101), Buginese (122), Ambon Malay (16), Nicobarese (27), Tetum (774) and Galoli (429). (Dalgado did not know Malay/Indonesian and the extent of the influence of Portuguese on these two languages has been updated since Dalgado's book, as scholars have published more recent papers and books on the subject.[3])

Dalgado also recorded Portuguese loanwords in Asian dialects of European languages: Anglo-Indian (173),[4] Indian French (62) and Chinese Pidgin English (15). (The last was used in the ports of South China.[5])

Contact Languages, Syncretic Cultures

A more interesting phenomenon is the creation of contact languages. As its name suggests, a contact language emerges when two or more different languages come into contact with one another and get lexically and structurally intertwined, forming what is called creoles. In the colonial context, such languages often consist of the vocabulary from the language of the coloniser (superstrate) and some lexical and grammatical influence from the language(s) of the colonised (substrate). Portuguese-based creoles are creoles whose main vocabulary consists of Portuguese words.

Portuguese-based contact languages in Asia arose when Portuguese men, such as traders and venturers (*casados*; literally "married"), married local women or took them as concubines. The offspring of these liaisons came to be known as Eurasian, who developed specific linguistic and cultural traits.[6]

There have been Portuguese-based creoles in Southeast Asia: Papia Kristang in Melaka; Batavia and Tugu creole in Java; Flores creole in the Flores and Solor islands; the Moluccas creole; Burma creole in Myanmar and Siam creole in Thailand.[7] With the exception of Papia Kristang, most of the other creoles have become extinct, or are now very close to it.

Papia Kristang

The first Portuguese contacts with Melaka began in 1509 and intensified after Afonso de Albuquerque conquered Melaka two years later. The most common name of the Portuguese-based creole of Melaka, Papia Kristang ("Christian speech"), and the local Portuguese settlement, Padri Sa-chang ("land of the priest"), show the deep connection between language, religion, territory and identity.

Today, Papia Kristang is considered an important identity marker but with little social prestige.[8] The people remaining in the Portuguese Settlement (in Malay, Kampung Portugis) in Melaka consists of a small group of poor fishermen who are an anthropological curiosity and a tourist attraction. As Papia Kristang is the only surviving Portuguese-based creole in Southeast Asia, it has attracted interest from both Kristang scholars[9] and other academics.[10]

Over time, Papia Kristang spread geographically as groups of Portuguese Eurasians moved around the region. Following the capture of Portuguese Melaka by the Dutch in 1641, some Eurasians fled to other places in the region such as Makassar. Subsequently, when the Dutch attacked Makassar in 1660, it led to an exodus of the Eurasians to Larantuka on Flores island. These migratory patterns spread Kristang to other areas outside of Melaka.

While the Dutch conquered Melaka from the Portuguese in 1641, and subsequently ruled it until 1825, they could not dethrone the Portuguese-based

The surviving gateway of A Famosa, the Portuguese fort in Melaka, 2015. The fort was built by the Portuguese after they conquered the city in 1511. Today, the only parts of the fort remaining are the Porta de Santiago gateway and the restored Middelburg Bastion, which was added on by the Dutch in 1660. *Photo by Chongkian. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons (Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International; CC BY-SA 4.0).*

There have been Portuguese-based creoles in Southeast Asia: Papia Kristang in Melaka; Batavia and Tugu creole in Java; Flores creole in the Flores and Solor islands; the Moluccas creole; Burma creole in Myanmar and Siam creole in Thailand.

Studio photograph of a Eurasian family in Singapore, 1910–25. *Lee Brothers Studio Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

creole in Melaka. Many Dutch men ended up marrying Creole-speaking Eurasians and had Creole-speaking slaves of Portuguese descent.[11] Despite being unrelated to the Portuguese, these slaves were known as Black Portuguese (*Zwarte Portugueesen*) and later Mardijkers (from Malay *merdeka*, which means "free men", as they were "free" from taxes. The word *merdeka* is in turn derived from *marhardika*, Sanskrit for "freedom").[12]

Many Mardijkers hailed from places in Southeast Asia where Portuguese-based creoles were spoken. The Dutch also recruited native Christian soldiers from the Indian coast who spoke a Portuguese-based creole, which further cemented the creole as a lingua franca. As a result, the presence of Portuguese-based creole solidified in Melaka during more than 180 years of Dutch rule.

The arrival of the British into the region was the impetus for more migratory waves of Portuguese Eurasians out of Melaka. Many settled in Penang after the British colonised it in 1786. The Portuguese Eurasians were also among the first to settle in Singapore after a trading port was set up here in 1819. In the colonial race hierarchy, Eurasians occupied the social stratum below Europeans but above Asians. As a result, being Eurasian became desirable, though more for political power than for cultural reasons.

In Singapore, Kristang has been supplanted by English, Malay, Tamil and Chinese, although there have been efforts to keep the language and culture alive.

Linguistically, the British were more successful than the Dutch as British colonial rule in the Straits Settlements (comprising Singapore, Melaka and Penang) led to the dominance of English in these territories, eventually displacing Kristang for the Portuguese Eurasians. As evidence, consider the fact that after the Second World War, Portuguese Eurasians who migrated out of Southeast Asia chose to settle down in English-speaking countries. Those who moved to Portugal were mainly from East Timor.

Among those who remained, Kristang continued to decline in the face of other languages like Malay (in Malaysia). In Singapore, Kristang has been supplanted by English, Malay, Tamil and Chinese, although there have been efforts to keep the language and culture alive. The Portuguese-Eurasian community has been promoting pedagogical and cultural activities to revitalise the Kristang language.[13]

In 2004, Valerie Scully and Catherine Zuzarte published a Kristang dictionary in Singapore because they wanted to "to help all those interested in this fascinating language learn more about it, and thereby remember our roots". Interestingly, in their acknowledgements, they noted that, as children, they had been "discouraged from using Kristang for fear that we would not be able to master the English language that was taught in schools".[14]

To give a flavour of the language, the dictionary contains poems, songs and prayers. The Lord's Prayer in Kristang goes:

Nos sa Pai ki teng na seu,
Santah fikadu bos sa nomi,
Bos sa reinu beng
Bos sa bontadi kumpridu,
Na terra asi kema na seu,
Dah nos sa pang di kada dia.
Peduah nos sa pekadu,
Asi nos peduah nos sa inimigu.
Nang desah nos teng mal intentasang,
Mas librah kon nos di tudu mal, Amen.[15]

A comparison with the prayer in modern Portuguese shows distinct similarities:

Pai nosso, que estais no céu,
Santificado seja o Vosso nome.
Venha a nós o Vosso reino.
Seja feita a Vossa vontade,
Assim na terra como no céu.
O pão nosso de cada dia nos dai hoje.
Perdoai-nos as nossas ofensas
Assim como nós perdoamos a quem nos tem ofendido.
Não nos deixeis cair em tentação,
Mas livrai-nos do mal, Amén.

Batavia and Tugu Creole

Between the 17th and 20th centuries, Batavia (now Jakarta) was the centre of Dutch power in Asia. Batavia came under Dutch control in 1619, but had never been ruled by the Portuguese. However, many people who had lived under Portuguese influence (soldiers, slaves and Eurasian families from South India, Ceylon, Melaka and various Southeast Asian islands) converged there. For that reason, a Portuguese creole came to be used as a means of communication between European and Asian groups.

As in Singapore, the Eurasians in Batavia were just below the Dutch in the social hierarchy, which conferred them political advantages. However, with the passage of time, as the influence of the Portuguese waned and was replaced by more powerful groups, the same happened with their linguistic and cultural influences.

In Tugu, a village near Batavia, the Portuguese language (via a Portuguese creole) was spoken. Unlike most other Eurasian communities, the people in this village converted to Calvinism. The Tugu community began to decline during the Japanese Occupation when the "Portuguese" were perceived as colonialists. Jacob Quiko, the mayor of Tugu who died in 1978, was one of the last creole speakers who actively promoted the language. His grandson Guido Quiko continues his legacy today, as he and his community still organise events celebrating their Eurasian heritage.[16]

Moluccas Creole

Another creole arose after the Portuguese founded Kota Ambon in 1521 in the Spice Islands (known today as the Moluccas or the Maluku Islands), and the building of Fort Kastela in Ternate in 1522. As in Melaka, Portuguese men married local women and their descendants were also called Eurasians and spoke a creole. When the Ternatans successfully seized the fortress in 1575, Eurasian families fled to Ambon.

In Maluku, the creole later shifted to Ambonese Malay, a local variety of Malay that still retains several Portuguese words. Subsequently, when the Spanish established a garrison in the Maluku Islands in the 17th century, Eurasian families migrated to the Philippines where they founded a town called Ternate in Luzon. There, the creole was relexified as a Spanish-based creole. Today, the language – known as Ternate Chabacano – is no longer recognised by the local Eurasian community as having Portuguese origins. It is only through linguistic and historical research that its Portuguese roots have been identified.[17]

Flores Creole

In the 16th century, Portuguese merchants and missionaries began settling in the islands of Flores, Adonara and Solor. The merchant community later split from the missionary community and relocated

Religious festivals are a part of life in the predominantly Catholic Eurasian community of Melaka's Portuguese Settlement. Pictured here is the celebration of Festa San Pedro, or Saint Peter's Festival. Saint Peter is the patron saint of fishermen. *Photo by Desmond Lui. Courtesy of Melissa De Silva.*

to Larantuka in Flores. However, these two groups subsequently reunited after Dutch attacks on Solor. Later, the two communities also settled in Wureh and Konga, both also in Flores. Their descendants, the local Eurasians, which also included deserters from the Dutch East India Company, became known as Larantuqueiros, or "people from Larantuka".[18]

In 1702, as they tried to flee from Dutch influence, the Portuguese community in Flores resettled in Lifau, Timor. Nonetheless, Portuguese linguistic and cultural elements remained in Larantuka. In Larantuka, Portuguese was used liturgically, in the same way Latin continued to be used in European churches long after vernacular languages had replaced Latin as a language of daily communication. The linguistic influence of Portuguese in Christian liturgy in Larantuka remains to this day.

