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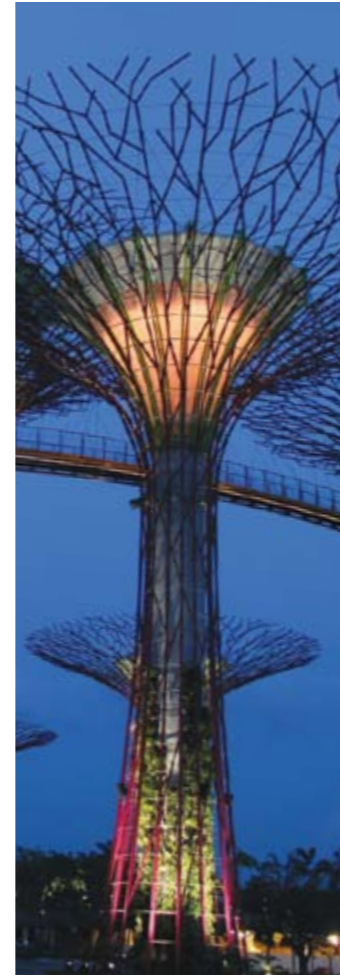


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Editorial & Production

Managing Editor
Joanna Tan

Editorial Support
Masamah Ahmad
Nor-Afidah Abd Rahman
Valerie Chew

Contributors
Alvin Chua, Foodwaste Republic, Jerome Lim, Joanna Tan, Julian Davison, Kevin Tan, Lim Tin Seng, Shirley Chew, Sundusia Rosdi, Victor Savage

Design and Print
Relay Room
Times Printers

Please direct all correspondence to:
National Library Board
100 Victoria Street #14-01
National Library Building
Singapore 188064
Tel: +65 6332 3255
Fax: +65 6332 3611
Email: ref@nlb.gov.sg
Website: www.nlb.gov.sg

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Director's Column

As we prepare to celebrate Singapore's 47th National Day, *BiblioAsia* looks at Singapore's remarkable development as a city since its founding by Sir Stamford Raffles in 1819.

The lead feature, "Raffles and the Founding of Singapore", focuses on the National Library's upcoming exhibition of rare letters from the collections of the Library and the Bute Archive in the United Kingdom. Written by Raffles during Singapore's early years, the letters present the unique perspective of Singapore's founder on the port city that he was instrumental in establishing. Curator Kevin Tan examines the historical context of the letters, which will go on show in August 2012.

This issue also explores Singapore's urban development in the twentieth century. Lee Kong Chian Research Fellow Julian Davison examines the making of Singapore's first high-rise skyline from 1918 to 1928 in "On the Waterfront", while Lim Tin Seng studies Singapore's more recent development as a Garden City in "From Botanic Gardens to Gardens by the Bay".

The growth of any city is accompanied by inevitable concerns about the sustainability of urban development. In "Sustaining City-State Singapore", Victor Savage explores the management of "brown" issues as a key element of Singapore's strategy for sustainable urban development.

Singapore's rapid development has also meant both the creation and loss of neighbourhoods. Alvin Chua outlines the history of Tiong Bahru, Singapore's first public housing estate, while Sundusia Rosdi recalls memories of Kampung Pasiran in "Menyingkap Kenangan Kampung Pasiran dan Sekitarannya".

In keeping with our celebration of Singapore's National Day, the front cover of this issue features a portrait of Raffles as a nod towards his role in the establishment of Singapore as a port city. The back cover looks at the development of Singapore through snapshots of the central business district skyline in 1932, 1986 and 2012. The changes in the skyline are both startling and an interesting reflection of Singapore's growth since the early twentieth century.

As a reminder of Singapore's setting within the Southeast Asian region, the National Library publication, *An Anthology of English Writing from Southeast Asia*, will be launched in July. Shirley Chew reviews the book in "Rich and Strange": The manifold remaking of English in Southeast Asian literatures".

We hope you enjoy this issue of *BiblioAsia*. Happy reading!

Ms Ngian Lek Choh
Director, National Library

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Statue of Raffles by sculptor Thomas Woolner. Courtesy of John Bastin.

Raffles and the Founding of Singapore: An Exhibition of Raffles' Letters from the Bute Archive and the National Library

Kevin Y.L. Tan

Nearly 200 years after he set foot on Singapore to establish a trading post for the British East India Company, Sir Thomas Stamford Bingley Raffles (1781–1826) continues to fascinate and intrigue us. How else can you explain our penchant for naming all manner of things after him?

The world's largest flower, the *Rafflesia arnoldii*, is named after him, as is the hotel that was once the world's tallest, Swissotel The Stamford, and the one which is Singapore's oldest. And then, there is Raffles Tailor, and Raffles Photographer, Stamford Canal, Raffles Boulevard, and the whole family of Raffles Schools. What about the more than a dozen biographies of the man, not to mention a forthcoming version by noted British biographer, Victoria Glendinning.

Even if the thousands of students forced a National Education diet of Raffles are probably quite jaded by the mention of his name, Raffles has worn well. He has not, like some of our more modern heroes, faded like the old history books that detail his story and deeds. The same students who have not heard of Toh Chin Chye still remember Raffles from their early history lessons. Come August this year, a new exhibition at the National Library will afford us another opportunity to revisit the life and exploits of this remarkable man.

Beyond the Visionary with Folded Arms

Powerful images have an uncanny hold on our memories and imaginations. Think of Raffles and there emerges the visage of a handsome

visionary, looking purposefully in a distance, arms confidently folded, thanks to the iconic bronze statue of Raffles by the English sculptor Thomas Woolner (1825–1892), who never saw the man in the flesh.

Raffles was born on 6 July 1781 off the coast of Port Morant, Jamaica, on a ship captained by his father, Captain Benjamin Raffles. The Raffles family was not rich but young Raffles went to school and stayed there till his father could no longer afford to pay for his studies. In 1795, at the age of 14, he obtained a position as a clerk at the British East India Company and two years later, when his father died, he became the family's sole breadwinner, providing for his mother and five sisters.

For a decade, Raffles enjoyed a career as a diligent, if unexceptional, cog in the gigantic organisation that was the East India Company. But things changed in 1805. That year, he married Olivia Marianne Fancourt, widow of Dr Jacob Fancourt (who had been assistant surgeon in Madras), and was sent to the Prince of Wales' Island (Penang) to become assistant secretary to Philip Dundas, the newly-appointed Governor of Penang. Out East, Raffles was to demonstrate his abilities and versatility and within two years,



Lord Moira, Marquess of Hastings.
Source: Roger Griffith & R. J. Beevor,
Hastings of Hastings, London, 1829.

was promoted to the post of Chief Secretary to the Governor. With this appointment, Raffles' salary was raised to £2,000 a year, a princely sum in those days.

Raffles and the Malay States

In 1807, Gilbert Elliot-Murray-Kynynmound, 1st Earl of Minto and better known as Lord Minto, was appointed Governor-General of India. In Penang, Raffles and Olivia had befriended Dr John Leyden, the polyglot orientalist and naturalist who was greatly admired by Minto; it was Leyden who drew Minto's attention to Raffles. Between 1807 and 1810, Raffles had made two trips to Melaka which had been placed under British custody by the Dutch, who feared that the French might seize the colony. Based on the intelligence he gathered there, Raffles wrote a long memorandum on how to protect British interests in the region. This he submitted to his superior, the Governor, who did nothing.

Minto was anxious that the French—who now occupied Java—might have further designs in the region and this might thwart British interests. Leyden drew Minto's attention to Raffles' lengthy memorandum. Deeply impressed by Raffles' memorandum, he told Leyden that he would be pleased to receive more information of this nature from Raffles. In June 1810, Raffles visited Minto in Calcutta and was appointed the Governor-General's Agent in the Malay States. This meant that Raffles would report directly to Minto and bypass his superiors. Not unnaturally, Raffles' superiors grew suspicious and envious of him.

By January 1811, Minto decided that he would personally lead a British force to invade Java and get rid of the French. Sailing along with him in the June 1811 expedition were Raffles and Leyden. The conquest of Java was swift and Raffles was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Java, a post he held till 1816, when Java was returned to the Dutch at the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars.

Set-backs and Triumphs

Raffles' departed Batavia with a heavy heart. His wife Olivia had died at the end of 1814, and his former Commandant, Colonel Robert Rollo Gillespie had levelled charges of maladministration against him in India. Raffles returned to London to answer these charges and to recuperate. There he successfully defended his record in Java and was fully exonerated by the Court of Directors. The following year, he published his *History of Java* to wide acclaim and was knighted by the Prince Regent (later King George IV). He was feted in intellectual circles, making friends with many influential personalities, including Princess Charlotte,

the Duke and Duchess of Somerset, William Marsden and Sir Joseph Banks. He was even elected Fellow of the Royal Society and was the toast of London high society.

Among those he met in London was George Canning, head of the Board of Control and later briefly Prime Minister of England. He sent Canning a memorandum, entitled 'Our Interests in the Eastern Archipelago', which offered a blueprint on how Britain could secure its interests in the east, and proposed the establishment of a third British settlement (other than Penang and Bencoolen). It appears that it was about this time that Raffles began seriously looking at various options

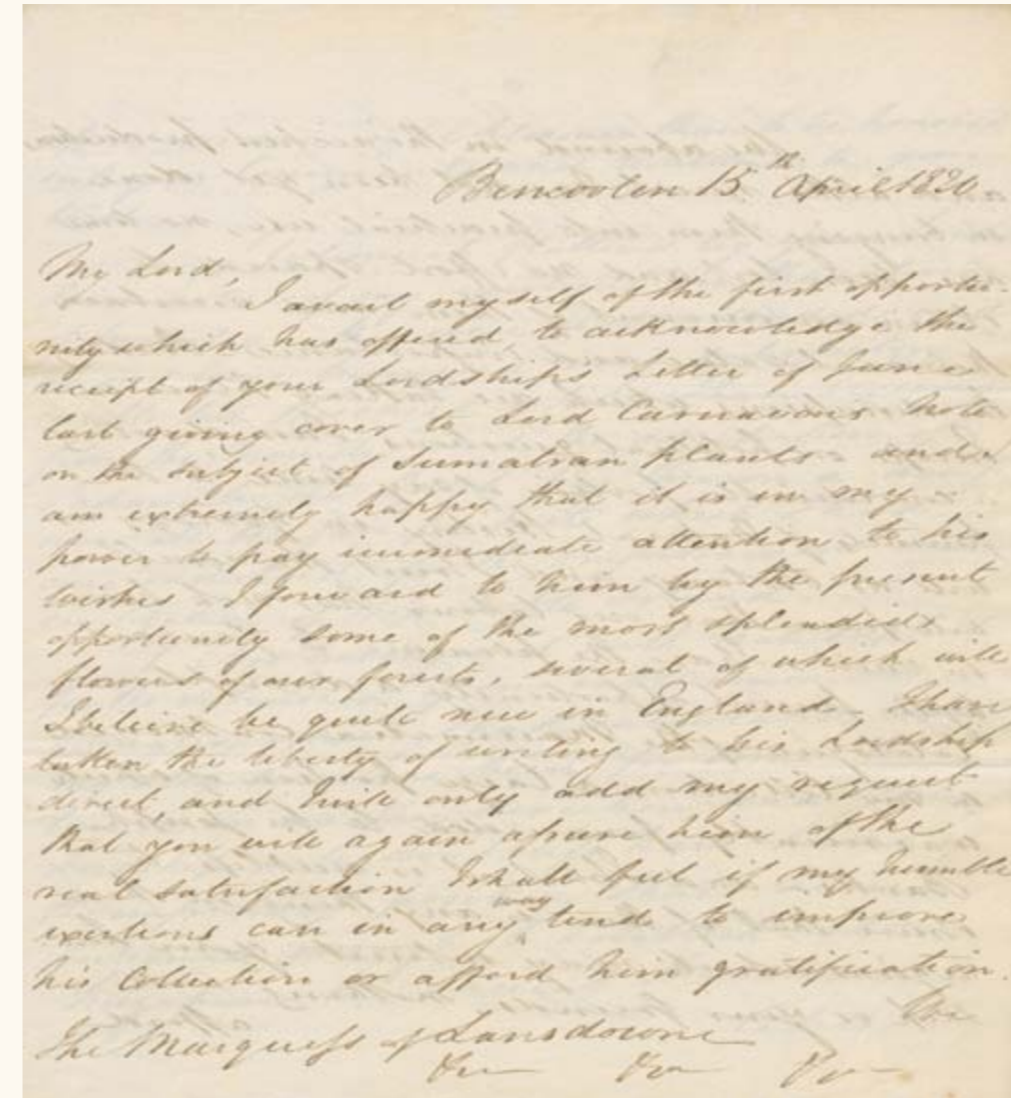
Raffles sent Canning a memorandum, entitled 'Our Interests in the Eastern Archipelago', which offered a blueprint on how Britain could secure its interests in the east, and proposed the establishment of a third British settlement.

lying to the south of the Straits of Melaka to establish a new British settlement. With the French threat gone, the English had now to worry about the resurgence of Dutch power in the region.

In 1818, as Raffles was due to return east to assume his post as Lieutenant-Governor of Bencoolen (Bengkulu) the Court of Directors of the East India Company give him certain general advisory duties. He was tasked with reporting all happenings in the Eastern Archipelago and to 'check Dutch influence extending beyond its true bounds'. It was in respect of these new duties that Raffles saw fit to write to Lord Moira, Marquess of Hastings, who was now Governor-General of India. The earliest letter from the Bute Archives stem from this period. Raffles urged Hastings to consider ways to stop the Dutch from reimposing their damaging trade restrictions, and once more pushed for the establishment of a new settlement in 'the eastward'.

Anxious Days and the Founding of Singapore

Hastings, now impressed with Raffles, invited him to 'a conference' in Calcutta. The two men met in September 1818 and Hastings signed a memorandum (most probably drafted by Raffles himself), giving Raffles leeway to act inde-



Extract of a letter dated 15 April 1820, from Raffles to Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, the Third Marquess of Lansdowne. Raffles informs Lansdowne that there are now over 10,000 persons on the island and "no less than 173 sail of vessels of different descriptions". Courtesy of the National Library Board. All rights reserved.

pendently with respect to the establishment of a new settlement. However, he was not to tangle with the Dutch. Raffles then set sail for Penang, arriving on 29 December 1818 to meet with Governor John Alexander Bannerman, his immediate superior in the East. Though cordial, the meeting was tense. Bannerman was not keen on Raffles' plans and was concerned that any new settlement would threaten the status of Penang.