The Portuguese subsequently settled in Dili, on Timor, in 1769. To ensure their safety, in 1859, the Portuguese sold their nominal rights over their other settlements in Flores and Solor in exchange for the Dutch recognition of East Timor as belonging to Portugal. This agreement led to a new wave of migration. *Moradores* (inhabitants) from Flores settled in Sikka while those from Solor moved to Bidau, in the suburbs of Dili. Each spoke its own variant of Portuguese creole, although only the latter is documented. As these creoles came into contact with local languages such as Tetum or with more normative versions of Portuguese, they were gradually phased out. The Solor variant was similar to Papia Kristang and Macanese creole (the creole that developed in Macau), which suggests that it was either derived from one of them or from a common ancestor.[19]

Burma and Siam Creoles

Little is known about the Burma creole in Myanmar and the Siam creole in Thailand. There are no surviving examples of the two creoles, only European accounts that these existed.

In Burma (now Myanmar), the Eurasian community lived in the southern region of Tanintharyi. They were called the Bayingyi, a derivation of the Arabic *Feringi* (anglicised as "Frank"), which means "foreigner". Their descendants, who now mainly reside in the Sagaing region in northern Myanmar, are culturally Burmese and are only distinguished by their religion– Catholicism.

In Thailand, the creole is supposed to have emerged in Ayutthaya and, after its fall in 1767, in present-day Bangkok. As in Burma, the people of Portuguese descent became integrated into Thai society.[20]

Timor Leste

The linguistic situation in Timor Leste today is complex and understudied. The territory has 31 ethnolinguistic groups and 46 "kingdoms".[21] Timor Leste represents an exception to the decline of Portuguese influence in Southeast Asia. Here, the Portuguese language (not a creole), as well as Catholicism, was used by educated elites to resist the annexation by Indonesia in 1974. After Timor Leste gained independence in 2002, both the Portuguese language and Catholicism were used as a means for fostering national unity among the many loose and decentralised ethnic groups and languages.

After Timor Leste gained independence in 2002, both the Portuguese language and Catholicism remained as a way to create national unity.

Besides Portuguese, the other official language of East Timor is Tetum. Tetum is not usually considered to be a creole; like Malay, it is categorised as an Austronesian language. It has, however, been largely influenced by the Portuguese lexicon and grammar, although Tetum itself has great internal variation.[22] For historical reasons, Tetum Prasa ("Tetum of the City"), the variety spoken in Díli, is heavily influenced by Portuguese, both lexically and structurally. The written version of Tetum Prasa, used in newspapers, is known as Tetunguês (a portmanteau of "Tetum" and "Portuguese").

The Immaculate Conception Metropolitan Cathedral in Dili is the main church of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Dili, Timor Leste. *Photo by Torbenbrinker. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons (Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International; CC BY-SA 4.0).*

As this brief survey demonstrates, while Portugal's legacy in Southeast Asia most clearly manifests in language, there are also other vestiges. The development of different Eurasian groups and the situation in Timor Leste show that Portugal's social and cultural legacy, which transcends language and involves other important identity traits, sometimes matters even more.[23]

Like all other European colonial conquests, the Portuguese venture into Southeast Asia was often a violent and unethical one. The legacies of colonialism, imperialism, euro-centrism and the "universal" values of Enlightenment have been interrogated in postcolonial studies. However, we cannot change history; we can only learn from past mistakes and work towards a better and more ethical present and future. In a world that is becoming increasingly globalised, culturally homogeneous and, at the same time, politically polarised, it is important that we celebrate diversity and do not let the past die out. ♦

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Which Was SINGAPORE'S FIRST COURTHOUSE?

Singapore's former Parliament building, known today as The Arts House, was used as a courthouse from 1828 to 1939. Prior to that, legal hearings were held in at least three other venues.

By Kevin Y.L. Tan

Official records establish that Singapore's first courthouse was located in a building at Empress Place, off High Street, known today as The Arts House. While it was built for Scottish merchant John Argyle Maxwell in 1827, he never used it for his residence, and the building was leased to the government as a courthouse. On 22 May 1828, it was used for the first-ever session of the Court of Judicature of the Prince of Wales Island (Penang), Singapore and Melaka held in Singapore.

In this sense, it would be correct to say that Maxwell's House was Singapore's first courthouse.

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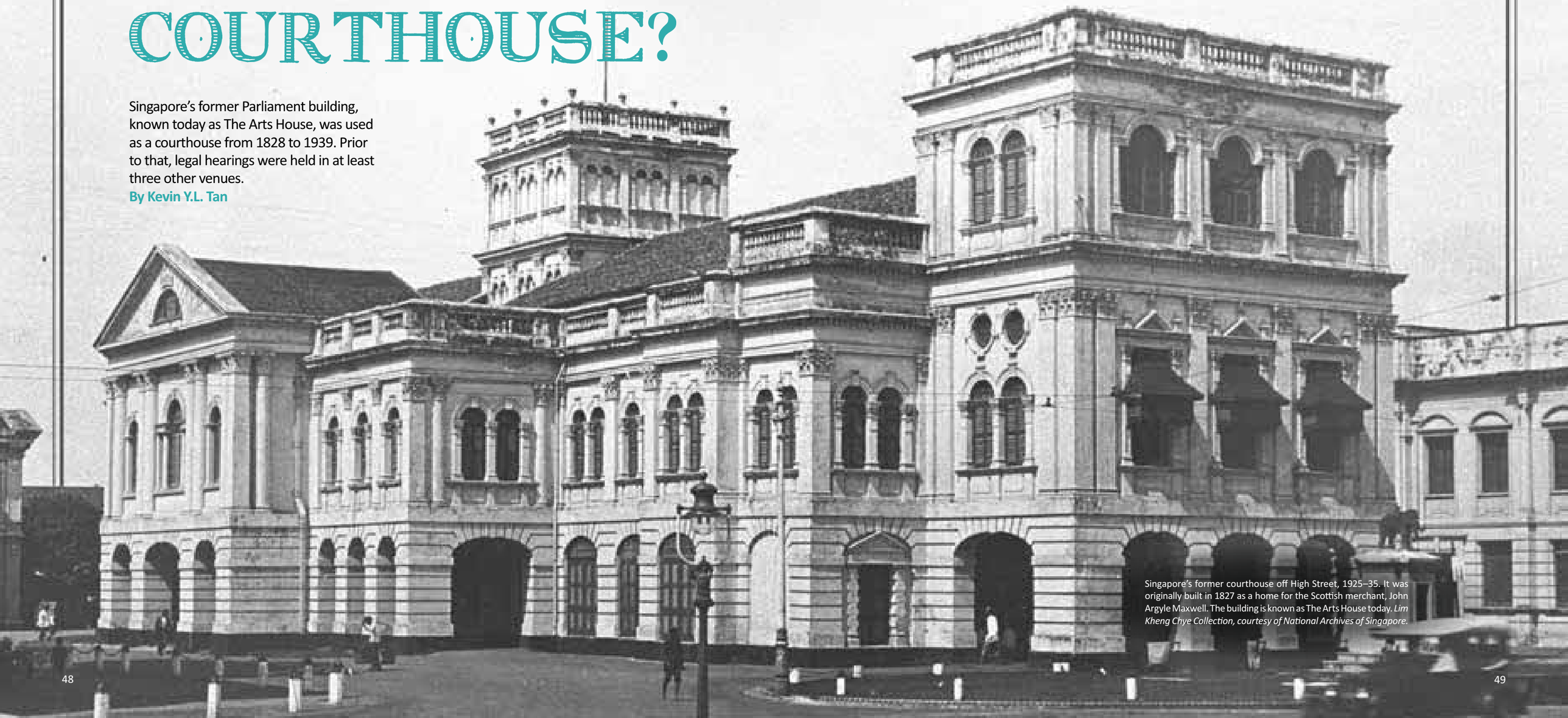
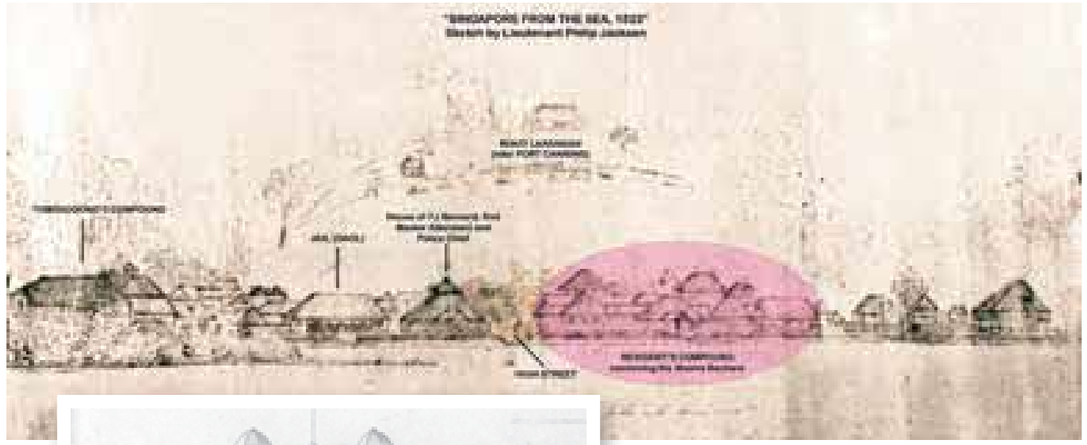
However, this would imply that no courts had sat in Singapore between the time of Stamford Raffles' arrival in January 1819 and May 1828, a period of close to 10 years. This is certainly not the case. In fact, the building at Empress Place is the fourth building in Singapore to have been used as a courthouse.



Singapore's former courthouse off High Street, 1925–35. It was originally built in 1827 as a home for the Scottish merchant, John Argyle Maxwell. The building is known as The Arts House today. *Lim Kheng Chye Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*



(Above) "Singapore from the Sea, 1823" by Assistant Engineer and Surveyor of Public Lands Lieutenant Philip Jackson. One of the structures in the shaded portion is the Rooma Bechara, Singapore's very first courthouse. This sketch is by K.M. Foong, who copied it from a photograph of the original drawing in the Drake collection of documents and personal effects belonging to Stamford Raffles, with annotation by Kevin Y.L. Tan. The original sketch by Jackson is found in H.F. Pearson, "Singapore from the Sea, June 1823. Notes on a Recently Discovered Sketch Attributed to Lt. Philip Jackson," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 26, no. 1 (161) (July 1953): 46. (From JSTOR via NLB's eResources website).

(Left) The front elevation of Singapore's former courthouse off High Street, c. 1860. The structure of this building was substantially transformed by massive renovations in 1901. *Image reproduced from T.H.H. Hancock, Coleman's Singapore ([Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia]: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in Association with Pelanduk Publications, [1986]), 23. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 720.924 COL.H).*

British Jurisdiction in Early Singapore

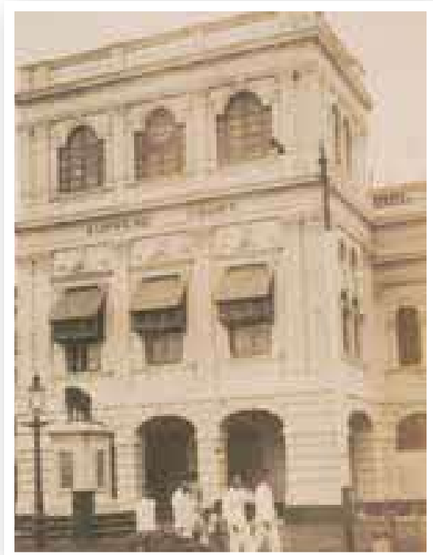
After Stamford Raffles and William Farquhar arrived in Singapore in January 1819 and determined that the Dutch had no presence on the island, the British East India Company (EIC) signed a Treaty of Friendship and Alliance (the First Charter of Justice Singapore) with Sultan Hussein Shah and Temenggong Abdul Rahman on 6 February 1819.

Under the treaty, the EIC was given "full permission" to "establish a factory or factories at Singapore, or on any other part" thereof.[1] Although the treaty did not set out the territory to be governed by the new settlement, a document titled "Arrangements Made for the Government of Singapore" dated 25 June 1819 stipulated that the British would control the area stretching from Tanjong Malang on the west to Tanjong Katang (Katong) in the east, "and on the land side, as far as the range of cannon shot, all round from the factory".[2]

At the time, Singapore's population was small, with possibly between 400 and 1,000 persons on the island, the bulk of whom lived on its southern shore, near the mouth of the modern-day Singapore River and Rochor Canal. Most of the inhabitants were the Orang Laut (sea people) as well as the Malays and followers of the Temenggong, whose compound was on the bank of the Singapore River, the site of the Asian Civilisations Museum today. We have no evidence as to what law was administered by the Temenggong, but it was most probably a mix of Islamic syariah law and local Malay custom, or *adat*.

The new settlement occupied a small jurisdiction, stretching roughly 8 km along the southern coast of Singapore island and 1.2 km inland from the southern shore.[3] Article 6 of the treaty provided that "all persons belonging to the English factory… or who shall hereafter desire to place themselves under the protection of its flag, shall be duly registered and considered as subject to the British authority".[4] As to the law applicable to the "native population", the "mode of administering justice… shall be subject to future discussion and arrangement between the contracting parties, as this will necessarily, in a great measure, depend on the laws and usages of the various tribes who may be expected to settle in the vicinity of the English factory", as spelt out in Article 7.[5] The port of Singapore was, by Article 8, placed "under the immediate protection and subject to the regulations of the British Authorities".[6]

At this point, the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance established that insofar as the British factory was concerned, the British would have jurisdiction



The Supreme Court remained in Maxwell's House (pictured) until 1939 when it moved to the newly built Supreme Court building at the junction of St Andrew's Road and High Street. *Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*

provided the subject either "belonged" to the factory (such as employees of the EIC), or those who voluntarily submitted to British jurisdiction (most probably European and other merchants trading on the island within the factory zone). Subjects under the sovereign control of the Sultan and Temenggong were *not* subject to this jurisdiction, and neither were the rest of the "native population". No further arrangements were made for the administration of justice upon Raffles' departure on 7 February 1819, the day after he concluded the treaty.

The Rooma Bechara

On 26 June 1819, Raffles and Farquhar signed a further agreement with the Sultan and Temenggong on arrangements to be made for the "Government of Singapore".[7] Responsibility for governing the British port was conferred on a triumvirate consisting of the Sultan, the Temenggong and the Resident, while those persons residing within the British port – but "not within the campongs of the Sultan and Tumungong" – would be under the "control of the Resident".[8] Of the seven articles in this second agreement, four of them dealt specifically with the administration of justice:[9]

> **Article 3**
> All cases which may occur, requiring Council in his Settlement, they shall, in the first instance, be conferred and deliberated upon by the three aforesaid, and, when they shall have been decided upon, they shall be made known to the inhabitants, either by beat of gong or by proclamation.
>
> **Article 4**
> Every Monday morning, at 10 o'clock, the Sultan, the Tumungong, and the Resident shall meet at the Rooma Bechara; but should either of the two former be incapable of attending, they may send a Deputy there.
>
> **Article 5**
> Every Captain, or head of a caste, and all Panghulus of campongs and villages, shall attend at the Room Bechara, and make a report or statement of such occurrences as may have taken place in the Settlement; and represent any grievance or complaint that they may have to bring before the Council for its considerations on each Monday.
>
> **Article 6**
> If the Captains, or heads of castes, or the Panghulus of campongs, do not act justly towards their constituents, they are permitted to come and state their grievances themselves to the Resident at the Rooma Bechara, who is hereby authorized to examine and decide thereon.

Article 4 established the Rooma Bechara ("Rumah Bicara" in its modern-day spelling) meaning Courthouse or Council House. We have no records to show when this Rooma Bechara first came into operation but evidence suggests that it was quite soon after the making of this agreement. This was because Farquhar – whom Raffles appointed British Resident of the settlement – had written to Raffles in November 1819 suggesting the engagement of an assistant to help with the judicial process. Farquhar proposed that:

> … the Court or *Bechara*, consisting of the Sultan, Temenggong & British Resident, which assembles at present usually every Monday morning to hear and decide in whatever courses or complaints may be brought before it, be in future, assisted by an executive officer or agent of the Court, to be a British gentleman, appointed & paid by Government, whose duty it will be to take examination in conjunction with the Captains or Native Chiefs on the first instance, into all complaints, civil or criminal, which may be brought before him, & to present a written record in English & Malays to the Court or Bechara, at which, all parties & witnesses must attend to undergo such further examination, as may be deemed necessary; a Native Writer & a few Peons to be assigned to the Agent of the Court of Bechara for the police duties of the Settlement.[10]

Farquhar recommended appointing David S. Napier to the post of Assistant or Agent in the Police Department at a monthly salary of 150 Spanish dollars to assist in the court's work. So while we have no record of the kinds of cases brought before the Rooma Bechara each Monday morning, there would have

MAXWELL'S HOUSE AND THE SUPREME COURT

Maxwell's House was used as the Court of Judicature and other government offices until 1839 when a separate single-storey building was erected on the side of the original building for the sole use of the court. Unfortunately, it was too noisy, being close to the adjoining shipbuilding yard. However, nothing was done until 1864 when a new building was built nearby to house the court. This building, which was completed in 1867, forms the oldest section of the Asian Civilisations Museum today, nearest to Cavenagh Bridge. This was Singapore's first purpose-built courthouse.

In the meantime, Maxwell's House was becoming overcrowded by the various government departments contained within. As a result, it was decided that a swap be made. The court, which had been reconstituted as the Supreme Court of the Straits Settlements in 1867, returned to Maxwell's House as the sole occupant in 1872 while the government departments moved to the former court building.

In 1901, Maxwell's House was completely renovated and extended to its current dimensions to accommodate an ever-enlarging court establishment. The Supreme Court remained in Maxwell's House until 1939 when it moved to the newly built Supreme Court building at the junction of St Andrew's Road and High Street.

After the Supreme Court moved out, Maxwell's House was used as a government storehouse and as government offices before being renovated in the mid-1950s to become the Legislative Assembly House. From 1965 to 1999, it was known as Parliament House until Parliament moved into its current location at 1 Parliament Place. Maxwell's house was reopened in 2004 as an arts venue known as The Arts House. Both the main building and annex were gazetted as national monuments in 1992.

The Supreme Court, meanwhile, occupied the building at the junction of St Andrew's Road and High Street until 2005 when it moved to its current location at 1 Supreme Court Lane. The old Supreme Court building, together with the former City Hall building next to it, now house National Gallery Singapore.

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(Facing page) The old Supreme Court building, which was built in 1939, now forms part of National Gallery Singapore. *Photo by Jimmy Yap.*

(Below) Singapore's first purpose-built courthouse at Empress Place, 1860–99. This building forms the oldest section of the Asian Civilisations Museum today, nearest to Cavenagh Bridge. *The National Archives of the UK, ref. CO1069-484 (92).*

been sufficient work to warrant such a request from Farquhar. What Farquhar had proposed was a more formalised mode of recording witness accounts and cross-examinations by appointing Napier as something akin to a registrar of the court. Raffles, however, turned down Farquhar's request and ordered that "all the duties of police" and the court be "conducted by the Resident himself until further orders".[11]

Where was this Rooma Bechara located? From the records, we know that the Bechara met at what was then known as "the Residency" – a cluster of wood and attap "bungalows and outhouses" that Farquhar erected and kept "in repair" for his accommodation as Resident, and which were also used as a treasury, public office, courthouse and church.[12]

This cluster of buildings was located at what is now the junction of High Street and St Andrew's Road, where the old Supreme Court building (it is today part of the National Gallery Singapore, along with the former City Hall building) stands.[13] The structures making up the Residency can be seen in the shaded portion of the well-known sketch "Singapore from the Sea, 1823" by Assistant Engineer and Surveyor of Public Lands Lieutenant Philip Jackson. It is, however, impossible to identify exactly which of these buildings was used as the Rooma Bechara, but this would have been the location of Singapore's very first courthouse.

The Residency was, from 1819 to 1823, the focal point of the settlement, and visitors would typically land at the Resident's Steps and then proceed to the Residency compound. The Resident appointed "Captains" or "Chiefs" – prominent and respected community leaders – for the various ethnic groups and entrusted each with the preservation of peace and settlement of minor disputes.[14] In 1820, there was a captain for the Chinese (who was assisted by two deputies), and one captain each for the Bugis, Malay and Chulia populations.[15]

The Second Charter of Justice in Singapore

Following the signing of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty on 17 March 1824, Singapore's second Resident, John Crawfurd, succeeded in purchasing outright the whole of Singapore island from the Sultan and the Temenggong. This meant that the British now had jurisdiction over the entire island, and not just the settlement. For all intents and purposes, the Rooma Bechara ceased to exist since there was no further need to involve the Malay rulers in the administration of justice.