In the ensuing days, Bannerman took all steps to delay Raffles and prevent him from setting out on his mission to establish a new settlement. These were anxious days for Raffles for he knew that the Dutch were quickly taking steps to re-establish themselves in the region and to exercise suzerainty and control over the old Johor-Riau-Lingga empire, whose territory extended from Pahang to Bintan. To thwart Raffles, Bannerman appointed him envoy to Aceh to settle a royal succession dispute and hold him in Penang. In the meantime, Raffles

had despatched Major William Farquhar, former Commandant and Resident of Melaka, to survey the islands at the tip of the Malay Peninsula and Johor Lama. These included the Carimon Islands (Karimun) and Singapore.

On 18 January, Raffles managed to escape the clutches of Bannerman when the latter told him that his mission to Aceh had been delayed. Ever the opportunist, Raffles—who had his ships prepared for this purpose—departed Penang immediately in the dead of night, informing Bannerman that since the mission to Aceh had been delayed, he would take the opportunity to catch up with Farquhar and his surveyors. Raffles, sailing on the *Indiana*, was not to catch up with Farquhar till 27 January 1819 at Carimon. That evening, agreeing to Captain Daniel Ross' suggestion to next survey the island of Singapore all 7 ships in the flotilla sailed for Singapore.

The rest of the story is well-known and does not bear repeating in great detail. Having

Raffles had despatched Major William Farquhar, former Commandant and Resident of Melaka, to survey the islands at the tip of the Malay Peninsula and Johor Lama [including] the Carimon Islands (Karimun) and Singapore.



Portrait of Major William Farquhar, c1830. Originally reproduced by permission of Mrs B. Atkinson.

Singapore the 20th Janry 1823

My Lord, In February last I took the liberty of forwarding to your lordship an Abstract Statement of the Trade of Singapore during the two first years and a half of its establishment, and I have now much satisfaction in transmitting a more detailed and authentic account of this Trade during the past year 1822, from which you will perceive that the improvement has been nearly in a geometrical ratio and that the Station is rapidly rising in value and importance.

The Marquis of Lansdowne

Extract of a letter from Raffles to Lansdowne, dated 20 January 1823, in which Raffles lists some of Singapore's achievements to date, among these the drafting of regulations to govern the island. Courtesy of the National Library Board. All rights reserved.

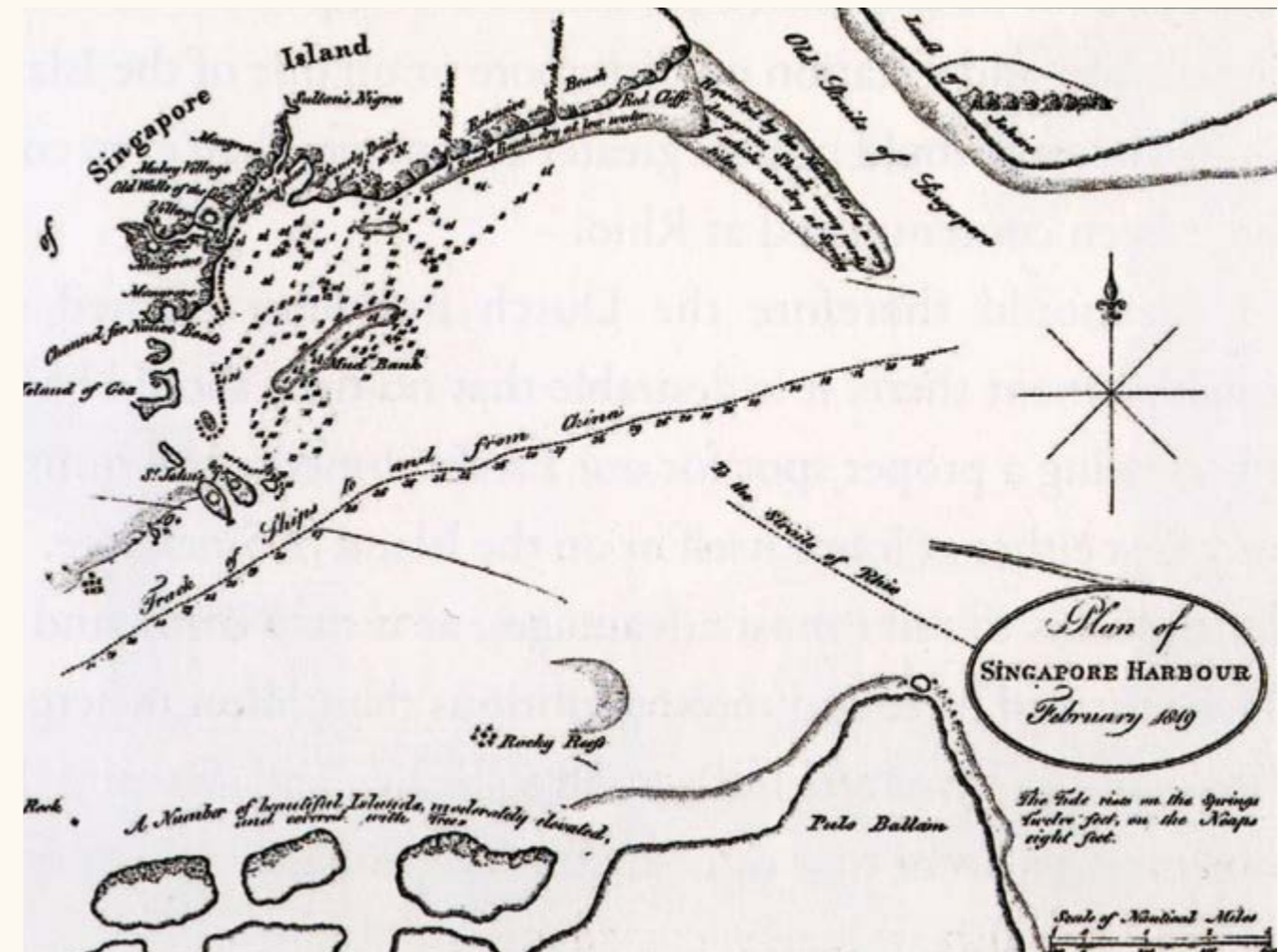
ascertained from Temenggong Abdul Rahman that the Dutch had not yet established a settlement on the island, Raffles proceeded to sign a preliminary agreement with the Temenggong to allow the British to establish a trading 'factory'. Capitalising on a succession dispute over the throne of the Johor Sultanate between Tunku Hussein (Tunku Long) and his younger brother Tunku Abdul Rahman, Raffles sought out Tunku Hussein, recognised him as sovereign and proceeded to sign an Agreement of Friendship and Cooperation that confirmed his earlier agreement with the Temenggong. Raffles appointed Farquhar Resident and Commandant of Singapore and left the island for Penang on 7 February.

Naturally, Raffles' unilateral action infuriated Bannerman, who ordered him to

get Farquhar and his troops off the island. The Dutch protested, arguing that they had a right to the island since it was part of the Johor-Riau-Lingga empire and they had an agreement with Sultan Abdul Rahman. The competing claims on the island were finally resolved with the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824, under which the Dutch surrendered all claims to Singapore and handed the colony of Melaka to Britain in exchange for the ports of Batavia and Bencoolen.

The Letters on Show

Exhibited at the National Library Singapore for the first time ever are 13 of 26 letters from the papers of Francis Edward Rawdon-Hastings, the 1st Marquess of Hastings, who served as Governor-General of India from



Captain Daniel Ross's survey map of Singapore Harbour, believed to be the earliest map of Singapore. The map was engraved by John Bateman and originally published by James Horsburgh in 1820.

1813 to 1823. These letters were written to Hastings (known at the time as Lord Moira) between April 1818 and October 1824. Of these, the most important ones were those written almost contemporaneously with Raffles' efforts to establish a new settlement in the 'eastward'.

These letters are being exhibited through the generosity of John Colum Crichton-Stuart, the Seventh Marquess of Bute. These letters were first brought to our attention by Dr John Bastin, the world's leading Raffles scholar. The Hastings Papers were acquired by John Crichton-Stuart (1847-1900), Third Marquess of Bute, sometime in the late nineteenth century. The Third Marquess was an industrial magnate, antiquarian, scholar and architectural patron and grandson of the papers' owner. His mother, Sophia Frederica Christina Rawdon-Hastings (1809-1859) was the second daughter of Lord Moira, 1st Marquess of Hastings.

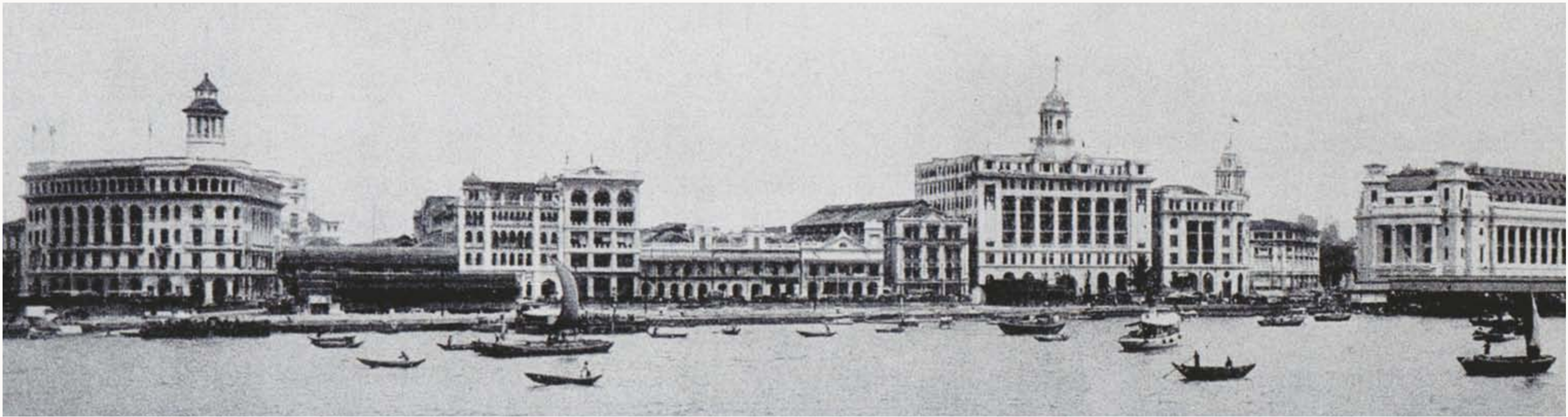
Also on display is a copy of what is believed to be the earliest map of Singapore drawn after Raffles' landing. Dated 1820, it is the result of the first survey of the island and contains details not seen in subsequent maps. This map has never been seen outside of the Bute Archives.

The End

Raffles visited Singapore only twice more before he returned to London in August 1824. By this time he was in poor health but he continued to be active in his intellectual pursuits, founding the Zoological Society of London in 1825 as well as the London Zoo. He died at Highwood House in Mill Hill in North London a day before his 45th birthday, on 5 July 1826.

About the author

Dr Kevin YL Tan is curator of the exhibition, *Letters from The Founder: Raffles' Letters from the Bute Collection & the National Library*, which will open at Level 10, National Library, on 28 August 2012.



On the Waterfront: The Making of Singapore's First High-rise Skyline, 1918–1928

Julian Davison

The town of Singapore and its architecture has always attracted attention. Even in the earliest days of the Settlement, visitors regularly commented on the fine buildings along the Esplanade, the neat and orderly streets and tree-lined thoroughfares, and the grand colonial-style residences of the European and Asian elites. From the outset, the progress of the town and its architectural landmarks were seen, quite rightly, as a reflection of the colony's prosperity.

This is just as true for today's Singapore, where the modern city-state is metonymically encapsulated by its cutting-edge architecture, designed by some of the world's leading architects—I. M. Pei, Kenzo Tange, Kisho Kurkawa, Kevin Roche, Peter Prah and Zaha Hadid, to name just a few. Inevitably, it is the cluster of tall buildings that constitute the Central Business District—Singapore's mini-Manhattan—that garners the most attention. There are three favoured viewpoints for photographing this scene. The first looks across the river from the north bank—either from somewhere between the two Parliament Houses, old and new, or else from the top of the Swissotel The Stamford, which offers a splendid bird's eye view of the metropolis. The second perspective is from a vantage point situated somewhere between the Esplanade

Theatres and the ECP Bridge, while the third is from the front of the Marina Bay Sands complex, looking across the waters of Marina Bay towards Collyer Quay. A recent addition to the latter aspect is a view of the city from the skyline swimming pool on top of the casino—an image featuring a botak (bald) swimmer in goggles making waves in the foreground became an instant icon for modern Singapore when it appeared in the press in 2010.

It is this vision of the city as a modern metropolis rising from the waves—or at least over the rim of an infinity pool—that I wish to consider in this essay. Not today's image, but an earlier version from a period when Singapore first began to flex its financial muscles and emerge as a major player in the global marketplace shortly after the end of the First World War.

In the nineteenth century, it was the view as one approached the town of Singapore from the sea that was especially admired. Frank Marryat, for example, who visited Singapore as a Midshipman in the Royal Navy in the 1840s, writes: "From the anchorage the town of Sincapore [sic] has a very pleasing appearance", adding that "most of the public buildings as well as some of the principal merchants' houses, face the sea".¹ This much-painted vista of Singapore from the Roads was the

'face' of Singapore throughout the nineteenth century and continued to be a defining view of the city right up to the late 1970s when the Marina reclamation scheme filled in the Inner Harbour and put the sea at one remove from the old waterfront.

Around the time that Marryat was writing, the principal focus of attention lay to the north of the Singapore River's mouth, the locus of Raffles' original 'European Town', with its elegant tropical Palladian architecture by George Coleman, juxtaposed with the soaring spires of the Christian places of worship—St Gregory's, St Andrew's and the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd—which were in effect Singapore's first 'skyscrapers'.

Gradually, however, the gaze of the onlooker began to shift south of the Singapore River after work began in 1858 on a land reclamation scheme on the seaward side of Raffles Place. The principal undertaking here was the construction of a robust seawall to a design by the eponymous Captain George Chancellor Collyer, Chief Engineer of the Straits Settlements; when this was completed in 1864, it made possible the development of a new commercial waterfront to the south of the Singapore River.