In its place, Crawfurd established the Resident's Court, which fulfilled the same function as the old Rooma Bechara, except that he presided every Monday as sole adjudicator. Later, most probably in 1826, the Resident's house and the Resident's Court and Police Offices were relocated across the Singapore River to what was then known as the

While Maxwell's House was the first "official" courthouse… it was actually the fourth building in Singapore to have been used as one.

Government Godowns Nos. 2 and 3 at Commercial Square. These premises had been appropriated for use as the Resident's Court and Police Offices, and Secretary and Master Attendant Offices.[16] These were not purpose-built administrative buildings but temporary premises, which were sturdier than the old Residency buildings that Farquhar had erected. These buildings, temporary though they were, would have housed Singapore's second courthouse.

With Singapore's sovereignty now in British hands, the EIC proceeded to establish a new Charter of Justice that would extend the jurisdiction of the Court of Judicature of the Prince of Wales Island (Penang) to both Singapore and Melaka. There were delays in the promulgation of the Charter (dated 27 November 1826), which did not arrive in Penang (then the headquarters of the Straits Settlements) until August 1827. News of the arrival of the Second Charter reached Singapore about the same time it did Penang, and the arrival of the Recorder (as judges were then known) was awaited with great anticipation.

In the meantime, the Resident Councillor – first John Prince and then Kenneth Murchison – continued to run the Resident's Court. Preparations began in Singapore in anticipation of the opening of the new Court of Judicature. One of the most urgent issues was finding a suitable building to house the court, especially since the Government Godowns at Commercial Square were wholly unsuited for use as the new court. The Singapore authorities set about scouting for a suitable building that would be large enough to accommodate the court and rooms for the Recorder while he was in the settlement.

In May 1827, the authorities identified a large house belonging to John Argyle Maxwell, which was still under construction.[17] The inspector-general was tasked to inspect the building to determine if it might be adapted for use as a Government House, a Courthouse and Recorder's Chambers. The elegant Palladian building, which came to be known as Maxwell's House, had been designed by George Drumgold (G.D.) Coleman and was scheduled for completion in September 1827. Writing to the Recorder, John Claridge, in Penang in January 1828, Governor of the Straits Settlements Robert Fullerton apprised him on the preparations for judicial accommodations in Singapore:

> In respect to arrangements at Singapore and Malacca for the accommodation of the Recorder and Court, it may be necessary to mention that the former being a place recently established not one of the regular buildings usually maintained at a British Settlement, Government House, Court House, Jail, Church etc have yet been erected, temporary means were of necessity resorted to, and a large house was engaged for, to be ready last November, the lower part of which was every way adapted for the Court, the upper for Chambers, and a place of residence for the Recorder; no intimation has yet been received officially of its being actually ready, but as orders have been sent to have it furnished, and placed on a proper footing, we conclude all will be found in due state of preparation.[18]

Portrait of Robert Fullerton, Governor of the Straits Settlements, by George Chinnery, early 19th century. Fullerton opened the first criminal hearing (session of Oyer and Terminer and Gaol Delivery) and presided over the first-ever Court of Judicature of the Prince of Wales Island (Penang), Singapore and Melaka held in Singapore on 22 May 1828. *Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*

A note in the Resident Councillor's diary dated 19 December 1827 suggests that there were delays in the construction of Maxwell's House, and that Coleman had assured the authorities that it would be completed in less than three months. However, it was expected that having heard its first sessions in Penang in December 1827, the Court of Judicature would travel on circuit to Singapore in January 1828. This meant that Maxwell's House would not be ready for use as a courthouse. An alternative would have to be found.

John Francis, proprietor of the Singapore Hotel, saw an opportunity and offered to lease his house to the authorities for use as a courthouse at 300 Sicca Rupees per month.[19] The offer was left to the governor to decide. A month later, on 28 February 1828, it is recorded that the New Tavern (also run by Francis) at Commercial Square had been "engaged as a temporary Court house" and as "sundry furniture and records, connected with the Judicial Office" were "deposited therein", the Commanding Officer of the Troops was requested to station a small military guard post there until further notice.[20] In the meantime, the godown space beneath the Resident's Office, which had hitherto served as a courthouse, was to be converted into a temporary jail for prisoners committed to stand trial.[21] The New Tavern, another temporary location, thus operated as Singapore's third courthouse, albeit, for a very short while.

By the time Fullerton and his retinue arrived in Singapore on 8 May 1828, Maxwell's House was already completed. Fullerton was greeted by the customary salutes. Sitting with Kenneth Murchison, the Resident Councillor, Fullerton opened the first criminal hearing (known as the session of Oyer and Terminer and Gaol Delivery), and presided over the first-ever Court of Judicature of the Prince of Wales Island (Penang), Singapore and Melaka in Singapore on 22 May 1828.[22] Notice of the first General Quarter Session of the court, to be held in Singapore on 2 June 1828, was published in the local newspapers.[23]

Fullerton and Murchison completed the first session, hearing 27 indictments brought by the Grand Jury. Six accused were found guilty of murder, one for manslaughter, and the rest for assault and offences against property. Two persons were sentenced to death, while two other persons indicted for piracy had to be released for the court's want of admiralty jurisdiction.[24]

After the Singapore sessions ended on 5 June 1828, Fullerton proceeded to Melaka where he opened the Assizes and held a session of Oyer and Terminer and Gaol Delivery for the first time on 16 June 1828, sitting alongside Samuel Garling, the Resident Councillor of Melaka.[25] Fullerton was back in Penang by the end of June, just in time for the next local sitting of the court.

The Court of Oyer and Terminer and Gaol Delivery was not to convene again in Singapore or Melaka during the rest of 1828, although Quarter Sessions were held in Singapore on 2 September 1828[26] and 2 December[27] 1828.

In view of history, it may said that while Maxwell's House was the first "official" courthouse, the Court of Judicature having sat for the very first time in that building in May 1828, it was actually the fourth building in Singapore to have been used as one. ♦

NOTES

1 "Treaty of Friendship and Alliance concluded between the Honourable Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles Lieutenant Governor of Fort Marlborough and its Dependencies, Agent to the Most Noble Francis Marquess of Hastings Governor General of India, etc, for the Honorable English East India Company on the one part and their Highnesses Sultan Hussein Mahummud Shah Sultan of Johore and Datoo Tummungung Sree Maharajah Abdul Raman Chief of Singapoora and its Dependencies; n the other part". See Charles Burton Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore,* vol. 1 (Singapore: Fraser and Neave, 1902), 38. (From BookSG)

2 "Arrangements Made for the Government of Singapore, in June 1819" as reproduced in Thomas St John Braddell, *The Law of the Straits Settlements: A Commentary* (Singapore: Kelly & Walsh, 1915), 148–150. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RRARE 348.5957026 BRA). Also see Buckley, An *Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore,* 58. Tanjong Malang is today the end of Shenton Way, near its junction with Prince Edward Road, while what was referred to as Tanjong Katong (or Deep Water Point) would be on the old coast where Still Road meets East Coast Road.

3 This estimate is based on the fact that the 12-pounder smooth-bore British cannons of the early 19th century had a range of about 1.2 km, and Article 1 of the treaty stipulated that the jurisdiction extended "as far as the range of cannon shot, all around the factory".

4 Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore,* 39.

5 Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore,* 39.

6 Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore,* 39.

7 "Arrangements Made for the Government of Singapore in June 1819". See Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore,* 58.

8 Article 1. See Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 58.

9 Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore,* 58–59.

10 Raffles Museum and Library, "Farquhar to Raffles, 2 November 1819," *L10: Singapore: Letters to Bencoolen*, Straits Settlements Records, 188–190. (From National Archives of Singapore)

11 Raffles Museum and Library, "Raffles to Farquhar, 20 March 1820," *L10: Singapore: Letters to Bencoolen*, Straits Settlements Records, 319. (From National Archives of Singapore)

12 Raffles Museum and Library, "Farquhar to Hull, 22 March 1823," *L13: Raffles: Letters from Singapore,* Straits Settlements Records, 283–87. (From National Archives of Singapore, microfilm no. NL58)

13 H.F. Pearson, "Singapore from the Sea, June 1823. Notes on a Recently Discovered Sketch Attributed to Lt. Phillip Jackson," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 26, no. 1 (161) (July 1953): 54. (From JSTOR via NLB's eResources website). This site used to lay a short distance from the seafront as the Padang – then known as The Esplanade – was only half its current width. See Kevin Y.L. Tan, "A History of the Padang," *BiblioAsia* 18 no. 1 (April–June 2022). Farquhar's Residency buildings were eventually abandoned. In 1827, Lieutenant Jackson reported that the old Residency area was "still covered with the decayed attap buildings belonging to Colonel Farquhar". See Pearson, "Singapore from the Sea, June 1823. Notes on a Recently Discovered Sketch Attributed to Lt. Phillip Jackson," 55.

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18 "Extract for a letter from the Honorable the Governor in Council, to the Recorder dated Fort Cornwallis 2d January, 1828" in *Minutes and Official Correspondence Between the Government and Sir John Thomas Claridge, Recorder of the Honorable Court of Judicature, Prince of Wales Island, Malacca and Singapore, Commencing in April 1827 and Terminating in September 1829* (Penang: The Government Press, 1830), 13, Google Books, accessed 3 February 2023, https://books.google.com.sg/books?id=2j9pAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

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22 James William Norton-Kyshe, *A Judicial History of the Straits Settlements 1786–1890* (Singapore: Faculty of Law, University of Singapore, 1969), 99. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RCLOS 347.5957 NOR); "Singapore," *Singapore Chronicle and Commercial Register,* 5 June 1828, 1. (From NewspaperSG)

23 "Notification," *Singapore Chronicle and Commercial Register,* 22 May 1828, 1. (From NewspaperSG)

24 Norton-Kyshe, *A Judicial History of the Straits Settlements*, 99; "Singapore".

25 Norton-Kyshe, *A Judicial History of the Straits Settlements*, 99; "Singapore".

26 "In the Court of Judicature of Prince of Wales Island, Singapore and Malacca," *Singapore Chronicle and Commercial Register,* 28 August 1828, 1. (From NewspaperSG)

27 "The Ministry," *Singapore Chronicle and Commercial Register,* 20 November 1828, 2. (From NewspaperSG)

Women and the Typewriter in Singapore's Herstories

The humble typewriter helped women become better educated, enter the workforce and contribute to society.