The earliest buildings on Collyer Quay were fairly modest, two-storey affairs; the ground floor comprising an arcaded verandah, or five-



Collyer Quay in the 1880s—two storeys with the occasional lookout tower. From the Lee Kip Lin Collection. All rights reserved, Lee Kip Lin and National Library Board, Singapore 2009.

foot way, with a cantilevered wooden balcony above. In one or two instances, a third storey was added in the form of a tower, or observatory, from the top of which a peon with an eye-glass could scan the horizon for in-coming ships; in those days, if a cargo was unassigned, then whoever managed to meet the vessel first as she came into port, and befriended the captain before he dropped anchor, generally got the business.

Two early buildings of note along this new stretch of harbour front were the General Post Office and Exchange Building, completed in 1878 and 1879 respectively. Although they fronted onto Cavenagh Bridge Road, they were designed to be seen as much from the seaward side as from the land. In 1892, they were joined by a huge Victorian blockbuster, the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank Building, standing at the corner of Battery Road and Collyer Quay—the same site that HSBC occupies to this day. The Bank's 1892 premises was an architectural tour de force in terms of its polygamous marriage of disparate architectural styles—Renaissance, Baroque, Queen Anne and Gothic, with a Roman portico tacked onto the front by way of an entrance. An early work by engineer-architects Messrs Archibald Swan and James Waddell Boyd Maclaren, it was, in the view of *The Straits Times*, “the most commanding building...yet erected in Singapore”, and it completed the line-up of waterfront buildings for the nineteenth century.²

There were further additions to the waterfront in the early twentieth century, the three

most notable edifices being Winchester House (1904), The Arcade (1909) and St Helen's Court (1916).³ Winchester House, at four storeys, was arguably Singapore's first bona fide high-rise building and it was also the first to have an electric lift installed, though not until 1906. With a colonnade of Roman Doric columns in the round at street level, and lots of rustication, quoins and other Classical detailing above, it certainly stood out from its rather more perfunctory nineteenth-century neighbours, which is no doubt what the owner, Towkay (loosely translated as “boss” in Hokkien) Loke Yew, intended. It was, however, somewhat eclipsed five years later by what was probably the most remarkable building to have graced Singapore's waterfront, namely The Arcade, an extraordinary Orientalist confection “built according to Arabian and Moorish designs”, with a couple of copper onion domes on top.⁴ Designed by Scottish architect David McLeod Craik for the Alkaff family, The Arcade comprised a glass-covered walkway, or atrium, which extended from Collyer Quay all the way through to Raffles Place. With rows of shops on each side and a restaurant in the middle, plus two floors of offices above, The Arcade prefigured, on a modest scale, many of today's shopping complexes. Lastly, there was St Helen's Court, headquarters of the Asiatic Petroleum Company and the Straits Steamship Company; at five storeys, St Helen's definitely put both Winchester House and The Arcade in the shade.

These noble edifices aside, the majority of buildings on Collyer Quay up until the end of the First World War were two-storey affairs (with the exception of the odd lookout tower), dating back some 50 years to the completion of Collyer Quay in the late 1860s. As for the new additions, imposing though they were in their way, they were still firmly situated in the nineteenth century; the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank building, just 20 years on from its grand opening, already seemed like an architectural dinosaur from another era.

Then suddenly, in the space of the 10 years that followed the end of the war in Europe in November 1918, we see a complete transformation of the waterfront from a relatively homogenous parade of low-rise nineteenth century godowns (with one or two exceptions) into a glamorous, modern skyline that, architecturally speaking, was situated somewhere between the London Embankment and the Shanghai Bund.

In order to fully appreciate how this came about, we need to understand that Singapore emerged from the First World War in a very strong position on several fronts. The price of Malayan rubber was high, while the tin market, though it had been in recession during the war

years, was about to make a brilliant recovery. At the same time, property prices and the construction industry were booming, and shipping was rapidly returning to normal.

Meanwhile, during the war there had been a complete makeover of the dockyards at Keppel Harbour, which now boasted the second-largest graving dock in the world, as well as a greatly extended wharf at the huge new Empire Dock, which had only been completed 1917. Work was also just about to begin on a causeway linking Singapore Island with the Malay Peninsula. Completed in 1923, the Causeway enabled goods and passengers to travel by train all the way from the terminus at Tanjong Pagar to the town of Prai in Province Wellesley, which was the mainland train station for the island of Penang; the ultimate aim, however, was a continuous rail link that would connect the Malay Peninsula, via Burma, with British India.

Strategically, the conflict in Europe had underlined Singapore's importance in times of war as a regional communications hub for cable and wireless telegraphy, while Singapore's military significance similarly increased, with Viscount Jellicoe, former First Lord of the Admiralty, describing Singapore as “undoubtedly the key to the Far East”. As well as plans for a massive new naval base, his fact-finding mission to East Asia in 1919 also led to the construction of a Royal Air Force station at Seletar (1927–1928). The latter, though primarily intended to serve a military purpose, also gave Singapore its first proper aerodrome for civil aviation; regular passenger and postal air services were, admittedly, still some way off, but the potential of civil aviation was already recognised in 1919 and it was simply just a matter of time before it became a reality.

In short, as the war in Europe finally drew to a close in 1918, Singapore was extremely well positioned both economically and in terms of her infrastructure to make the most of the resumption of normal trading along with the economic upturn that accompanied it. Although there was a recession looming just around the corner, no one knew about it then.⁵ Rather, this was a period of optimism and celebration, with the upcoming centenary of the founding of Singapore by Sir Stamford Raffles to look forward to. Sir Raffles' cherished dream of establishing a “great commercial emporium” in the East was, by then, very much a reality.

It is no coincidence, then, that it is precisely at this point that we see a sudden burst of building activity taking place at Collyer Quay which, in the space of just 10 years, would be completely transformed by the addition of four major new buildings. They were, in order of appearance, the Ocean Building

(1922), the Union Building (1924), a new Hongkong and Shanghai Bank Building (1924), and the General Post Office or Fullerton Building (1928).⁶ These were not just new buildings, but buildings of a kind never seen in Singapore before—huge, corporate blockbusters, built to the latest designs, that gave Singapore its first high-rise skyline, a skyline that before the decade was out would be drawing comparisons with London, Liverpool and Shanghai.



The Hongkong & Shanghai Bank Building in 1905 with part of the Singapore Exchange on the right and Johnston's Pier in the foreground. From the Lee Kip Lin Collection. All rights reserved, Lee Kip Lin and National Library Board, Singapore 2009.

The first of the postwar behemoths to go up on Collyer Quay was the Ocean Building, the new headquarters of the Ocean Steamship Company, more popularly known as the Blue Funnel Line, which had one of the largest fleets operating in the Far East. The design of the Ocean Building is credited to the British engineer Somers Howe Ellis (1871–1954), who was Chief Civil Engineer of the Ocean Steamship Company from 1919 until his retirement in 1939. It was situated at the corner of Collyer Quay and Prince Street—the site occupied by today's Ocean Building—and replaced an earlier two-storey structure that had been the premises of Blue Funnel's Singapore agents, Mansfield & Co. The contrast between the new and old could not have been greater. Five storeys in elevation, the main part of the building was a few feet higher than St Helen's Court, which up until then had been the tallest building by the waterfront, but then there was a 50-foot tower on top that turned the Ocean Building into a veritable ‘skyscraper’ by the standards of the day.

² Arrangements. (1984, November 1). *The Straits Times*, p. 2.

³ These are the years the buildings were completed.

⁴ Arcade for Singapore. (1907, October 30). *The Straits Times*, p. 7.

⁵ This was the 1920–1921 US recession that caused the prices of rubber and tin to crash.

⁶ These are the years in which the buildings were completed.



The Union Building and the Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank in 1911. Source: National Archives of Singapore.

To think that a building of such size and mass could be erected on ground that was far from firm was entirely due to the employment of the latest construction techniques, namely a concrete frame with masonry infill which was then covered over with a layer of artificial stone or ‘cladding’. This method is, of course, standard procedure in today’s architecture, but at the time the Ocean Building was going up, it was still considered innovative and certainly had not been used on this scale in Singapore before. And it wasn’t just the size of the building that astonished people, it was also massive in terms of its composition; that is to say, the size and proportions of the Classical elements and ornamental features that made up its façade were equally monumental in scale.

The Municipal Architect, Alexander Gordon, explained this new aesthetic in an address that he gave to a lunchtime gathering of the Singapore Rotary Society at the Raffles Hotel in October 1930. He began by noting that since there was no tradition of permanent architecture indigenous to the region, as there was, say, in India, “the more important buildings are now being erected in the modern classic style [which] has evolved from a study of the old Greek and Roman buildings adapted

to modern construction and requirements”.⁷ “These new buildings,” Gordon continued, “are designed on a much bigger scale than the old Renaissance or classic buildings seen here. You now design on a larger unit.” By way of example, Gordon compared the Hotel de l’Europe, on St Andrew’s Road, erected 1904–1907, with its next-door neighbour, the recently completed Municipal Offices (later known as City Hall, now occupied by the National Art Gallery, Singapore). “There is very little difference in height or frontage,” Gordon observes, “yet the scale seems so much bigger. Whereas in the old type, an elevation would have a base with two three colonnades one above the other, the front being divided into approximately equal divisions vertically, the new type has a massive base, one tall dignified colonnade with cornice and parapet in proportion”.⁸ According to Gordon, “the modern classic, aims at bigness, simple dignity and the cutting out of superfluous features and decorations”⁹ and these qualities were characteristic features of all the new buildings erected on Singapore’s waterfront between 1918 and 1928.

This raises an interesting point, however, regarding the perceived modernity of Gordon’s “modern classic” style. From today’s perspec-

tive, the Ocean Building, with its arcaded elevations, rusticated façade, and rotunda-like tower, seems anything but modern. At that time, though, none of this was felt to be in anyway anachronistic; contrary to being an oxymoron, “modern classic” was very much the architecture of choice for large civic or commercial buildings in the decade following the end of the First World War. Nowadays, there is an almost intuitive tendency to think of modern architecture between the two world wars in terms of the glass and steel erections of the German Bauhaus school, or Le Corbusier’s “purist” white cubes, or Mies van der Rohe’s minimalist Barcelona Pavilion. In actual fact, the vast majority of new buildings erected during this period—certainly in the 1920s, but also the 1930s—were conceived in the Classical manner. Indeed, as architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock points out, “Through at least the first three decades of the twentieth century most architects of the western world would have scorned the appellation ‘modern’, or, if they accepted it, would have defined the term very differently from the way it [is] understood [today]”.¹⁰ Still deeply steeped in the historicism of the nineteenth century, the term modern, to them, generally meant designing buildings in the grand Classical tradition, while making the most of the recent advances in construction techniques—steel and reinforced concrete, artificial stone, plate glass, electric lifts and services, and so on.

The continued preference for Classically-informed buildings was not because the general public was unaware of the ‘new architecture’ of the early Modernists; it was simply not well received, whether in Europe or here in Singapore. “Modern German dwelling houses look like the products of a cubist or futurist nightmare,” declared the editor of *The Straits Times* in June 1929.¹¹ “Although they are obviously designed to act as sun-straps, there is no architectural merit in the utilitarian purpose. They are odd, uncouth, apparently unfinished. The average child can construct something aesthetically more pleasing with a Meccano set.”¹²

It took close to three years for the Ocean Building to be completed, but the wait, it seems, was worth it. “An imposing pile,” proclaimed *The Straits Times* at the official opening on 24 March 1923, “that it is the handsomest building in town admits of no doubt.” It soon had its rivals, being followed, a year later, by the Union Building and a new Hongkong & Shanghai Bank, which replaced the old Gothic pile on the corner of Collyer Quay and Battery Road. Both these buildings were designed by Denis Santry of Messrs Swan & Maclaren, who had joined this most



The Municipal Building in the 1950s. From the Lee Kip Lin Collection. All rights reserved, Lee Kip Lin and National Library Board, Singapore 2009.

prestigious of architectural practices just after the end of the war. Santry had previously worked in South Africa, where he is recognised as the father of the South African Arts and Crafts Movement, but his Hongkong & Shanghai Bank was anything but Arts and Crafts in style. It was described at the time as being in the “English Renaissance” style—that is to say, Gordon’s “modern classic” style—and it was another corporate blockbuster.

The new bank building comprised a rusticated arcade at street level, surmounted by a grand colonnade of Ionic columns rising through three storeys to support an attic floor, the whole being surmounted by a rotunda and dome.¹³ In terms of the materials, too, this was a very lavish affair. For starters, there were four pairs of bronze entrance doors, each pair measuring 8 feet wide by 14 high, and weighing 3 tons, while the main banking hall had marble columns topped by brass capitals, as well as marble floors throughout—even the cashiers’ counters were marble. To add further to this magnificence, the space was lit from above by two domed lights, or lanterns, executed in stained glass, which, according to *The Straits Times*, created “a cathedral like effect”.¹⁴

This was corporate power dressing taken to the extreme, the mercantile equivalent of ‘shock and awe’ tactics, intended to impress upon the Singapore public the Olympian stature of the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation in the world of Eastern finance. It was not the last word in ostentation on Singapore’s waterfront in the mid-1920s, however; that honour was reserved for the bank’s next-door neighbour, the Union Insurance Society of Canton.

The Union Building was a one-and-a-quarter-million-dollar, seven-storey extravaganza,

¹⁰ Hitchcock (1958), p. 531.

¹¹ The New Architecture. (1929, June 10). *The Straits Times*, p. 10.

¹² Meccano is the brand name of a model construction kit, comprising re-usable metal strips, plates, angle-girders, axels, wheels, gears and so forth, which can be connected together using washers, nuts and bolts. Invented in 1901, Meccano is still manufactured today in France and China, but probably reached the height of its popularity between the two world wars, when it provided an invaluable introduction to the principles of mechanics and engineering for boys who were so inclined.

¹³ The rotunda was removed sometime in the mid-1950s.

¹⁴ The Hongkong Bank. (1921, November 16). *The Straits Times*, p. 9.

⁷ Building on City Swamps. (1930, October 25). *The Straits Times*, p. 12.

⁸ Building on City Swamps. (1930, October 25). *The Straits Times*, p. 12.

⁹ Building on City Swamps. (1930, October 25). *The Straits Times*, p. 12.



From left to right: Asia Insurance Building, Ocean Building and The Arcade. This image photographed in 1960 gives a good idea of the comparatively huge scale of Ocean Building compared to its predecessors—the previous building on the site was identical to The Arcade, which was the second tallest building on Collyer Quay prior to the completion of Ocean Building. Asia Insurance Building later became the tallest building in Singapore when it was completed in 1955. From the Kouo Shang-Wei collection 郭尚慰收集. All rights reserved. National Library Board Singapore 2010.



The Fullerton Building around the time of its completion in 1928. Source: National Archives of Singapore.

surmounted by a 60-foot tower, the top of which stood at 173 feet above street level. Although two storeys taller than its neighbour, the rusticated arcade on Collyer Quay matched that of the Hongkong & Shanghai Bank in scale and proportion, creating a sense of harmony at street level. The façade above was dominated by a majestic colonnade of Ionic columns, book-ended by tall panels rising through four storeys, with huge bronze medallions at the top, some 8 feet in diameter, bearing the coat of arms of the Society. A bold, dentilated cornice with a 7-foot projection—“a particularly ticklish piece of engineering work”, according to *The Straits Times*¹⁵—completed the main façade, with a stepped-back attic storey above. The crowning glory, though, was undoubtedly the central, rotunda-like tower, surmounted by a stepped dome.

Like its neighbour, it also had a pair of monumental bronze doors, measuring 15½ feet high and 8 feet wide, which opened onto a broad flight of stairs leading up to a 50-foot hall, lit from above by a glazed skylight. Huge doors—again cast in bronze—led to magnificent suites of offices on either side, with coffered ceilings 20 feet high.¹⁶

No expense was spared on the materials either. A feature article in *The Singapore Free Press*, written in January 1924 as the building was nearing completion, tells us that the

...harmonious use of various coloured marbles for floors and walls on the ground floor will provide an effect of striking richness, unequalled in the country. The floor marbles will be Belgian black and dove, the skirting of the walls will be of Genoa green, the mouldings round the doors will be Swiss cippolino (striped green), while quartered panels will be of bresicated Sienna.¹⁷

The final building to complete Singapore's new-look waterfront in the 1920s was a new General Post Office, otherwise known as the Fullerton Building,¹⁸ which was erected on the site previously occupied by the old Post Office and the Exchange Building. The site was of course superb—“probably no structure in the East could have a more commanding site”¹⁹—and mindful of this, the Government decided to host an open competition to ensure

that the location got the building it deserved.

The competition was won by the Shanghai practice of Keys & Dowdeswell, with the eponymous partners, Major P. H. Keys, FRIBA, and Frederick Dowdeswell, ARIBA, moving to Singapore to start work on their commission in May 1920. Sketch plans and the principal elevations were displayed in the Legislative Council Chamber for a month, and approval had been given to go ahead with the working drawings, when it was suddenly decided that owing to the uncertain financial climate—this was the time of the 1920 US recession, which was accompanied by a corresponding crash in tin and rubber prices—the building should be postponed until the economy brightened.²⁰

In the event, work did not begin on site until 1924, by which time Keys and Dowdeswell had been inducted into the colonial civil service as Government architects. The Post Office was their biggest project to date, indeed it would be the biggest of their career, a massive seven-storey structure, plus basement, “the largest building of the kind ever built in Singapore”, so *The Straits Times* of 9 January 1924 reported. It also had a budget to match—a colossal

\$4,098,808, which at that time was by far the largest figure ever spent on a building project in the Straits Settlements.²¹

The biggest problem faced by the contractors was providing adequate foundations for such a massive building on a site that was so close to the sea and on ground that was not very firm to begin with. The best solution, it was decided, was to employ the so-called ‘raft’ method of foundations—basically a huge platform of cement which ‘floated’ on the soil beneath—rather than resort to piles. This involved digging down through a strata of boulders and clay to a point 16 feet below ground level; some 40,000 cubic yards of soil were removed from the site, while pumps worked day and night to prevent the hole from filling up with water, since it was well below the tidal level on the other side of Captain Collyer's seawall.²²

The Fullerton Building was finally completed in June 1928 to much acclaim. It was the view of *The Straits Times* that “the Post Office building, with its walls towering 120 feet from the ground, its fluted Doric colonnades on their heavy base, its lofty portico over the main entrance, and

¹⁵ Singapore Development. (1924, January 23). *The Straits Times*, p. 12.

¹⁶ Beautifying Singapore. (1924, January 17). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* (1884-1942), p. 12.

¹⁷ Beautifying Singapore. (1924, January 17). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* (1884-1942), p. 12.

¹⁸ The Fullerton Building was named after Sir Robert Fullerton (1773–1831), first Governor of the Straits Settlements, during the time of the East India Company (1826–1830).

¹⁹ Government Buildings. (1920, September 30). *The Straits Times*, p. 7.

²⁰ The New Post Office. (1928, June 23). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* (1884-1942), p. 11.

²¹ The New Post Office. (1928, June 23). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* (1884-1942), p. 11.

²² New Post Office. (1924, January 9). *The Straits Times*, p. 9.

- ²³ Past and Present. (1928, June 27). *The Straits Times*, p. 9.
- ²⁴ The Post Office. (1928, June 27). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* (1884-1942), p. 10.
- ²⁵ They were actually described as such. Sky scraper audacity. (1922, February 4). *The Straits Times*, p. 10.
- ²⁶ Past and Present. (1928, June 27). *The Straits Times*, p. 9.
- ²⁷ Braddell (1934), p. 3.
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the 400-foot frontage along the waterfront, adds immeasurably to the dignity and solidity of central Singapore”.²³ *The Singapore Free Press* similarly thought the Fullerton “a public building worthy of the city and port of Singapore”, and reckoned that “for a time a visit to the new Post Office will be almost an awesome experience”.²⁴ Governor Sir Hugh Clifford, who officiated the opening ceremony, was in no doubt that the new Post Office was “the most imposing [building] at present existing in the Colony of the Straits Settlements”, adding that it “will be for many years, one of the principal landmarks in Singapore”. And he was right, for even today, despite the dramatic backdrop of glass and steel that towers behind it, the Fullerton Building still retains a kind of monumental grandeur that easily competes with its lofty but less substantive neighbours.

The Fullerton Building was the last of the four major building works undertaken on Singapore’s waterfront in the 1920s. Clifford Pier would subsequently be added to the ensemble, but work on that did not begin until 1930 and the pier obviously did not contribute to Singapore’s changing waterfront skyline. Indeed, there were no significant additions to the waterfront until after the Second World War, when the Bank of China and the Asia Insurance buildings were erected during the mid-1950s. In the meantime, it was the four Baroque blockbusters from the 1920s that held pride of place: they were Singapore’s first skyscrapers,²⁵ impossibly tall, so it seemed back then, with their soaring towers and rotundas boldly silhouetted against the sky like a display of gigantic wedding cakes.

“There are few Oriental cities which can boast of a nobler and more inspiring group of buildings than that which is now seen by the citizen of Singapore as he passes over Cavenagh or Anderson Bridge,” observed *The Straits Times* in an article published on the eve of the official opening of the Fullerton in June 1928.²⁶ “On a bright tropical morning, with flags lending bright touches of colour to their pillared, galleried masses, these new buildings on Fullerton Road and Collyer Quay give [even] the most unimaginative a glimpse of the power and romance of Eastern commerce.” Local worthy Roland Braddell felt that Singapore in the early 1930s was “so very George the Fifth...most of the big buildings are quite new and if you are English, you get an impression of a kind of tropical cross between

Manchester and Liverpool”.²⁷ Similarly, Robert Bruce Lockhart, returning to Singapore in 1935 after a quarter of a century’s absence, thought that contemporary Singapore resembled an “international Liverpool with a Chinese Manchester and Birmingham tacked on to it. Its finest buildings are modern”.²⁸

The comparisons with Liverpool are especially revealing because this was a time when Liverpool proclaimed itself to be the “Second City of Empire”, with a port that was second only to London in size and importance. And it was not just Liverpool that Singapore resembled, but also Shanghai; a photograph of the Singapore waterfront, which appeared in *The Straits Times* of 2 March 1935, was accompanied by a caption that read, “What China Coast people call the ‘Bund’”. This was precisely the kind of impression that was intended for Singapore in the 1920s, that of a city on the move. It was an era of optimism, energetic growth and expanding horizons, the economic recessions of the early 1920s notwithstanding. This is when we see Singapore transcend its traditional role of regional entrepôt and interlocutor between Asia and Europe, to take up a position on the international stage as a global port-city with connections reaching around the world—to Japan, Russia, the Americas, Australia and South Africa, as well as Britain, India and Europe. It was also a time of rapid social changes and political developments—not something I have been able to consider here—reflected in the lifestyles and aspirations of the people. By the end of the decade, Singapore could properly be considered a modern city in every sense of the word and it was precisely this message that the buildings down on the waterfront set out to capture and convey, for then, as now, it was Singapore’s corporate ‘skyscraper’ architecture which, more than anything else, proclaimed Singapore’s status as a thoroughly modern twentieth- or twenty-first century metropolis.



Sustaining City-State Singapore: Exploiting Global Hinterlands, Leaving Footprints Behind

Victor R. Savage

There is a global quest for states and communities to find pathways to sustainable living. In the last 45 years, Singapore has come a long way in developing a more sustainable system of intra-urban living. The secret to Singapore’s success is taking care of its brown issues (refuse disposal, littering, sewerage, modern sanitation, clean water and energy) through public housing, innovating and managing urban transport systems, and reducing its water footprint by recycling and conserving water as well as creating more reservoirs.

About the author

Dr Julian Davison was a Lee Kong Chian Research Fellow from 2009 to 2010. He obtained his PhD in Anthropology from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He is the author of *Black and white: The Singapore house, 1898-1941* (2006) and *Singapore Shophouse* (2010).



The Marina Barrage is a dam built across the mouth of the Marina Channel to create Marina Reservoir. Launched in 2010 as Singapore's fifteenth reservoir, it is the only reservoir located in the city. Marina Barrage, 2011. Courtesy of Joanna HS Tan.

Management of brown issues undergirds urban sustainability and this is achieved by attention to urban maintenance of buildings and infrastructure. These are green ideas that Singapore exports to other cities as part of its eco-city package. Sustainable Singapore, however, can only take place when the green software, environmentally friendly behaviour, becomes part of the *genre de vie* or style of living of Singaporeans.

Ever since the Brundtland Report introduced the concept of sustainable development in 1987 (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), the concept—despite its hollowness and contradiction—remains the capstone of governments and politicians trying to capitalise politically on environmental agendas. But new impetus is given in Japanese, German, American and South Korean tertiary institutes, where sustainability studies are a key academic programme. Sustainability studies do not cover only environmental issues but also a whole interdisciplinary agenda involving politics, economics, culture and society. Yet the interchangeability of nature and society is not an easy task to operationalise, since nature interacts physically by material, biological and energy flows while society and culture interact symbolically through knowledge, information and value systems. Over the decades, the links of nature and society have been cast in conceptual frameworks such as political ecology, eco-cities, industrial ecology, sustainable development, co-evolution, human ecology and eco-development. Notwithstanding these diverse relationships, there is urgency for sustainability studies given the growing failure of states,

in both the developed and developing worlds, in maintaining economic and environmental balance sheets.

Given the importance of cities in the new globalised world, it is not surprising that three important books have made pertinent interventions on the rise of the world city: *The City: A Global History* (2006) by Joel Kotkin; *World City* (2007) by Doreen Massey; and *Worlding Cities* (2011), an edited work by Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong. While these books have extolled the cultural virtues, economic engines and political capital of cities, the question left unanswered and open-ended is: how can governments sustain their cities? In most cases, cities have been ephemeral entities—few cities have sustained themselves over long periods much less as capital, global or world cities. The black box of sustainable cities is still to be uncovered and understood.

The challenge of modern urban living seems to fall into four areas:

- (i) how can cities compete to attract the best talents to serve as catalysts of economic growth and societal development;
- (ii) how can urban governments handle and manage the national and international non-skilled migrants in cities;
- (iii) how can governments deal with the rising disparities of wealth, inflation and food insecurity; and
- (iv) how can cities become more sustainable from both an intra-urban and extra-urban context?

These issues are pertinent to Singapore, but for a city-state they are modified through the filter of foreign relations, international trade and inter-state migration protocols. The following analysis addresses these challenges by looking at other major intersecting themes. I advocate that the four urban challenges facing Singapore and other countries need rethinking, strategic planning and realignments at the national level.

First, in a globalising world, foreign policy becomes as important as domestic national policy. Foreign and national policies cannot be separated and disentangled easily. This is de facto policy in Singapore given our city-state status. Had it not been averted, the Greek debt default that loomed in 2011 would have had serious repercussions in the European Union and states around the world. The inter-relationship between foreign and domestic policy is encapsulated in the opening line of Thomas Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum's book, *That Used to be Us*: "This is a book about America that begins in China."¹

The international trade in foods leads to disruptions in food harvests, creating inflation with severe social and political repercussions. The global fluctuations of wheat production, for example, led Russia to stop exports of its wheat from mid-2010. The increase of wheat and food prices arising in part from climate change and food disruptions led to a chain of governments being toppled in North Africa (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya) in what is now known as the Arab Spring. For an open economy like Singapore that depends heavily on imported food, raw materials, energy, water and labour, and which has a large tourism sector and accounts for 2% of global trade, it will be difficult for any Singapore government to make a distinction between foreign and domestic policy. Every major international and regional issue has ramifications for Singapore's economy and society. Given that Singapore is a city-state, the foreign and domestic policies have always been intertwined and hence the ruling government has been proactive in ensuring Singapore is on international radar screens and never marginalised in global debates.

Second, the increasing impact of climate change reverberates globally, unlike most environmental and ecosystem issues which are spatially delimited. As Tim Flannery argues, "our global civilisation is telekinetic" in that there is "movement at a distance without a material connection" and hence regional disruptions of wars, famines and diseases can have "dire consequences for humanity as a whole".² The recurrent issues of El Niño and El Niña in the eastern Pacific Ocean have created severe droughts and heavy rainfall respectively in Southeast Asian states; the 1997-98 forest fires in Indonesia arising from El Niño, for instance, had massive environmental and human outcomes in the region. These environmental events have both direct and indirect impact on Singapore—the island state suffers periodically from haze created in Indonesia due to prolonged drought and prices of food and resource imports swing like a yo-yo due to weather and climatic effects on agricultural production.

Third, environmental and climate changes have across the board multi-sector implications in countries and cities. Environmental disruptions cannot be isolated and contained from their political, economic, social, cultural or security influences and impacts. Singapore's costs of imported energy create domestic inflation in all sectors and these higher costs of production affect foreign companies and industries located in the city-state. Companies in Singapore have to consider the trade-offs between political stability, sound environmental management and high costs of production.