By Liew Kai Khiun

Mechanical to electric, manual to automated, ubiquitous to ornamental. Since it first entered commercial production in the 1870s, what is now seen as the humble typewriter has played a significant role in the history of the 20th century. Less well known is the fact that the typewriter was also a key force in shaping herstory in the same period. Women's progress through the formal economy has been closely intertwined with the typewriter. Women typists, stenographers and secretaries bore witness to the technological, socio-economic and political changes from the 1900s to the tumultuous 1950s, and later the "electrifying" 1970s.

Women Typists in Prewar Singapore

In colonial Malaya, advertisements for typewriters began appearing in English-language broadsheets from the late 1890s.[1] In the early days, companies in Malaya did not seem to hire many female typists. A letter to the *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* in 1908 notes that the "lady shorthand typist is a rare personage within the walls of commercial houses", reflecting the general absence of women in this emerging trade.[2]

Female literacy rate was low in Singapore in the prewar period and women's employment was largely confined to the informal sector.[3] However, as attitudes toward women's education changed, interest in secretarial skills like shorthand and typing became heightened. As M.R. Menon, the principal of the Young Men's Christian Association's (YMCA) School of Commerce, noted: "With the social advancement of womanhood, the Chinese girl labours under no false modesty. She is no longer content to sweep the floor and open the windows of the house and to do the cooking. Education has fired her with an ambition to do something."[4] The typewriter was to be part of the education and progress of women.

Shorthand and typing courses continued even during the period of the Japanese Occupation of Singapore (1942–45). Among the propaganda showcases were initiatives encouraging the progress of women through typewriting courses. Accounts in the English-language *Syonan Shimbun* (the newspaper that replaced the *Straits Times* during the occupation years) featured local Malay women undertaking typing courses as well as the introduction of the Kanji typewriter (which uses traditional Chinese characters).[5]

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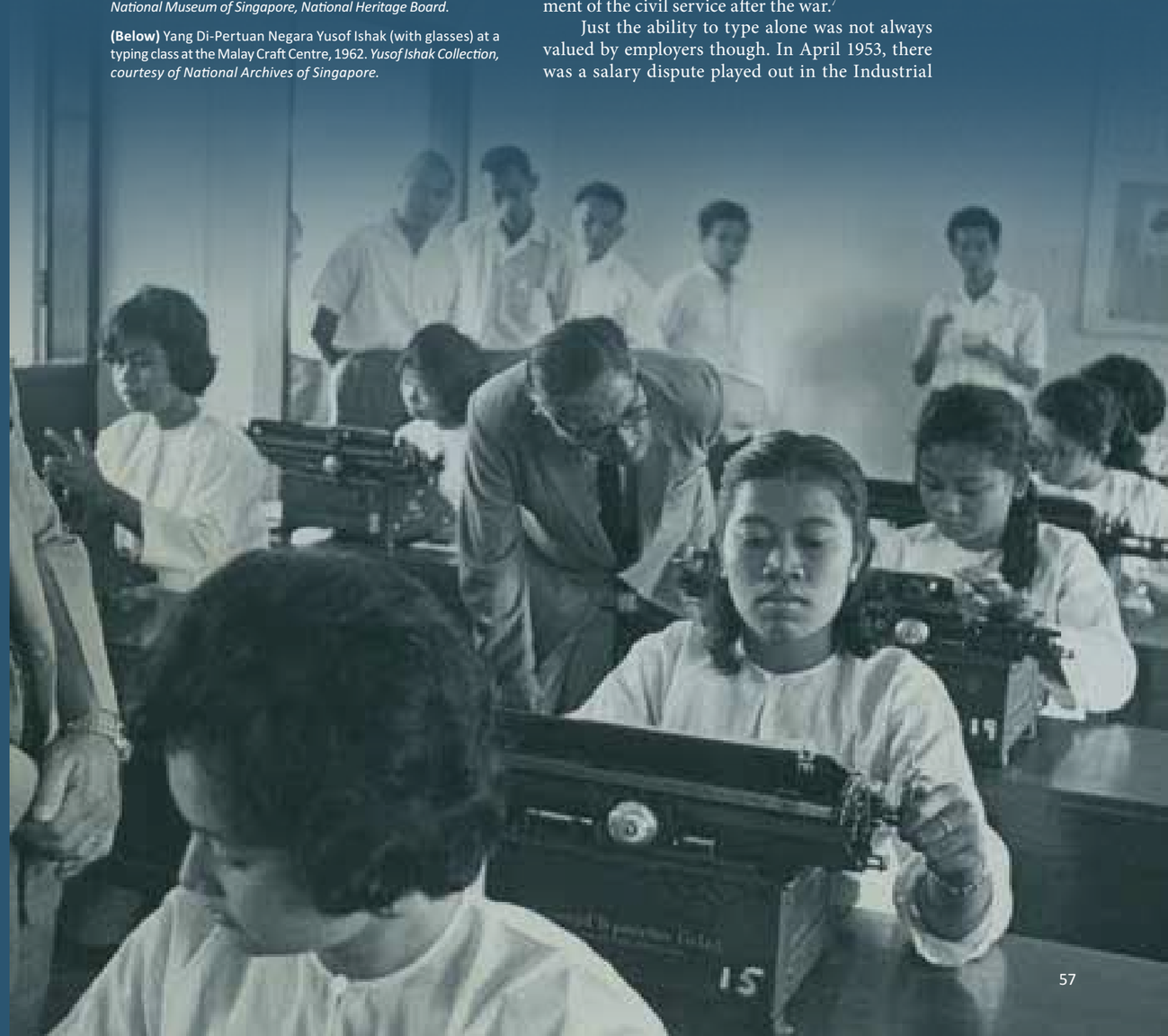
(Facing page) A Remington typewriter, 1900s. *Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*

(Below) Yang Di-Pertuan Negara Yusof Ishak (with glasses) at a typing class at the Malay Craft Centre, 1962. *Yusof Ishak Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

The Tumultuous 50s

Demand for typewriters grew significantly after the war. The trend started from the disruption of women's education during the occupation years when many found themselves either too old or economically disadvantaged to continue with their education. Instead, these women attended commercial classes like typewriting and shorthand.[6] Jobs that required such skills saw acute demand with the reestablishment of the civil service after the war.[7]

Just the ability to type alone was not always valued by employers though. In April 1953, there was a salary dispute played out in the Industrial



Arbitration Court between the Singapore Government Administrative and Clerical Services Union and the Singapore Post and Telegraph Workers' Union (SPTWU), and the Telecommunications Department. One of the key points of contention was the call for women teleprinter operators to receive the same salary as women postal clerks.[8]

Teleprinters were introduced in 1932 in the postal offices of Malaya – a milestone in communication technology.[9] Also known as "typewriting by wire", teleprinting entailed telegraphic instruments receiving printed messages via telephone cables and radio relay systems. The Posts and Telegraphs Department had affered teleprinter work to women typists "as an experiment" and "'a different kind of job' for the fair sex".[10]

When pressed to increase the salary scale of teleprinters to that of clerks, the Telecommunications Department attempted to devalue the responsibilities of its 35 women teleprinter operators by claiming that they had engaged in frivolous tele-conversations with male pilots. When cross-examined by the union's legal representative Lee Kuan Yew, the assistant controller of the Telecommunications Department, J. Metcalfe-Moore, said that his female workers had voluntarily taken on duties on long-range radio communication. He added: "The girls like talking to the pilots and the pilots like talking to them."[11] The court eventually ruled in favour of the teleprinter typists, and reduced the time to attain the maximum salary from 21 years to 17.[12]

Prejudice against teleprinter typists continued. Three years after the court ruling, a *Straits Times* cartoon characterised the teleprinter typist as having a "life of ease" and undeserving of her salary. The cartoon drew a sharp rebuke from Betty De Silva of the SPTWU. In her letter to the newspaper titled "The Tougher Sex", she noted that teleprinter typists in the Telecommunications Department worked longer shifts and longer hours (42 hours per week) compared to typists in other government departments (36.5 hours per week). In addition, they were also called upon to perform other duties such as sending or receiving telegrams by telephone, gathering and compiling traffic statistics, operating telephone switchboards, communicating with aircraft on radio telephones and carrying out other clerical duties.[13]

De Silva wrote: "As for soft supervisors and 'Crying Allowance', it might enlighten your artist to learn that some supervisors have earned the reputation as strict disciplinarians, the respectful title of 'the tiger', the 'hawk,' etc.". Below the published letter was the editor's remark, seemingly contrite: "The joke, apparently, is on us."[14]

More than a week before De Silva's letter was published on 29 August 1956, the *Singapore Standard* had reported on 18 August that 53 staff from the Union Insurance Company of Canton had threatened a walk-out after the company sacked one of its stenographers, Doris Phua, allegedly for "unsatisfactory" work.[15] Phua was subsequently reinstated to her position, with an additional three months' salary as compensation.[16]

Industrial strikes and labour disputes were part of Singapore's politically tumultuous landscape in the 1950s. While their numbers were small, women typists played a part during the period of decolonisation and self-determination.