Many developed countries in-advertently

concentrate on ensuring strict laws and environment-friendly practices at the expense of the global environment. One example is the strict adherence to environmental impact assessments or EIAs. If every developed country implements clean environmental practices domestically by observing EIAs, what we would have is a NIMBY (not in my backyard) syndrome. Unfortunately those clean domestic practices are not observed globally. Hence the Japanese might have strict laws protecting their domestic forests, but they are also the biggest importers of tropical hardwoods from Southeast Asia. Hong Kong might boast of superb EIA practices, but the industries across the border in China owned by Hong Kong entrepreneurs are the biggest polluters that provide poetic justice in Hong Kong through smog and air pollution. And while we might not have EIAs in Singapore, we certainly have effectively removed many polluting activities—pig farming has been eradicated in Singapore because of its pollution but we import pork from our neighbouring countries. In short, many developed countries and cities leave behind their ecological footprints in less developed countries. Hence they might enjoy good environmental standards, but the cost of their consumption is borne by less developed and poorer communities.

And finally, the world has been developed under a political architecture of many autonomous and independent states, each pursuing selfish national goals and objectives. With environmental and climate changes and globalisation, it seems difficult to expect countries to abandon their territorial interest and national pursuits for the global common good. The United Nations is a hollow international institution without much political clout to set international goals. Hence we see endless debates over any agreement on climate change, from Kyoto and Bali to Copenhagen, Cancun and Durban. Yet one needs to be optimistic because at least the 192 countries can still engage in dialogue and debate even though solutions and compromises progress slowly. If countries in the developed world do not accept the need to ensure that developing countries embark on sustainable programmes, the world will be poorer for this, both ecologically and socially. It is thus not surprising that the latest United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Report focuses on the theme of "Sustainability and Equity"—acknowledging that "environmental degradation intensifies inequality" while human development amplifies environmental degradation.³ Singapore's growing inequality of wealth, which is one of the highest in the world, is cause for political concern since studies show that states and societies with wide inequalities are likely to be socially unstable.



Senoko Power Station is one of several power stations that provides for Singapore's energy needs. Senoko is upgrading its oil-fired steam plants into environmentally friendly gas-fired combined cycle plants that will be among the first in Singapore to use Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG). Senoko Power Station, 1986. Source: National Archives of Singapore.

¹ Friedman and Mandelbaum, p. 3.

² Flannery, p. 23.

³ UNDP, p. 1.

⁴ Rigg (2001).

⁵ McGee (1991).



In an effort to create more environmentally conscious public housing, HDB has begun offering innovative housing projects such as the Pinnacle@Duxton. The development integrates private living and public communal spaces in high-rise, high-density living, and was designed to enhance energy efficiency by maximising natural airflow and light and minimising sun exposure. Pinnacle@Duxton, 2012. Courtesy of Joanna HS Tan.

Given these interrelationships between states and ecosystems globally, no country or city can isolate itself from the reverberations of global forces (stock market fluctuations) and climate change outcomes (food harvests). The issue in the climate change debate lies with two alternatives: mitigation or adaptation. For the developing countries, the G77 (group of 77 developing countries), mitigation (reducing CO₂ emissions) based principally on reducing and curbing development goals and trajectories is a non-negotiable solution. This position falls squarely in the blame game between China and the United States, between the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and developed countries, over the right to continue carbon-fuel driven development, industrialisation and modernisation. Given this situation, most developing countries including Singapore have to double their efforts in seeking reliable and effective ways of adaptation to likely climate change scenarios of the future.

Singapore's challenges

Singapore, a city-state of 712km² and 5.18 million people (2011), is small in both area and population but it has economic prowess as a financial centre, oil refining base, trading and business hub, hi-tech industrial city and mass communication and transport hub. Singapore faces four major challenges: the impact of globalisation and information technology; an aging population; climate change and related energy issues; and food security.

Given the exposed nature of its economy (finance, industry, transportation, tourism),

Singapore is highly sensitive to global reverberations. Import contractions, trade fluctuations and financial instability in major trading economies impact on the city-state's economy. Singapore needs to adapt constantly to the international changing winds. The city-state's small size and political clout mean its leadership must remain alert and percipient all the time. Globalisation is a double-edged sword for Singapore. If global markets become freer, Singapore can tap into them more readily and easily. However, greater integration with other economies means that national problems overseas will have direct impact on Singaporeans.

What are the options Singapore faces in trying to remain a sustainable political and environmental city-state? Given its dependence on imported water from Malaysia, Singapore has been vulnerable to the changing nature of bilateral political relationships with Malaysia especially during the Mahathir-Lee years. In a way, this contentious bilateral relationship in the 1980s and 1990s spurred the Singapore authorities to find ways of being self-sufficient in water. With remarkable efforts in technological inputs, public water conservation and ecosystem management, the government did not need to extend the 1961-2011 water contract with Malaysia. Indeed by 2061, when the last water contract with Malaysia ends, the Singapore government notes that Singapore will be self-sufficient in water—a landmark achievement in reducing its water footprint and becoming totally self-sufficient in water. Singapore is asserting its independence in a life-sustaining and strategic resource.

The second challenge and more directly related to climate change is reducing the energy footprint. This is a more difficult challenge. The global economy and infrastructure are dependent on fossil fuel supplies of energy (coal, oil, gas) and domestic changes cannot take place unilaterally. The Singapore government is hoping to achieve some level of success as with its water systems by concentrating on alternative energy supplies. Singapore has steered its domestic energy demands to natural gas. And in the long run, with its hot, sunny tropical weather, the government hopes to bank on solar power.

The third challenge is to encourage green technologies and more energy-efficient systems for all activities. In space-dependent Singapore, the authorities seem to be confronted with the dilemma of increasing car quotas to meet rising demand for cars from young Singaporeans and the need to inculcate a public transport behavioural pattern. Indeed, the Singapore authorities can do more to improve public transportation. There is no need to ensure that all Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) lines must

be fully utilised—if more MRT lines with a broader rail network were available, the rush-hour peak periods could be reduced because commuters would be able to take other lines to go home. It seems illogical to ensure that every MRT station should have high train-carrying capacities. One classic case was the building of numerous public institutions (including the Ministry of Education and the Civil Service College) to boost traffic around the Buona Vista MRT station because surveys in the past found the station had the least passenger traffic. Currently the MRT network is still too limited and hence peak hours provide exasperating situations for commuters.

I do not see why Singaporeans would need to drive cars to work and urban leisure-entertainment if there is dependable and convenient public transport. Instead of building more roads and highways, the government needs to build a more integrated, efficient and reliable MRT system. Singaporeans also need to take lessons from London, Hong Kong and Tokyo with regard to being comfortable with using the metro-transit and mass transport systems. Indeed, one will find in these cities relatively few traffic problems on weekdays because most urban commuters use the underground transit system. There is a need to remove from the psyche of Singaporeans the status symbol of driving cars—the car should not be equated with success and having arrived in life. Hence Singapore's MRT system should serve also the rich living in landed properties and condominiums and not encourage them to commute by car.

Singapore is a compact city because of its lack of spatial choice. This city is subject to deliberate planning because it cannot survive on spontaneous developments or succumb to the spatial adjustments arising from economic changes. Hence building an intra-urban eco-city is paramount. The secret of Singapore's eco-city success has been its relentless Housing and Development Board (HDB) public housing schemes, currently housing some 82% of Singapore's population. Public housing provides many environmentally friendly urban advantages—clean water, efficient, safe and clean energy supplies, modern sanitation, effective refuse and garbage disposal systems and a living environment with good public health and hygiene.

The essential ingredient that public housing in Singapore underscores is efficient and effective maintenance of its 15 satellite towns and its thousands of flats. Unfortunately the institutionalisation of urban maintenance systems is missing in many cities, especially in emerging states. If city administrators do not pay attention to vigilant cleaning, upgrading and repair of buildings and the urban infrastructure,

sustainable urban environments will remain pipe dreams. In many cities in developing countries, one finds building booms taking place, massive infrastructures developed and iconic buildings erected but what is sadly missing is the daily maintenance of buildings, roads, gardens, parks and the urban infrastructure. Intra-urban sustainability begins with the implementation of effective maintenance services to ensure brown issues (pollution, sewerage, refuse, clean water and electricity) are managed correctly and effectively. In Singapore, this is legislated and implemented efficiently because the government is the largest land owner and the biggest real estate agency. The government, HDB and other statutory boards set the benchmarks for keeping the city clean and green and these are translated to and emulated by the private sector.

With increasing information technologies and the diffusion of globalisation, some academics have said that rural and urban demarcations are blurring. According to geographer Jonathan Rigg,⁴ the urban and rural areas in Southeast Asia have become one seamless continuous landscape; Singaporean architect Tay Kheng Soon refers to this as “rurbanization”; and urban geographer Terry McGee postulates that urban areas in Indonesia have developed into *desakotas* (village-city spatial entities).⁵ Despite these integrated conceptions of an expanding urban domain, cities still remain distinctive spatial entities in many countries, covering 1% of global land area but consuming over 65% of resources.

These rural-urban integrated conceptualisations underscore the best example of future eco-cities. The ideal eco-city must provide a seamless integration of rural and urban activities and functions with the minimum of negative environmental fallout and ecological disruption. Singapore never can aspire to be a prototype eco-city because we do not have a domestic hinterland to tap and integrate. But what we have offered to other countries is a model of intra-urban sustainability. The moot question is that the city-state needs to ensure that its oasis of economic prosperity and its Edenic urban garden do not leave ecological footprints with future negative effects in other countries and communities. We need to be law-abiding and environmentally conscious Singaporeans as well as ecologically responsible global citizens. Despite Singapore's unique geographic and political status as a city-state, there are lessons that can be learnt by other cities and countries. At the end of the day, Singapore's sustainability lies in finding the correct political governance of keeping the future navigable and viable as well as accessible—a quest other countries would like to emulate.



In 2003, the Public Utilities Board developed NEWater, a form of high-grade reclaimed water purified for drinking using advanced water purification technology. NEWater now provides for 30% of the nation's water needs. NEWater facility at Changi, 2003. Source: National Archives of Singapore.

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About the author

Victor R. Savage is an Associate Professor with the National University of Singapore Department of Geography. He undertakes research in cultural, environmental and political-economy issues on Singapore and the Southeast Asian region, including cultural landscapes, sustainable development, sustainable urban development and cross-cultural issues in Southeast Asia. He teaches courses on eco-development in Southeast Asia and Southeast Asian cultural landscapes.



From Botanic Gardens to Gardens by the Bay: Singapore's Experience in Becoming a Garden City

Lim Tin Seng

Gardens by the Bay is Singapore's spectacular new landmark. Tucked in the heart of Marina Bay, Singapore's new downtown, the 101ha garden is marked by two futuristic, cavernous, 38m-tall glass domes and 18 gigantic concrete-and-steel vertical gardens or Supertrees, each measuring between 25m to 50m in height.

These structures tower over the three distinctive gardens that make up Gardens by the Bay—Gardens at Marina South, Gardens at Marina East and Gardens at Marina Central—and they serve as conservatories to a diverse range of plants from different climatic zones. Collectively, Gardens by the Bay provides the experience that Singapore is more than a place to work but also a compelling destination to live and play. It also demonstrates that

the boundary of garden design can be pushed beyond just landscaping and horticulture to include a multitude of disciplines ranging from architecture to structural and environmental engineering. More importantly, Gardens by the Bay is testament to Singapore's development experience as it signifies the maturity of Singapore's Garden City concept.

Put in place by former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in 1967, the Garden City concept

integrates the natural environment into Singapore's development and has been instrumental in creating a manicured environment of trees, flowers, parks and rich bio-diversity. The opening of Gardens by the Bay, however, signifies the beginning of the next phrase of garden development in Singapore. Instead of creating parks and gardens, Gardens by the Bay launches the City in a Garden vision that aims to bring parks and green spaces into people's homes and workplaces. By journeying through the development of the various parks, gardens and green spaces in Singapore over the years, this article not only examines the dynamics behind Singapore's Garden City development strategy but also shows how the Garden City concept has evolved into the City in a Garden vision.

The First Garden: The Singapore Botanic Gardens

The drive to build gardens in Singapore is not new. The earliest efforts can be traced to the few gardens and parks that were established during the colonial period, the most prominent of which was the Singapore Botanic Gardens. Plans for the Botanic Gardens materialised as early as 1822, when Sir Stamford Raffles allocated a 19ha site on Fort Canning for the establishment of a Botanic and Experimental Garden in the Raffles Town Plan.¹ Apart from being a keen naturalist, Raffles' motivation for a botanic garden in Singapore was attributed to the colonial tradition of developing botanical gardens in the tropics to experiment with the cultivation of revenue-earning crops and ornamental plants, as well as for the research and preservation of native plants. However, attempts to develop a botanic garden to reach the scale of other noteworthy gardens in the British Empire at the time, such as the Pamplemousse in Mauritius and the botanical gardens of Calcutta, Trinidad and Penang, was hampered by the lack of proper administration and government support. By 1829, the Botanic Gardens project had come to a standstill and the land on which it stood was parcelled out for other public projects. It was revived briefly in 1836 on a smaller scale on a 2.8 hectares site, but high upkeep costs eventually caused the project to be shelved in 1846.

Interest in the Botanic Gardens revived in 1859, this time led by the Floricultural and Horticultural Society. To pick up where the abandoned garden at Fort Canning had left off, one of the Society's first steps was to reposition the Botanic Gardens as a landscaped ornamental garden and leisure park as well as an experimental horticulture plot. The Society also relocated the Botanic Gardens to a 23ha tract at Tanglin, where it is presently located. With more support, development of the new

Botanic Gardens quickly gained traction. By the time the management of the Gardens was handed over to the colonial government in 1874, it had a Main Lake, its trademark ring pathways and was organising flower shows and horticultural fetes to attract visitors.

The Botanic Gardens grew under the administration of botanists and horticulturists such as Henry James Murton, Nathaniel Cantley and Henry Nicholas Ridley. Murton, for instance, established the Economic Garden in 1879 for the conservation of and research into plants with economic potential, while Cantley brought order to the rapidly growing garden by introducing by-laws for visitors and hiring staff to label the plants and trees in the Garden. Thereafter, under Ridley's stewardship, the Botanic Gardens planted the region's first rubber trees and later gained fame when it became the major supplier of rubber seeds during the rubber rush in the early 1900s. Ridley also greatly expanded the Gardens' collection by adding plants that he had gathered from his explorations in the Singapore heartlands and the region. Perhaps one of his most important additions was the orchid hybrid *Vanda Miss Joaquim*, which was later adopted as Singapore's national flower.

In Need of a Greening Policy

Despite the rapid expansion of the Singapore Botanic Gardens, its greening enterprise was not transferred to urban areas of Singapore. Prior to 1965, the only sizeable public parks in Singapore were the Botanic Gardens and the Esplanade.² By contrast, the city area was devoid of trees and lush greenery could be seen only in the suburbs within the premises of large colonial bungalows. To a large extent, the absence of greenery in Singapore was because gardening was considered more of a personal pursuit and gardens.³ The colonial government did not have a declared objective of introducing greenery or creating green spaces to improve the urban environment or to enrich people's lives. Although the colonial government had initiated Tree Planting campaigns in 1880s and established a nature reserve at Bukit Timah in 1883, public parks and gardens at the time were conceived of as isolated public recreation spaces. They were created as an afterthought on an ad hoc basis and catered mainly for passive recreation. For instance, the Esplanade, though a popular spot for the general public, was fitted with modest facilities and mostly barren with very few trees.⁴

The lack of attention to the provision of green spaces persisted until the first Master Plan was adopted in 1958. In the Master Plan, the need to create green spaces was based on a number of considerations. For instance, a green belt was proposed for the creation of recreational

¹ Tinsley (1989), p. 14.

² Yeh (1989).

³ William (2000), p. 13.

⁴ Yuen (1996), pp. 959-960.



Opened in 1953, Elizabeth Walk was one of the few public parks in Singapore prior to 1965. From the Lee Kip Lin Collection. All rights reserved, Lee Kip Lin and National Library Board, Singapore 2009.

spaces for the urban population and to stop the continued expansion of the central area. Land was also set aside along the coasts of Bedok, Changi and Pasir Ris and in the city area for recreational development. The Master Plan even laid out a long-term goal to increase the amount of green space in the urban area from 263ha in 1953 to 1,039 acres by 1972.

Besides trees, the (Park and Trees Division) began using shrubs such as *Bougainvillea* and *Cassia* to add colour to roads and expressways that were already lined with trees. Different varieties of creepers, palms and shrubs were also used to conceal concrete structures such as flyovers, overhead bridges, retaining walls and vehicular guardrails to soften the concrete urban landscape.

Even then, creating green spaces was still not a government priority. This was because the prevailing government policy at the time was to allocate as much resources as possible to solving chronic housing and employment problems.⁵ There were also no legal powers for the provision of green spaces in city planning. As a result, green spaces in most housing estates built in the late 1950s and early 1960s were kept to a minimum.⁶ As more such estates were developed and natural surroundings bulldozed to make way for other developments, Singapore's urban landscape was slowly turning into a concrete jungle. Aware of this trend, the newly elected government led by the People's Action Party (PAP) tried to inject some greenery into Singapore's urban setting in 1963 by initiating Tree Planting Day.⁷ However, it was not until the housing and industrialisation programmes were progressing at a satisfactory rate in the mid-1960s that the greening of Singapore became a matter of public policy.⁸

Taking the First Step: Planting Trees and Shrubs

The launch of Singapore's greening policy was marked by the introduction of the Garden City concept in May 1967 by former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew.⁹ The objective of the concept was to make life more pleasant for Singaporeans by transforming Singapore from a city that was crowded with concrete buildings and infrastructure into a city with a clean and green environment, roads lined with trees, and ample green spaces for recreation. This green vision also had an economic angle as the aim of introducing such lush greenery was to show that Singapore was a well-organised city and therefore a good destination for tourists and foreign investments.¹⁰

In the early phase, the Garden City concept was implemented in the form of an intensive tree-planting programme to recreate in Singapore the avenues of trees and abundant lush greenery that Prime Minister Lee came across in his overseas trips.¹¹ This task was spearheaded by the Parks and Trees Division (PTD), the predecessor of the current National Parks Board (NParks).¹² As the tree-planting programme was to take place mostly within the urban environment, the PTD was presented with several problems. First, the soil in the city area was not good enough to support plant growth. Second, there was limited space for tree planting as most of the areas within the city, including sidewalks and roads, were covered by concrete and tarmac. Third, there was a need to find suitable tree species that were not only hardy and fast-growing but also able to provide sufficient shade.¹³ To address these issues, the Division

adopted the simple solution of adding planting platforms on road pavements to provide space for trees to be grown. It also formulated better tree-planting technique and identified suitable tree species to be used. In the early years, the Angsana, Rain tree, Coral tree and Pong-Pong were the most widely used trees as they were able to grow in poor soil conditions and took considerably less time than normal trees to attain a sizeable height. In addition, these species could withstand rough handling when transported. In later years, flowering trees such as the Yellow Flame and the Red Flame as well as trees with fragrant flowers such as the Tembusu and Gardenia were added to increase the variety of trees that were planted.

The tree-planting programme turned out to be very successful. Over 14,300 new trees were planted by the end of 1967, and by 1970 the total number of newly planted trees rose to 153,000.¹⁴ To maintain the momentum, Tree Planting Day was reintroduced in 1971 as an annual event involving students, grassroots leaders and residents living in both public and private housing estates. Numerous nurseries were also set up to supply the seeds and saplings needed for the tree-planting programme.¹⁵ This was followed by the passing of the Trees and Plants (Preservation and Improvement of Amenities) Act in 1971.¹⁶ Designed to conserve the newly planted trees and other trees growing on vacant or relatively undeveloped land, the Act made it an offence for any person to damage or remove trees growing on public spaces.

As the tree-planting programme was also pursued by other government agencies such as the Housing Development Board (HDB) and the Jurong Town Corporation (JTC) in their own domains, a high-level Garden City Action Committee was formed in 1973 to coordinate the greening activities of the various government agencies.¹⁷ By then, the greening of Singapore had found other forms of expression. Besides trees, the PTD began using shrubs such as *Bougainvillea* and *Cassia* to add colour to roads and expressways that were already lined with trees.¹⁸ Different varieties of creepers, palms and shrubs were also used to conceal concrete structures such as flyovers, overhead bridges, retaining walls and vehicular guardrails to soften the concrete urban landscape.

To create a more comprehensive approach to sustain the tree and shrub planting programme, a new Parks and Trees Act was introduced in 1975.¹⁹ While preserving the tree conservation provisions set by the Trees and Plants Act in 1971, the new legislation laid out the first set of guidelines mandating that space had to be set aside for greenery in open spaces and in development projects such as roads and



East Coast Park was one of the first regional parks. Developed on reclaimed land in four phases over a 12-year period from 1971 to 1983, the park was designed with a "Recreation for All" theme. Source: National Archives of Singapore.

open car parks. For instance, the legislation stipulated that new major roads had to provide a centre divider with planting verges and new open car parks had to separate their rows of parking lots with a median for tree planting. Similarly, plazas and other large concrete areas were required to set aside about 30-40% of its given space for tree or shrub planting. Besides introducing a greenery component in land use, the Parks and Trees Act also contained provisions requiring all trees, shrubs and creepers to be inspected and pruned regularly. This was to ensure that the greenery was properly maintained to prevent unruly or dangerous growth.

The guidelines set by the Parks and Trees Act were adopted by all government agencies involved in development projects around Singapore. It was administered by the Parks and Recreation Department, which replaced the Parks and Trees Division in 1975. The Parks and Trees Act had a significant impact on the rate of tree planting, as the number of new trees planted from 1974 to 2009 rose significantly from 149,650 to about 1.3 million.²⁰

Taking the Next Step: Creating Parks and Gardens

As these trees and shrubs were being planted, parks and gardens were also developed in tandem. During the initial years after the Garden City concept was announced, the development of parklands was mostly in the form of upgrading existing ones.²¹ Public amenities and facilities such as park shelters, restrooms, benches, walkways, cycling tracks, chess tables, car parks and lightings were added to improve the park facilities as both active and passive recreation spaces. Trees and shrubs were also planted to beautify the parks and provide shade for their users. From the mid-1970s, the PTD together with other government agencies such as JTC, HDB and later the Urban Redevelopment Authority

⁵ Planning Department (1975), p. 68.

⁶ Yuen (1996), p. 960.

⁷ Plant a tree drive in Spore (1963, June 12), *The Straits Times*, p. 9.

⁸ Planning Department (1975), p. 68.

⁹ Spore to become beautiful, clean city within three years (1967, May 12), *The Straits Times*, p. 4.

¹⁰ Lee (2000), p. 188.

¹¹ Lee (2000), pp. 189-190.

¹² Body to make people care for trees (1967, April 19), *The Straits Times*, p. 13.

¹³ Yeh (1989), pp. 815-817.

¹⁴ Public Works Department (1974), p. 52.

¹⁵ Public Works Department (1971), p. 63.

¹⁶ Now you can arrest vandals (1971, December 16), *The Straits Times*, p. 1.

¹⁷ Lee (1992), p. 127.

¹⁸ Yeh (1989), p. 818.

¹⁹ Yeh (1989), p. 817.

²⁰ Info-communications Development Authority of Singapore (2009, October 5).

²¹ Lee (1992), p. 13.

(URA) began placing more emphasis on creating new parks. To a large extent, this shift was due to the release of the revised Master Plan of 1975 that gave statutory recognition for the provision of green spaces in land use.²² In the revised Master Plan, green spaces were seen as serving two essential functions, as recreational areas for an increasingly affluent population and as ventilation or “green lungs” for built-up areas. To support the park development programme, the Master Plan set aside a considerable amount of land for new parks. To measure the adequacy of green spaces in Singapore, it also adopted a standard based on the provision of green spaces relative to the communities they served.

As a result, parks built from the mid-1970s were different from ones built in earlier years. Not only were they bigger, the newer parks were equipped with a range of facilities to meet the diverse recreational needs of different population groups. These parks were also aesthetically designed to give each its own identity. Generally, the newer parks can be divided broadly into three categories, each performing certain roles.²³

Regional parks formed the first category. Ranging from 10-200ha in size, regional parks function as recreational grounds for the general population, offering all the ancillary facilities and amenities required for active and passive recreation.²⁴ Most of the regional parks were located on reclaimed land along Singapore’s coastlines, but many could also be found in more central parts of the island, carved out from water catchment areas or from spaces bordering nature reserves. A notable early regional park is East Coast Park. Developed by the PTD and later the Parks and Recreation Department in four phases over a 12-year period from 1971 to 1983, East Coast Park was spread over a reclaimed area of 209ha and spanned more than 20km in length. The park was designed with a “Recreation for All” theme. Besides its thick belt of greenery, the park has a 15km sandy beach, another 15km of jogging track, a 14km cycling track and a 4ha swimming lagoon. These facilities were complemented by other recreational developments such as holiday chalets, camping spots, barbeque pits, a fishing jetty and a recreation centre consisting of a bowling alley, a tennis centre and restaurant outlets. Other regional parks that also provided such elaborate recreational functions included Mount Faber Park, Labrador Nature Park, West Coast Park, Pasir Ris Park, Seletar Reservoir Park, MacRitchie Reservoir Park and Bedok Reservoir Park.

In the second category of parks were the community or town parks. While regional parks served the general population, commu-

nity parks catered to the residents of HDB housing estates. Depending on the size of the population they served, these parks ranged from 1,000m² to 40ha in area.²⁵ Even though community parks were smaller than regional parks, they had the full range of facilities associated with the larger parks. Among the facilities provided were jogging tracks, children’s playgrounds, playing fields, multi-purpose courts, fitness corners, and landscaped areas with seats and shelters. Thick groves of trees were planted in these parks to provide shade for their users. As community parks were designed to be within walking distance for residents living close by, these parks were usually centrally located within HDB estates or in proximity to the recreational green spaces provided in HDB estates. Some of the earliest community parks were Toa Payoh Town Park, Bishan Park, Duxton Plain Park and Ang Mo Kio East and West Gardens. As it was envisaged that each HDB estate would have at least one community park, later examples of community parks can be found in HDB estates developed in the 1980s such as Woodlands and Bukit Batok. In most cases, community parks were developed either by HDB or JTC before being handed over to the Parks and Recreational Department for maintenance.

Parks and open spaces in the city area made up the third category of parks. Ranging from 1,000m² to 30ha, these parks were created by the URA and its predecessor, the Urban Development Department, under the urban redevelopment programme to beautify the cityscape and to function as “green lungs” amid the built-up city environment.²⁶ These parks varied in type from small pocket parks and shaded plazas located between buildings to large city parks and open spaces. Regardless of their sizes, city parks and open spaces were usually designed to bring out their unique characteristics and reinforce the mood of their surrounding areas. For instance, parks near government district areas such as the Merlion Park, the Fort Canning Historic Park and the War Memorial Park were designed with a nation-building narrative. In general, parks and open spaces in the city area were used by the general public, city-dwellers and tourists as resting places or tourist spots and office workers as congenial spots for lunch.

The move to create new parks had a profound effect on the extent of green spaces in Singapore. When the park development programme began taking off in the mid-1970s, Singapore only had 879ha of parks and green spaces. By 2011, however, Singapore was home to 5,083ha of parks and green spaces and 3,347ha of nature reserves, which together made up more than 8% of Singapore’s total



Community parks like this one in Woodlands were developed after the launch of the Garden City concept. Source: National Archives of Singapore.

land area. During the same period, the number of newly created parks in Singapore rose from only 13 to 317.²⁷ To enable better administration of these parks, the Parks and Recreational Department was reconstituted into a full-fledged statutory board called the National Parks Board (NParks).