Teleprinter typist Loretta Monteiro (left) giving a pilot his bearings, while her colleague Nellie Sims records a message from another pilot at the Singapore Telecommunications Department's civil radio receiving station on St Michael's Road, 1953. *Source: The Straits Times © SPH Media Limited. Reprinted with permission.*

(Above) An evening typing class, 1954. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

(Left) Advertisement for a Smith Premier typewriter. *Image reproduced from "Page 2 Advertisements Column 3," Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser, 3 June 1899, 2. (From NewspaperSG).*

The Electrifying 1970s

When Singapore gained internal self-government in 1959 under the People's Action Party (PAP), the typewriter was still out of reach for much of Singapore's populace. However, by the 1970s, typewriters were in great demand in offices.[17] By the mid-1970s, Singapore was importing around 70,000 typewriters per year, with many growing increasingly sophisticated with memory chips and computer functions.[18]

With the extensive provision of education opportunities to the general populace by the new PAP government, a more educated women workforce emerged.[19] Collectively, these women provided additional labour to the government's industrialisation drive to power the burgeoning local economy in the 1970s.[20]

Between 1970 and 1980, a radical spike was recorded in the women workforce: from 761,356, or 24.6 percent of a total of 1.9 million workers to 981,235, or 39.3 percent. In the fastest-growing industries of manufacturing, finance, business and trade, women – mostly single – registered a growth of over 120 percent within the same decade, exceeding the number of men.[21]

These changes were also reflected in the shifting demographics in women's educational levels and participation in the labour force.[22] The 1970 population census registered 56,939 men versus 26,002 women in the clerical sector. A decade later, the numbers reversed, with 65,931 men to 101,524 women, with the latter seeing a quadruple jump.[23] Many women entered the workforce as typists and secretaries, becoming the first to handle increasingly sophisticated typewriters in new business environments.

"We Are Women, Not IBM Machines"

By 1978, Singapore had an estimated 14,800 employees under the category of "office support service". Secretaries became highly sought after. Compared to the monthly salary of $323 and $560 for typists and stenographers respectively, secretaries commanded a higher monthly salary of almost $1,500.[24]

Embodying this desire to use a typewriter as a springboard was 22-year-old Nancy Khoo, a private secretary at a foreign bank, who was featured in the *Straits Times* in August 1970. After leaving school, Khoo worked in a food and beverage company as a telephonist-cum-receptionist. Attracted by what she perceived as the growing prestige of secretaries, Khoo enrolled in evening shorthand and typing courses and became a qualified secretary.

She told the *Straits Times*: "I was then earning $200 a month, now I'm getting more than $600. I also get an annual bonus. In four years' time I will have

(Right) The Typists' Branch of the Amalgamated Union of Public Employees published *The Typist Voice* newsletter. *Image reproduced from The Typist Voice 1, no. 1 (Singapore: Typists' Branch, Amalgamated Union of Public Employees, 1975–). (From PublicationSG).*

(Below) A trade exhibition of computers and office equipment held in 1969. *Image reproduced from IBM News: Singapore and Malaysia 2, no. 1 (Jan–Feb 1969): 1. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RCLOS 651.26 IBMWTC).*


EXHIBITION OF COMPUTERS AND OFFICE EQUIPMENT

The Singapore Society of Accountants recently organised an exhibition of computers and office equipment in the Singapore Polytechnic. The exhibition was opened by Singapore's Minister of Science and Technology, Dr Toh Chin Chye.

IBM participated in the exhibition with an IBM 1130 Computing System and a display of the latest in office equipment.

As expected, a large crowd turned up at the exhibition and a lot of attention was focussed on the IBM section of the exhibition.

Miss Shirley Tan, Educational Data Representative, demonstrating the new advanced electric typewriter, the IBM Selectric to a section of the crowd.

One of the contests organised by the Singapore Association of Personal and Executive Secretaries in search of the "ideal secretary" was "Queen of the Keys" in 1981. *Image reproduced from The Nine to Five Secretary, May 1981 (Singapore: Sterling Communications, 1981–), 52. (From PublicationSG).*

a chance to travel on company expense, because after six years' service we are supposed to pay head office in Manila a visit. I will like to do a managerial job next." Her aspirations reflected a more promising career prospect that the typewriter had facilitated.[25]

However, such prospects were also premised upon the recognition of the contributions of the mainly female secretaries. As another secretary told the *Straits Times* in August 1970: "[W]e are women, and not IBM machines. Once in a while when we have done a job well we'd like to receive a compliment. We want to feel we are contributing towards the company. We want to take on some responsibility, to get involved and to use our initiative."[26]

The growing visibility of the typewriting profession was reflected in the formation of two female-centric associations in the early 1970s. They were the Typists' Branch from the main trade union, the Amalgamated Union of Public Employees, and the Singapore Association of Personal and Executive Secretaries (SAPES).[27] These organisations aimed to provide more active support and representation of secretaries in Singapore.

What we know of the Typists' Branch comes mainly from its short-lived newsletter, *The Typist Voice*, produced in 1975 to circulate information to its increasing membership, who were mainly women as reflected in their dominance in the branch committee.[28]

SAPES, on the other hand, began to find resonance with a new generation of female secretaries and executives. Starting with around 50 members and with the support of the Stamford Group of Colleges that provided typewriting courses, SAPES's prominence in the 1970s came with the hosting of the Asian Congress of Secretaries in 1978.[29] By then, the association's membership had increased to 400 comprising mainly women.[30] According to the assistant secretary of the organisation, Chua Lee Hua, "they were clearly tired of the stock image of secretaries as nothing more than wooly-headed dolly birds who sit on bosses laps and make coffee".[31]

Following its inception in 1971, SAPES started organising annual public contests in search of the "ideal secretary". These included the "Ideal Secretary Quest" in 1974 and "Queen of the Keys" in 1981.[32] Qualities such as "good human and public relations attitudes", having good "secretarial skills" and a "charming personality" were extolled.[33] The association also celebrated International Secretary Week, organising international conferences and participating in trade exhibitions of office equipment.[34] Its public inputs and endorsement became important to distributors of office equipment in the competitive industry.

The typewriter entered its twilight years in the 1980s as the era of microcomputers dawned.[35] Over time, everyone who worked in an office was given a personal computer for their use. The job of stenographer and typist vanished, and typing pools dried up. And with everyone sending out their own emails these days, secretaries no longer take memos and type out letters. Instead, they have evolved to become personal assistants.

Typewriters and electronic word processors can no longer be found in offices . But even if their absence is little mourned today, they deserve to be remembered for their role in providing women with avenues for entering the workforce and, in the process, helping to write, or rather type out, herstory. ♦

NOTES

1 In an advertisement for the Remington typewriter by A.R Carbbe, the sole importer for the Straits Settlements, the device is described as "an investment that will pay. Saves time, money and labour. The use of the machine can be learned in 30 minutes... Writes four times as quick as the pen". See "Page 2 Advertisements Column 4," *Daily Advertiser*, 7 December 1891, 2. (From NewspaperSG)
2 "Shorthand for Girls," *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 16 April 1908, 10. (From NewspaperSG)
3 Sharon Lee, "Female Immigrants and Labour in Colonial Malaya: 1860–1947," *International Migration Review* 23, no. 2 (June 1989): 309–31. (From JSTOR via NLB's eResources website)
4 According to M.R. Menon, since the YMCA School of Commerce opened in 1928, out of around 400 students enrolled, 60 were women and all of them ethnic Chinese. See "More Chinese Girls Work in Singapore Offices," *Straits Budget*, 27 July 1939, 8. (From NewspaperSG)
5 ''Katakana and Kanzi Typewriters Will Soon Be Fashion Here," *Syonan Shimbun*, 24 July 1942, 4; "Of Interest to Women," *Syonan Shimbun Fortnightly*, 5 June 1945, 6. (From NewspaperSG)
6 "'Commercials' Are Big Draw for Better Jobs," *Singapore Free Press*, 6 March 1957, 5. (From NewspaperSG)
7 "War Over Clerks," *Singapore Free Press*, 10 December 1946, 4. (From NewspaperSG)
8 "Problem Number One for Mr. Yong Is All About Women: Postal Pay Arbitration Opens," *Straits Times*, 10 April 1953, 7. (From NewspaperSG)
9 "A Demonstration of Teleprinters," *Malayan Tribune*, 24 May 1933, 5. (From NewspaperSG)
10 "Typing Letters Across Malaya at 60 Words a Minute," *Straits Times*, 19 March 1933, 9. (From NewspaperSG)
11 "Problem Number One for Mr. Yong Is All About Women."
12 "Mr Yong Gives Clerks $500: Arbitration Award," *Straits Budget*, 16 April 1953, 15. (From NewspaperSG). In a subsequent Industrial Arbitration Court ruling in 1965, the salary scale for teleprinter typists was increased from $137.50–$332.50 to $145–347.50, while the salary of teleprinter supervisors was raised from $400 to $425. See "Clerks Get a $15 Rise: Arbitration Award," *Straits Times*, 17 October 1965. 9. (From NewspaperSG)
13 "The Tougher Sex," *Straits Times*, 29 August 1956, 6. (From NewspaperSG)
14 "The Tougher Sex."
15 "53 May Go on Strike Because Pretty Doris Is Under Notice," *Singapore Standard*, 18 August 1956, 3. (From NewspaperSG)
16 "Doris (The Girl Who Nearly Caused a Strike) Gets 'Windfall'," *Singapore Standard*, 6 September 1956, 4. (From NewspaperSG)
17 "Local Companies Join the Technological Era," *New Nation*, 31 August 1971, 10. (From NewspaperSG). Reflecting the transformation of offices in the 1970s, the sale of office equipment in the first quarter of 1970 was $5,874,632 compared to $16,189,261 for the whole of 1968. See Anthony Ramasamy, "Clearing the Desks for Action," *Singapore Trade and Industry*, March 1971 (Singapore: Straits Times Press, 1961–1976), 8. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 381.095957 SIN)
18 "Latest Machines to Help Firms to Increase Output and Efficiency," *Straits Times*, 24 August 1975, 20. (From NewspaperSG)
19 Linda Lim and Pang Eng Fong, *Trade, Employment and Industrialisation in Singapore* (Geneva: International Labour Organisation, 1986), 59–61. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 330.95957 LIM)
20 Dick Wilson, "Singapore Is Poised for a Major Economic Breakthrough," *Singapore Trade and Industry*, February 1970 (Singapore: Straits Times Press, 1961–1976), 33. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 381.095957 SIN)
21 Khoo Chian Kim, *Census of Population 1980: Release No. 4. Economic Characteristics* (Singapore: Department of Statistics, 1981), 2, 12. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 312.095957 CEN)
22 Janice Loo, "A Quiet Revolution: Women and Work in Industrialising Singapore," *Biblioasia* 10, no. 2 (July–September 2014): 28–33.
23 Khoo, *Census of Population, 1980*, 14–15.
24 "Bouquet for the Personal Secretary," *Business Times*, 6 March 1978, 14. (From NewspaperSG). Evidence of the growing recognition of the secretarial profession was already evident in the early 1970s, with pay grades based on academic qualifications, certification and experience. This ranged from $350 for those with just a Senior Cambridge Certificate and no prior working experience, to $1,400 for secretaries with university degrees working in multinational corporations. Judith Wong, "The Girls the Bosses Must Pamper," *Straits Times*, 2 August 1970, 12. (From NewspaperSG)
25 Wong, "The Girls the Bosses Must Pamper."
26 Wong, "The Girls the Bosses Must Pamper."
27 "No Longer on Their Own…", *New Nation*, 20 March 1972, 3 (From NewspaperSG)
28 *The Typist Voice* 1, no. 1 (Singapore: Typists' Branch, Amalgamated Union of Public Employees, 1975–). (From PublicationSG). Other than several volumes found in the collection of the National Library Board, there remains scant information about the Typists' Branch. Since the 1950s, typists in the public sector were placed in Division IV, alongside office boys and drivers with limited prospects. See "Division 4 Officers", *New Nation*, 27 May 1974, 6. (From NewspaperSG)
29 "Upgrading Skills to Meet Challenges of the 'Eighties," *Straits Times*, 6 March 1978, 12. (From NewspaperSG). For details of the event, see Singapore Association of Personal and Executive Secretaries, *Welcome to Third Asian Congress of Secretaries, Hyatt Singapore Hotel, 5–11 March 1978* (Singapore: The Association, 1978). (From PublicationSG). SAPES was renamed the Singapore Association of Administrative Professionals (SAAP) in 2005. It still exists today. See "About SAAP," Singapore Association of Administrative Professionals, accessed 9 July 2022, https://saap.org.sg/index.php/about-us/history-logo-vision-mission.
30 "About SAAP."
31 "Just Fed Up," *New Nation*, 14 January 1975, 10–11. (From NewspaperSG)
32 *The Nine to Five Secretary*, May 1981 (Singapore: Sterling Communications, 1981–), 52. (From PublicationSG)
33 "Out to Prove Who Is the Best," *New Nation*, 8 February 1974, 2. (From NewspaperSG)
34 In conjunction with the Asian Congress of Secretaries in 1978, SAPES also organised an exhibition of the latest office equipment at the Hyatt Hotel showcasing new products like the IBM Copier III, the IBM selectric typewriter 82C, IBM microsystems, videotype CRT screens from Videotron Singapore, Rank Xerox machines and telephone apparatus from Northeastern Telecom (Asia). See "Latest Office Equipment on Display," *Straits Times*, 6 March 1978, 12. (From NewspaperSG)
35 Ilene Aleshire, "Computers Start to Put the Bite on Companies," *Straits Times*, 27 May 1984, 19. (From NewspaperSG)

Terraces on Tagore

The Curious Origins of Teachers' Housing Estate

The Singapore Teachers' Union wanted a clubhouse.
It ended up building a housing estate.
By Sharon Teng

A view of the Teachers' Housing Estate from the bustop on Yio Chu Kang Road. *Photo by Sharon Teng.*

Sharon Teng is a Librarian with the National Library, Singapore. She is part of the Arts and General Reference team, and manages the Social Sciences and Humanities Collection.

People living in private residential estates like Opera Estate and Sennett Estate end up developing a strong sense of camaraderie over time as neighbours became friends. In Teachers' Housing Estate, the special bond among residents was established quickly because most of the original homeowners in the area shared a similar profession – they were, as the name of the estate implies, teachers.[1]

Located at the junction of Upper Thomson Road and Yio Chu Kang Road, Teachers' Housing Estate came about thanks to the efforts of the Singapore Teachers' Union (STU). The estate has a somewhat curious history: the primary reason for building it was because the union wanted to have a clubhouse for its members.

Work on the 20-acre site began in the late 1960s. When the estate was officially opened in 1971, about 70 percent of the 256 homes in the estate were owned by teachers. The clubhouse was built a few years later.

An Estate for Teachers

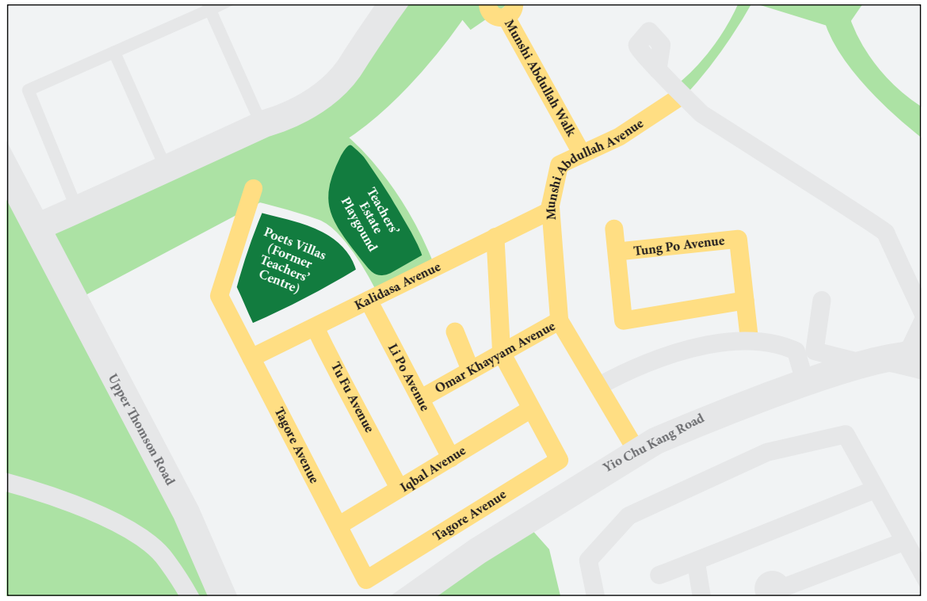
The STU mooted the idea of building a Teachers' Estate with its own clubhouse in 1967.[2] Yeoh Beng Cheow, a teacher at Bartley Secondary school and the union's deputy general secretary in 1968, was involved in the conception and development of Teachers' Housing Estate, along with then STU president Karim Bagoo.[3]

In a 1995 interview with the *Straits Times*, Yeoh said that the union had planned to build a clubhouse for several years but nothing was done, so he and his colleagues decided that the STU committee would do so. Unfortunately, there were problems. "The union could not afford to buy a centrally sited piece of land large enough for a clubhouse and for outdoor facilities," according to the news report. The union considered a site further from the city which would be cheaper. However, being further away would not be convenient for members. "In the end, the committee came up with a novel plan: develop a housing estate around the clubhouse," the paper reported.[4]

Yeoh recalled in his 2010 oral history interview: "At that time, we had no money for a clubhouse. There was a fund of about $80,000 set aside, too small for anything. With that, we could probably buy a house somewhere and turn it into a clubhouse. But in my view, that was unacceptable because the house would eventually degenerate into a mahjong house and that would tarnish the image of the profession. An idea struck me one day, that STU [Singapore Teachers' Union] should develop a housing estate and acquire the land within the estate for a clubhouse."[5]

The site that was eventually chosen was near Sembawang Hills Estate. It had been a gambier and pepper plantation in the mid-19th century before being

An advertisement for houses in Teachers' Housing Estate, priced from $24,500 and up. *Image reproduced from "Page 6 Advertisements Column 1," Straits Times, 7 October 1967, 6. (From NewspaperSG).*



Map of the Teacher's Housing Estate, showing the roads and various amenities.

converted into a pineapple plantation. It subsequently became a rubber plantation named Hup Choon Kek towards the end of the 19th century.[6] Teachers' Estate was also located near Serangoon Housing Estate and Windsor Park Co-operative Housing Estate where many teachers lived. It was anticipated that teachers living in these two estates as well as the new Teachers' Housing Estate would become regular patrons of the clubhouse.[7]

In recollecting the initial planning of the estate and clubhouse, Yeoh envisioned that the "housing estate would be sited away from the city and with sufficient teachers living there, the clubhouse would be patronised and running expenses could be met".[8]

In 1967, a committee for the housing project was formed, headed by Bagoo as committee chairman. Other committee members included Yeoh, who was appointed committee secretary, and Lawrence Sia, the general secretary of the STU.[9]

Then Minister for Finance Lim Kim San agreed to release $5 million for teachers who needed housing loans.[10] As he explained at the opening of the estate on 19 October 1971 (by which time he was the education minister): "When Devan [Nair] first approached me regarding a Government loan to help members of the Teachers' Union to build their own homes, I had no doubts about the benefit of such a scheme. We were then in the midst of encouraging our citizens to become home-owners through the Housing and Development Board home-ownership scheme, and the plan of the STU ties in beautifully with the overall plan to make Singapore a home-owning democracy."[11]

The STU appointed Lian Hup Construction Company as the developer. As Yeoh recalled in 1995: "I was in my early 30s then, full of fire and drive. Yes, we had no technical background. So we found a developer, and told him: You buy the land, build the houses. We will arrange for buyers and financing. I gave him quite tough terms: We pay you 10 per cent downpayment, 90 per cent on completion. This way, it was in his interest to complete the project fast."[12]

Building Homes

Under the STU's arrangement with Lian Hup, the developer agreed to give the union a piece of land of about 90,000 sq ft (8,361.3 sq m) for free which would be used for the clubhouse.[13]

For each house built by Lian Hup, the STU paid the developer $24,000. The union then sold the houses and used the difference to fund the building of the clubhouse. These were priced from $24,500 for an intermediate double-storey terrace house to $30,000 for a corner double-storey terrace unit with a basement.[14] The STU offered housing loans that ranged from $13,800 to $24,000, with the repayment period between six and 12 years.[15]

However, the initial reaction by teachers was lukewarm. There were other options, prices of houses elsewhere were comparable, and many considered the estate to be too rural; the site had dirt tracks leading to it and was surrounded by farmland.[16] Potential homebuyers also had reservations about whether the STU could complete the project, given that this was not something the union had done before. In addition, there were concerns about flooding in the estate as it was lower than Yio Chu Kang Road.[17]

Subsequently though, when bookings for the estate were offered to other government servants and the general public, there was a healthy response as the prices of the houses were considered reasonable.[18]

A Neighbourly Spirit

All 256 houses in Teachers' Estate were completed by June 1969.[19] The housing committee met up with the Advisory Committee on the Naming of Roads and Streets and suggested that the roads in the estate be named after poets or people well known in the education or literary fields. The proposal was accepted. Roads include Munshi Abdullah Avenue, Tagore Avenue and Tung Po Avenue.