Enriching the Garden City Experience

Towards the end of the 1980s, the government began exploring ways to enrich the Garden City experience that had been put in place by numerous recreational parks and lush greenery. The result was the launching of the Green and Blue Plan.²⁸ Proposed in the Concept Plan of 1991, the Green and Blue Plan aimed to give the heightened impression of a Garden City by turning Singapore into one big playground. One major tool used to realise this initiative was to create a network of park connectors as green corridors to link all the parks, waterways and nature sites in Singapore.²⁹ By providing access to different parks around Singapore, these corridors offered additional pathways for activities like jogging, in-line skating and cycling. They also enabled park users to mix and match their leisure pursuits. For instance, a park connector linking East Coast Park and Pasir Ris Park would enable a user to windsurf at East Coast Park in the morning before cycling to Pasir Ris Park for an evening barbeque party. These park connectors were created through the optimisation of unused land such as

drainage reserves, foreshore and road reserves. They were also fitted with facilities such as lighting, rain shelters and communal nodes. Native plant species were planted to enhance the connectors, making them lush, nature corridors. The earliest park connector was the stretch linking Toa Payoh New Town Park, Bishan Park and Lower Peirce Reservoir Park, followed by the corridor that links East Coast Park and Pasir Ris Park. By the end of 2011, NParks had created a total of 41 park connectors measuring 160km and plans were already in place to expand the network further.³⁰

Besides establishing park connectors, the Green and Blue Plan also contained plans to conserve the natural environment. This was to ensure that the natural heritage of Singapore would be safeguarded and the continued greening of Singapore would not be restricted to man-made areas. At the time the Green and Blue Plan was announced, more than 3,000ha of Singapore’s natural landscape was earmarked for conservation.³¹ Some of the conservation sites includes nature sites at the Bukit Timah and Central Catchment Nature Reserve, the mangrove swamps at Mandai, Changi Creek and Pasir Ris, and the coral reef at Pulau Semakau. New conservation areas were also created from farming plots. For instance, the Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve located at the northern west coast of the island was developed from vacated prawn farms. Besides serving as nature parks, these

²² Planning Department (1975), pp. 68-69.

²³ Lee (1992), p. 19.

²⁴ Lee (1992), p. 19.

²⁵ Lee (1992), p. 78.

²⁶ Lee (1992), p. 64.

²⁷ National Parks Board (2011), pp.48-49.

²⁸ Urban Redevelopment Authority (1991), p. 28.

²⁹ First stage of nature corridor project to link parks opens (1992, August 15), *The Straits Times*, p. 23.

³⁰ National Parks Board (2011), p. 49.

³¹ Urban Redevelopment Authority (1991), p. 31.

conserved areas also functioned as natural habitats and sanctuaries to protect the flora and fauna of Singapore.

Other than the Green and Blue Plan, many community partnership programmes have also been introduced by NParks to further enrich the overall Garden City experience and to instil a green consciousness among Singaporeans. One key example is the Community in Bloom (CIB) programme.³² Launched in 2005, this programme allows Singaporeans to form gardening groups to create and maintain new gardens. These CIB gardens are usually located on assigned areas within public and private housing estates. Some of them can also be found within the premises of schools or public places such as hospitals. The groups tending the CIB gardens are left to their own devices. They can choose to plant flowers or grow their own vegetables, herbs and fruit trees. If needed, the gardening groups can seek advice from NParks or the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority on seeding, fertilisation and irrigation.

In addition to the CIB programme, there are also other community programmes such as the Adopt-A-Park scheme and Park Watch Scheme.³³ These programmes allow volunteers to participate in various park outreach activities such as conducting guided tours or organising cultural and artistic performances as well as other activities to attract visitors. The main objective of these programmes is to encourage members of the public to engage in activities on a personal level to help sustain parks and the Garden City concept. To further cement community participation and appreciation of the Garden City concept, NParks launched the Singapore Garden Festival in December 2006.³⁴ The biennial festival was to bring together local gardening communities and experts as well as award-winning international garden and floral designers to exhibit their green creations.

The Next Lap: City in a Garden

Even with the introduction of various programmes to enrich the Garden City concept, tree planting and the creation of parklands remains fundamental to the sustainability of the concept. For instance, Tree Planting Day has remained an annual tradition in Singapore since 1971. Today, it is an important component of a larger green programme known as Clean and Green Week. Launched in 1990, Clean and Green Week is

an annual campaign aimed at maintaining the green consciousness created by Tree Planting Day as well as at increasing awareness of environmental issues such as recycling, green consumerism and creating a litter-free environment.³⁵ In addition, in the latest Parks and Waterbodies Plan released by NParks in 2002 to lead the greening effort in Singapore for the next 10 to 20 years, the creation of new parks remains a key priority.³⁶ The plan aims to create an additional 1,200ha of new parks and to provide greater diversity in them by capitalising on natural assets such as hills, nature areas and waterbodies. The Plan also looked at ways to develop better facilities and amenities in existing parks and to improve accessibility to parks and nature areas by extending park connectors.

To supplement these efforts, a variety of streetscape and beautification treatments have been introduced to enhance the identity of greenery on roads and buildings.³⁷ For instance, roads already lined with lush and picturesque greenery such as Mandai Road and Mount Pleasant Road are protected as Heritage Roads. At the same time, a vertical greening programme was introduced to encourage property developers to beautify their high-rise developments with greenery.³⁸ To incentivise developers to adopt the vertical greening programme, URA allows the provision of additional gross floor area in buildings for the creation of balconies and sky terraces as spaces for greenery.

Ultimately, the Parks and Waterbodies Plan aims to develop the Garden City concept into the City in a Garden vision in which Singaporeans will have a garden in their homes instead of gardens outside their homes.³⁹ To lead the City in a Garden vision, NParks and URA worked together to develop one of the largest dedicated green spaces in Singapore. Known as Gardens by the Bay, this development reinforces Singapore's identity as the world's premier Garden City.⁴⁰ Located on waterfront land in the heart of the Marina Bay area, Gardens by the Bay offers a different greening experience for Singaporeans to live, work and play in a closer to water and surrounded by lush greenery. The Gardens will be a destination attraction for all, capitalising on its proximity to events and water activities, and the nearby attractions such as the Esplanade Theatres, the Singapore Flyer, Marina Barrage and the Integrated Resort.

About the author

Lim Tin Seng is a Librarian with the National Library Heritage division. He has co-edited two books, *Harmony and Development: ASEAN-China Relations* (2009) and *China's New Social Policy: Initiatives for a Harmonious Society* (2010). He is currently doing research on the Eurasian community for an upcoming National Library Board exhibition.



The Gardens by the Bay Supertree Grove at dusk with the OCBC Skyway. Courtesy of Jerome Lim, The Long and Winding Road.

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³² Ministry of National Development (2007).

³³ Ministry of National Development (2007).

³⁴ Flower power (2006, December 21), *The Straits Times*, p. 6.

³⁵ Greener S'pore drive gets boost on Sunday (1990, October 30), *The Straits Times*, p. 17.

³⁶ Urban Redevelopment Authority (2002).

³⁷ Seah (2006).

³⁸ Urban Redevelopment Authority (2002).

³⁹ City in a Garden (2002, October 21), *TODAY*, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Gardens to do a Garden City proud (2007, November 10), *The Business Times*, p. 2; Work to start on Marina Bay's three gardens (2007, November 5), *The Straits Times*, p. 20.



Tiong Bahru: Exploring Singapore's first public housing estate

Alvin Chua

Tiong Bahru is a place of many faces. Originally known for its “aeroplane houses”, Singapore’s first public housing experiment once had a reputation as a haven for the mistresses of rich businessmen. These days, it is better known for its heritage housing, skyrocketing property prices and popular food establishments.

Origins of Tiong Bahru: Swamps and cemeteries

The name Tiong Bahru is derived from the Hokkien word *tiong*, meaning “graveyard”, and the Malay word *bahru*, meaning “new”. The area originally contained a number of Chinese cemeteries, and its name is likely to have been coined to distinguish it from older cemeteries in the Chinatown area.¹ A 1905 article in the *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* also notes that the Hokkien name for Tiong Bahru was *O chai hng*, which means “tapioca vegetable garden”.²

Before 1926, Tiong Bahru consisted largely of mangrove swamps and several low hills, bordered by Sit Wah Road and Outram Road. The cemeteries included Si Jiao Ting, a public cemetery for Hokkiens, and cemeteries for deceased with the surnames of Choa, Wee and Lim, as well as family-owned burial plots.³ One of the more famous burials in the area was that of philanthropist Tan Tock Seng. The cemeteries sat mostly on the hilly areas of Tiong Bahru, while squatters in attap and plank huts formed colonies in the foothills near the swamps. The squatters paid rent to the caretakers of the burial grounds, and those who lived over the swamps built their huts on stilts. The area also featured pig and duck farms, a sago factory, the Sungei Batu rubber factory and the Ghin Teck Tong temple.

The early twentieth century saw the resident population of Tiong Bahru grow due to overcrowding in nearby Chinatown. The area’s infrastructure remained poorly developed, however, and the existing roads were not well maintained. This was evident when firemen were unable to reach the Sungei Batu rubber factory during fires in 1911 and 1914—in both cases, the firemen were unable to drive their engines to the factory due to the condition of the roads, and had to haul their equipment via footpaths. In 1914, *The Singapore Free Press* described Morse Road as “dilapidated and dangerous” and Tiong Bahru Road as being “in a disgraceful state of neglect, being full of huge holes and ruts”.⁴ The presence of the swamps led to poor sanitary conditions and malaria, with Tiong Bahru noted as a mosquito breeding area, although a 1918 report recorded that municipal work had greatly improved the drainage of the area.⁵

Development begins:

The Singapore Improvement Trust

In 1925, the Municipal Commission initiated a scheme to clear the land in Tiong Bahru, remove the squatters and their dwellings, and lay the infrastructure for a new town. Municipal health officer P. S. Hunter had earlier studied the sanitary and health problems of overcrowding in Chinatown, and recommended that a well-planned suburb nearby was necessary to relieve the congestion. Tiong Bahru’s unsanitary conditions were also considered undesirable given its location near the General Hospital.⁶

In June 1926, the scheme to develop around 33 hectares of land was approved. Under a joint Municipal-Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) scheme, the land was acquired for over \$600,000.⁷ The goal was to provide plots of land that could be easily built up, and lay roads and pavements. The land was to be acquired and developed by the govern-

¹ Yeoh & Kong (1995), pp. 89–115.

² Firmstone (1905), pp. 53–208.

³ Yeoh & Kong (1995), pp. 89–115.

⁴ Rubber factory fire (1914, April 6), *The Singapore Free Press*, p. 12.

⁵ Municipal Singapore (1918, May 24), *The Straits Times*, p. 10.

⁶ Renovating Singapore (1926, October 1), *The Singapore Free Press*, p. 11.

⁷ Yeoh & Kong (1995), pp. 89–115.



Tiong Bahru Community Centre, 1951. Source: National Archives of Singapore.

ment before being sold to prospective housing builders.

With the Singapore Improvement Trust Ordinance approved in 1927, work soon started on the slum clearance and land acquisition scheme. However, the colonial government found it difficult to clear the squatter colonies and took several years to evict over 2,000 squatters and demolish 280 huts.⁸ Several kampongs remained in Tiong Bahru and its surrounds, however, and new ones were to spring up in the future. Graves at the burial grounds were exhumed and moved to Bukit Brown cemetery, while the hills were levelled and the soil used to fill up the swampy ground. Roads in the area were named after prominent businessmen and philanthropists of the period, including Khoo Tiong Poh, Koh Eng Hoon and Seah Eu Chin.⁹

By 1931, the land work, including the laying of roads, drains and culverts, had been completed at a cost of around \$1.5 million. Over the next four years, the SIT sought to sell land sites to private developers for the development of residential property, but was unable to find buyers.¹⁰ In February 1935, the SIT decided to start housing development itself. SIT manager L. Langdon Williams, who was to direct the housing scheme, attended the International Town Planning Congress in London and visited British cities for ideas.¹¹

Construction of the estate began in March 1936, and the first block of flats consisting of 28 units and four shops was completed in December that year. The first 11 families moved in on 1 December, paying monthly rents of \$20 for a ground floor unit and \$22 for an upper level unit. By 1941, some 784 flats in two- and three-storey blocks, 54 tenements

and 33 shops had been completed, accommodating over 6,000 people. The estate had a market, a restaurant, coffee shops, a shoe shop, a dressmaker's shop and sundry shops, and the flats had a diverse population of Chinese, Indian, Eurasian and European residents.

Advent of war: The Japanese Occupation

With Tiong Bahru's development ongoing even as World War II approached, town planners built air raid shelters within the estate. The blast-proof shelters at Block 78 Guan Chuan remain intact as Singapore's first air raid shelters located within a public housing estate, while another shelter at Eu Chin Street was later turned into a community centre.¹² Children's playgrounds were also turned into makeshift air raid shelters as the Japanese advanced towards Singapore.¹³

The Japanese invasion and occupation of Singapore interrupted development of the estate, which had already cost a large proportion of the \$10 million originally allocated to the SIT for slum clearance all over the island. The roofs of a number of Tiong Bahru flats were damaged by Japanese bombing, and during the Japanese Occupation, the flat roofs fell into further disrepair through vegetable cultivation and other unauthorised uses.¹⁴

The Occupation saw a large number of new residents in Tiong Bahru, with an estimated 40% of the estate's post-war population having moved in during the Occupation. These new residents were recognised by the post-war British Military Administration, while those tenants who had illegally sold their flats for thousands of dollars' worth of Occupation-era "banana money" had their tenancies terminated after the war. Other tenants had sublet their flats, leading to the estate's resident population nearly doubling to around 14,000.¹⁵

Post-war growth and renewal

After the Occupation, construction continued on the housing estate. In 1948, a club was formed to manage the social, physical and cultural life and amenities of the community. By 1951, the estate had a physical centre, Singapore's first community centre. The centre had its own civil defence group and auxiliary police force for the area.¹⁶ In 1961, the first polyclinic in Singapore opened in Tiong Bahru. Tiong Bahru flats continued to be in high demand, with thousands of applicants on the waiting list. By 1954 the SIT added another 1,258 units to the estate.¹⁷

In the early 1950s, the population of Tiong Bahru stood at around 400,000. Besides those living in SIT housing, a number of attap hut villages had sprung up on uncleared burial



Housing and Development Board Area Office at Tiong Bahru, 1964. Source: National Archives of Singapore.

grounds. *The Straits Times* called the area "one of the worst attap slums in Singapore... haunted by a nest of gangsters and undesirable elements".¹⁸ The remaining slums and grave sites on the fringes of Tiong Bahru were only cleared by the mid-1970s.

In 1955, the SIT was dissolved and the People's Action Party government that had come to power in 1959 instituted the Housing Development Board (HDB) in its place. The HDB announced its first five-year building plan in December 1960, including the construction of some 900 flats at Tiong Bahru for lower-income groups. From March 1965, the HDB ended the rental policy of the pre-war flats and sold a number of them to their occupants, and evicted the remaining tenants who did not take up the sale option. The post-war flats came under HDB management in 1973 and residents had their 99-year leases renewed.

In 1966, the HDB announced that as part of its second five-year plan, an S\$8.5 million housing scheme for 40,000 people would be developed on Kampong Tiong Bahru, which had been the site of several major fires.