In 1971, when the estate was officially opened, 180 of the homes were owned by teachers.[20] Neighbourhood amenities were slowly added. By 1974, the estate had a grocery shop, a tailor's shop, a hairdressing salon, a bakery, a small church, and a bus terminus with buses to town and Jurong. However, residents had to travel to Nee Soon and Thomson Road for the nearest wet markets.[21]

"Although the estate is a bit way out, I don't mind," said one resident in 1974. "It is really quite convenient. We have the fishmonger, the egg woman and the newspaper man making their rounds to the homes every morning." She did wish that more hawkers would come by though.[22]

Crime was one of the problems faced by residents in the early days. A few months after moving in, residents reported two burglaries in October 1969: thieves had broken into houses via window grills. "At that time, the families that moved in were far and in-between," recalled a pioneer resident. "The thieves found the homes a good target, even during the day, as most of us would be away working." Alarmed, the residents formed a vigilante corps and the place acquired the nickname "Whistling Estate" because residents used police whistles to summon help from neighbours. Home burglaries eventually stopped when more people moved into the estate, police patrols increased in frequency and residents kept watch dogs.[23]

Given that the majority of the residents shared a similar occupation, a community spirit quickly developed. Besides home visits, they would go for outings together and many also joined the estate's organised activities. Carpooling was the norm for travelling to work, and help was never far away if a resident's car developed mechanical problems. "Teachers who find themselves teaching in schools in the same locality are quite ready to give lifts to each other," said Mrs T. Broughton, a teacher and resident. She herself got a lift from her neighbour teaching in the same school.[24]

The same neighbourly spirit was also evident during school holidays, when spring-cleaning and house-painting were done en masse. "Whenever we feel that it is time the exteriors need a new coat of paint we just consult our neighbours in the same row, decide on the colour scheme and get on with the painting. Apart from cutting down on cost, we all agree it would give the houses a neater appearance," said another resident.[25]

Social life in the estate revolved around the communal activities organised by the Teachers' Housing Estate Residents' Association. Excursions were organised to visit places of interest and, on occasion, welfare homes. Yoga classes for ladies were held in one another's homes on a rotation basis, and youths attended twice-weekly sparring sessions at the basement of a resident taekwondo enthusiast. Residents were also treated to a monthly sale at the Teachers' Centre's mini-supermarket.[26]

In 1973, Tan Wee Kiat, the president of the Residents' Association, noted that "[t]hough the Teachers' Estate did not start out as a social experiment, it has nevertheless shown that a friendly, more co-operative community is forged when residents are of the same profession and socio-economic background".[27]

Teachers' Centre

With the estate built, the STU embarked on plans to build a clubhouse, which would also serve as the union's headquarters.[28] The original plans for the clubhouse were expansive: it included facilities such as a library, a kindergarten, a hostel, a restaurant, a swimming pool, tennis courts, a multipurpose hall and a field with a 400-metre running track. The clubhouse was projected to cost half a million dollars to build. However, in 1971, the STU only had $80,562 from its building fund and a further $160,000 from the estate developer as commission for the housing project.[29]

To raise money, the STU launched a series of fundraising activities from October 1972. The aim was to raise $150,000 (30 percent of the estimated

Teachers visiting the Teachers' Centre construction site, 1972. *Image reproduced from Mentor vol. 2, no. 6 (October 1972) (Singapore: Singapore Teachers' Union, 1971–), 6. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 331.881137 M).*

The "trishawthon" event helped raise funds for building the Teachers' Centre, 1973. *Image reproduced from Mentor vol. 5, no. 1 (1975) (Singapore: Singapore Teachers' Union, 1971–), 14. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 331.881137 M).*

cost for phase one) for the clubhouse, which would be called the Teachers' Centre.[30] One of the activities in February 1973 was a "trishawthon", which raised $34,671.[31] The STU also appealed to teachers to donate to the clubhouse fund and over 300 teachers pledged a total of $35,540. In 1973, the union received a $100,000 loan from the government.[32]

The Teachers' Centre was finally completed in the second half of 1973, and on 19 October 1974, the STU held its anniversary celebrations at the centre for the very first time. However, not all facilities had been built. The swimming pool was completed in 1975, the tennis court in 1978, and two squash courts were only added 10 years later.[33]

In 2010, the STU leased out the land that the centre had occupied to a private developer and the union relocated to Serangoon Road that same year.[34] In a 2009 piece in the STU's *Mentor* publication, Leow Peng Kui, a trustee of the union, wrote that the decision to move was not taken lightly and was made "after much thought and consultation". "The re-current [sic] cost of maintaining the present Union Centre in tip top condition is prohibitive," he wrote. "Furthermore, the facilities are under-utilised." He noted that while there were "a lot of sentiments" associated with the place as it had been there for several decades, change was necessary. "[I]f we do not move ahead because of sentiment, we may compound the problems we will face in future," he added.[35]

The site where the centre used to be is now occupied by Poets Villas, a cluster housing development.[36]

Teachers' Estate Today

Despite its success, Teacher's Estate was the only housing effort by the STU, though not for want of trying. In 1984, the union announced plans to build a second Teachers' Estate in Bukit Timah, but those plans fell through. The 912 teachers who had expressed interest in this project were left disappointed.[37]

Over time, as with other housing estates around Singapore, some of the original terrace houses have been torn down, with three- and four-storey houses erected in their place. Nonetheless, the estate still retains the charm of a quaint and rustic neighbourhood. As a writer for a property website noted: "Although I could see that many of the houses are old – they still boast the original architecture… [b]ut they do not look rundown and the estate feels both comfortable and well-loved."[38]

The Teachers' Centre, 1975. *Image reproduced from Mentor vol. 5, no. 1 (1975) (Singapore: Singapore Teachers' Union, 1971–), 10. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 331.881137 M).*

One of the original residents of the estate, Abdul Qayyum, paid $26,500 for a 3,200 sq ft (297 sq m) corner terrace house in 1969. By 1995, it had appreciated to about $1.4 million but he firmly declared that he had no intention of selling. "Many of us know each other as neighbours, and as colleagues. I'm so used to this place, I don't intend to move anywhere else," he said.[39] According to a property website, a 2,700 sq ft (250 sq m) four-bedroom house on Omar Khayyam Avenue is currently on the market for $4.2 million.[40]

In 2004, it was announced that Teachers' Estate would be upgraded under the Estate Upgrading Programme; upgrading works began on 10 October 2004. The $1.16-million facelift included the creation of a new poetry gallery, a new staircase, new estate signage and refurbishment of parks.[41] A new 7.6-hectare park planned for the estate is due to be completed by 2024.[42] ♦

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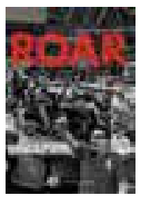

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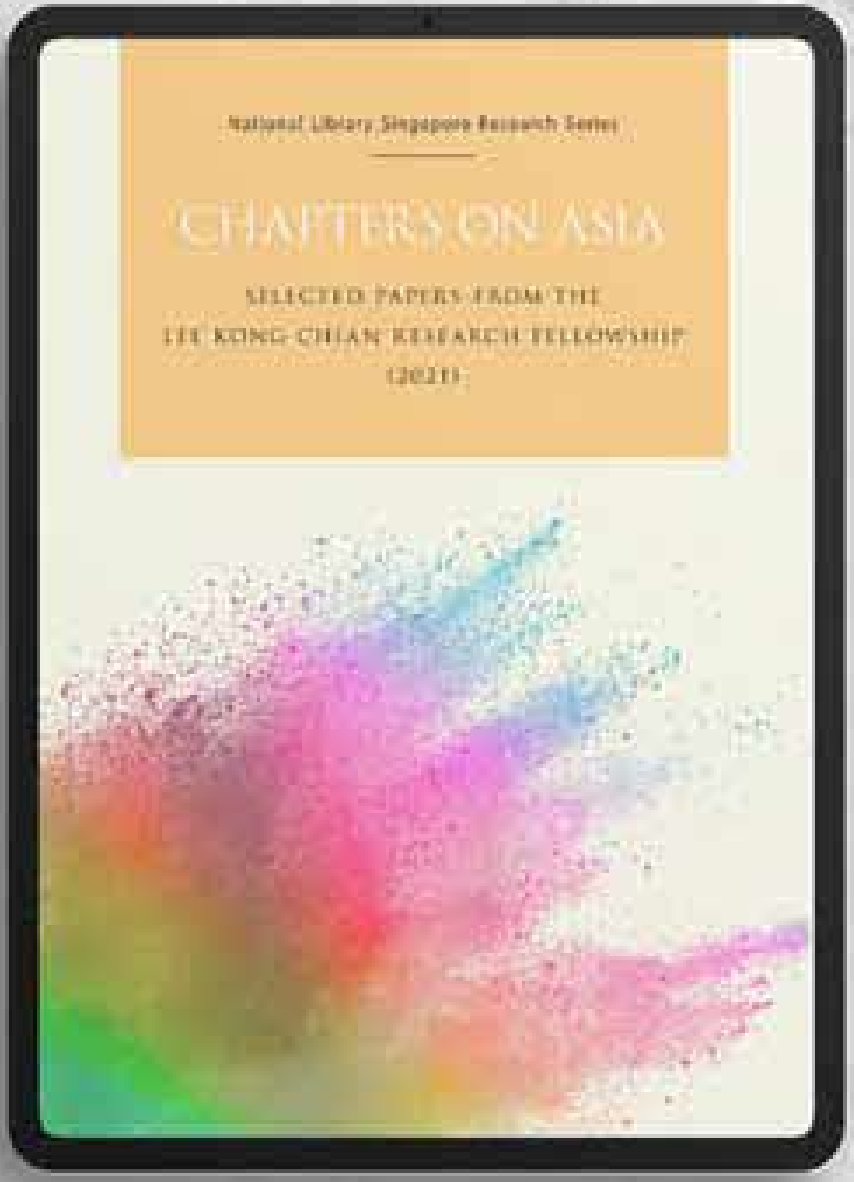

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