Fires in Tiong Bahru

There were numerous fires in Tiong Bahru, both big and small, before the development of widespread modern housing in the area. In August 1934, more than 500 dwellings across the kampongs of Tiong Bahru, Bukit Ho Swee and Havelock Road were destroyed by what was then described as "one of the worst fires in

years". Up to 5,000 people were left homeless.

Fires in 1955 and 1958 left hundreds in Kampong Tiong Bahru homeless, leading to the formation of a volunteer fire-fighting force in 1958. The easily flammable materials used to construct attap huts in the kampongs and the densely packed nature of their layout meant that fires spread quickly and caused major damage. Another fire in February 1959 caused up to 12,000 to lose their homes and \$2 million worth of damage.

On 25 May 1961, a fire that began near the site of the 1959 fire at Kampong Tiong Bahru spread across 100 acres, and the homes of nearly 16,000 people were destroyed. The Bukit Ho Swee fire, as it came to be known, is considered one of Singapore's worst-ever fires and gave new impetus to the government's policy of clearing attap hut settlements and shifting to flatted public housing.

Growth and redevelopment

By the 1980s, Tiong Bahru was seen as an estate with a greying population and ageing facilities. The 1990 Singapore Census of Population showed that those aged above 60 made up the highest proportion of residents in the estate.¹⁹ However, a combination of redevelopment and an influx of new residents attracted to the architecture and culture of the area changed the demographics of Tiong Bahru in the early 1990s. A shopping mall, Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) station, new public housing and private condominiums sprang up around the area.

Firemen were unable to reach the Sungei Batu rubber factory during fires in 1911 and 1914—in both cases, the firemen were unable to drive their engines to the factory due to the condition of the roads, and had to haul their equipment via footpaths.

⁸ Yeoh (2003), p. 300.

⁹ Savage & Yeoh (2003), p. 386.

¹⁰ Yeoh & Kong (1995), pp. 89–115.

¹¹ Tiong Bahru housing plan (1935, April 20), *The Straits Times*, p. 12.

¹² Price (2012, January 27), *MyPaper*.

¹³ Yeoh & Kong (1995), pp. 89–115.

¹⁴ Yeoh & Kong (1995), pp. 89–115.

¹⁵ Jalleh (1949, July 24), *The Straits Times*, p. 8.

¹⁶ Tiong Bahru community centre plans own police (1951, November 30), *The Straits Times*, p. 4.

¹⁷ Yeoh & Kong (1995), pp. 89–115.

¹⁸ Modern housing estate from the slums (1964, October 16), *The Straits Times*, p. 8.

¹⁹ Yeoh & Kong (1995), pp. 89–115.



Kim Pong Road, 1992. It was named after Low Kim Pong, whose firm Chop Ban San was once the largest druggist in Singapore. From the Lee Kip Lin Collection. All rights reserved, Lee Kip Lin and National Library Board, Singapore 2009.

The iconic Tiong Bahru Market underwent a two-year, \$16.8 million redevelopment, with the new building following the Art Deco architecture of the estate.

In 1995, a five-hectare site opposite Tiong Bahru Plaza, including 384 flats built in 1952, was chosen for the first Selective En-Bloc Redevelopment Scheme (SERS). The scheme was for older estates considered unsuitable for upgrading, and these 16 blocks of flats were acquired by the government and redeveloped into 1,402 new flats, more than three times the previous number.²⁰

From the early 2000s, Tiong Bahru began to attract a new generation of residents. Drawn by the area's unique architecture and heritage, the influx of young professionals helped rejuvenate Tiong Bahru's community life and retail scene, with art galleries, bookstores, cafes, restaurants and specialist boutiques setting up shop.²¹

SIT architects and managers took inspiration from public housing in British New Towns like Stevenage, Harlow and Crawley. These influences were applied to the estate's flats and shophouses, creating a blend of imported and local styles.

Conservation and renewal

In late 2002, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) held a public consultation and exhibition of sites proposed for conservation. Tiong Bahru was not part of this exhibition, but was later included after a public show of support for the estate.²² In 2003, 20 blocks of pre-war SIT flats were granted conservation status by the URA, which meant



National Day Parade at Tiong Bahru, 1975. Source: National Archives of Singapore.

that changes to the building structures were restricted by URA guidelines. From the late 1990s and into the 2000s, both the pre-war and post-war SIT flats were highly sought after by home buyers, and property prices rose to some of the highest in Singapore.²³

Two blocks of conservation flats were developed by Chinese firm Hang Huo Enterprise into the S\$45 million Link Hotel, a budget boutique hotel that was completed in 2007. The Link was joined by Hotel Nostalgia in 2009 and Wangz Hotel in 2010, giving Tiong Bahru the feel of a boutique hotel enclave.

Architecture and culture

SIT architects involved in the design of Tiong Bahru estate included Lincoln Page, Robert F. N. Kan and A. G. Church, who were influenced by the International Style popular in Europe during the period. The style spurned elaborate, decorative construction and focused on simple expressions of clear lines and planes.²⁴ SIT architects and managers took inspiration from public housing in British New Towns like Stevenage, Harlow and Crawley.²⁵ These influences were applied to the estate's flats and shophouses, creating a blend of imported and local styles.

The layout of the estate incorporated plenty of open spaces, with an emphasis on small neighbourhoods. The pre-war flats were neatly laid out and circled a central communal

zone. This zone included a market and hawker centre, coffee shops, a pet shop and a Chinese temple. The hawker centre housed reputed *chwee kuay* (rice cakes), pig organ soup and *pao* (bun) stalls, and the pet shop and bird-singing corner attracted both local bird lovers and tourists. The bird corner at Block 53 along Tiong Bahru Road was started in 1957, and was flagged by international travel writers as a slice of heartland Singapore in the 1970s and 1980s.²⁶ It closed for a period of redevelopment but has since reopened on the grounds of the Link Hotel.

The pre-war flats showed the influence of the shophouse, the prevalent dwelling form among Singapore's urban population at the time. The flats were based on a modified shophouse plan featuring courtyards, air-wells and back-lanes, but also combining the aspects of a modern apartment and designed in a way that provided a high level of privacy for individual homes.²⁷ A new style took hold in the form post-war flats, which were slab blocks of long, narrow buildings bordered by greenery. These walk-up apartments had clean architectural facades with rounded balconies and exterior spiral staircases.²⁸

In the first few decades following its pre-war origins, Tiong Bahru estate gained the colloquial tag of *mei ren wo* (Mandarin for "den of beauties"). This nickname came about as the estate developed a reputation for housing the mistresses of many rich men, as well as nightclub singers and hostesses working in the nearby Keong Saik Road red-light district and Great World Cabaret.²⁹ The pre-war flats were also called *puay kee chu* or "airplane houses" in Hokkien, as their design resembled that of the control tower at Kallang Airport, constructed around the same time. The estate was also dubbed "the Hollywood of Singapore" by locals who had previously only seen flats in American movies.³⁰

The regeneration of Tiong Bahru from the early 2000s has led to a sense of an incipient arts and culture scene taking root in the area, with new residents, art galleries and boutiques drawing inspiration from the heritage and culture of the estate while adding their own narratives to the Tiong Bahru story.³¹ The estate has also drawn artists and filmmakers—Tiong Bahru estate appeared in scenes of *Be With Me*, a 2005 movie by local filmmaker Eric Khoo, while in 2010, the short film *Civic Life: Tiong Bahru* featured residents of the area and told the stories of the relationships between the community and the environment.

About the author

Alvin Chua is an independent researcher who writes on Singapore history, culture and heritage. Since 2008, he has contributed numerous articles to Singapore Infopedia, NLB's online encyclopaedia on Singapore. He previously wrote for the *TODAY* paper and a number of websites.

²⁰ Williams (1995, August 23), *The Straits Times*, p. 1.

²¹ Huang (2008, February 24), *The Sunday Times*, p. L35.

²² Kong (2011), pp. 165-167.

²³ Loo (2004, September 5), *The Sunday Times*, p. 25.

²⁴ Lou (1990, December 5), *The Straits Times*, p. 4.

²⁵ Wan (2009), pp. 169-171.

²⁶ Lev (1996, December 26), *The Orange County Register*.

²⁷ Wan (2009), pp. 169-171.

²⁸ Wong (2005), p. 46.

²⁹ Jalleh (1949, July 24), *The Straits Times*, p. 8.

³⁰ Ng (2006, September 3), *The New Paper*.

³¹ Tan (2011, July 30), *The Business Times*.



Tiong Bahru Market. All Rights Reserved. National Library Board Singapore 2007.



Flautist Herbie Mann performing at the Tiong Bahru bird corner, 1984. Source: National Archives of Singapore.

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Menyingkap Kenangan Kampung Pasiran dan Sekitarannya

Sundusia Rosdi



Anak-anak Kampung Pasiran di awal tahun 1960an. Foto ihsan Puan Rohaidah Mohd. Yadri.

Latarbelakang Perkampungan Melayu di Singapura

Sebelum Sir Stamford Raffles mendarat di Singapura pada tahun 1819, telah pun wujud beberapa perkampungan di bawah penguasaan pemerintah Temenggung Abdul Rahman. Dianggarkan terdapat 1,000 penduduk iaitu kira-kira 500 Orang Kallang, 200 Orang Seletar, 150 Orang Gelam mendiami kawasan Sungai Singapura dan 200 Orang Laut di daerah Keppel Harbour.¹

Sebelum kedatangan Inggeris, pendatang-pendatang perlu mendapatkan izin Temenggung untuk membuka penempatan baru, berkebud atau mengusahakan hasil mahsul tanah. Kuasa Temenggung ini berterusan hingga termeterainya perjanjian 1819 dengan Kompeni Inggeris melalui Surat Perjanjian bertarikh 26 Jun, mengenai Pembahagian Hak dan Kedudukan Penduduk.²

Kampung di pinggir bandar

Professor Madya Hadijah Rahmat dalam bukunya, *Kilat Senja* telah menyenaraikan lebih 90 perkampungan yang pernah wujud di Singapura.³ Kebanyakan perkampungan Melayu terletak di persisiran pantai timur

dan barat lantaran corak ekonomi berasas laut serta faktor kemudahan dan pengangkutan masa itu. Selain itu tersenarai juga beberapa kampung lain yang terletak di kawasan tengah Singapura seperti Kampung Cantek, Kampung Tempe, Kampung Woodleigh dan Kampung Pasiran.

Generasi lama mungkin masih mengingat nama Kampung Pasiran walaupun kini yang ada hanyalah "Jalan Pasiran". Kampung Pasiran terletak di daerah pinggir bandar Singapura berdekatan kawasan Newton/Thomson Road. Ia pernah bertapak di kawasan mewah Gentle Road, Chancery Lane, Newton Road, Gilstead Road dan Buckley Road.

Dari simpang Newton Circus ke Kampung Pasiran yang bersaiz 10 ekar tanah, perjalanan kaki mengambil masa kurang dari 5 minit sejauh lebih 1 km. Pada awal tahun-tahun 1920an terdapat dua buah kolam ternak ikan dan udang milik seorang taukeh Cina, Ah Seng.⁴

Kampung Pasiran pernah mengandungi lebih 50 buah rumah panggung, rumah separa batu dan rumah deretan dengan lebih 100 keluarga di sepanjang jalan Gentle Road.

Abstract

The article features the historical development of a village in Singapore named Kampung Pasiran (situated at Gentle Road/Newton Road) and its surrounding areas. Deriving primary material sources from oral records of the National Archives of Singapore and interviews with surviving kampung dwellers, the article includes the kampung pioneers, life during the Japanese Occupation, the role of its savings and thrifts co-operatives, the ties between the only Malay-stream school in the area with the villagers as well as the bond forged by the prominent Alsagoff family with the villagers in facilitating economic activities through employment. The function of the mosque as a religious as well as a socio-cultural focal point is also discussed. Owing to its central strategic location, the mosque, amidst its affluent residential environment now, is likened to an 'oasis in the desert'.

Masjid Abdul Hamid Kampung Pasiran dan Sekolah Perempuan Melayu Bukit Tunggul (1961-1974) pula terletak di hujung simpang Gentle Road.

Menurut cerita orang tua-tua dulu yang disampaikan oleh Allahyarham Haji Bahari Haji Suradi, 85 tahun (penduduk asal kampung itu), nama Kampung Pasiran berasal daripada kata 'Pasir' yang diimbuh dengan akhiran 'an' dan lahiriah perkataan pasiran. Pasiran bermakna banyak pasir atau kawasan berpasir yang luas. Terdapat sebuah kuari (lombong) pasir berdekatan dan sebuah kolam terjadi kerana pasir putih di situ di kaut korek pengusaha bangunan untuk kerja-kerja pembinaan. Di kolam itu terdapat sampan-sampan untuk beriadah dan memancing ikan. Setelah beberapa kejadian mati lemas dan kemalangan berlaku, kolam itu kemudiannya ditimbus. Hasil daripada kuari pasir ini maka terbitlah nama 'Kampung Pasiran' dan 'Jalan Pasiran'.¹ Berbanding dengan kampung-kampung lain di Singapura, keistimewaan kampung ini terletak kepada asal tapak kampung yang merupakan kuari pasir itu.



Penduduk Kampung Pasiran (1960an).
Foto ihsan Cikgu Kader Suradi.

Sejarah Kampung Pasiran

Penempatan awal kampung dipercayai bermula di antara tahun 1870an hingga akhir abad ke 19. Haji Buang Siraj, 94 tahun, mantan Presiden Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS) (1974-1980), yang pernah menetap di Kampung Pasiran selama 20 tahun (1917-1937) berpendapat bahawa Haji Abdul Latib Samyidin merupakan salah seorang peneroka terawalnya berdasarkan beliau adalah pemilik terbanyak tanah dan rumah di kampung sehinggalah sebahagian tanahnya diwakafkan sebagai tapak Masjid Abdul Hamid, Kampung Pasiran yang ada kini. Selain itu seorang lagi pengasas kampung ini ialah Haji Abdul Hamid Embong (Datuk kepada Haji Buang).

Kedua-duanya Haji Abdul Latib dan Haji Abdul Hamid berasal dari Kendal di Jawa Tengah dan dipercayai berhijrah ke Singapura pada tahun 1870an. Dalam perjalanan pulang

dari Mekah, mereka singgah di Singapura untuk bekerja bagi membayar hutang dengan ejen-ejen haji kerana perbelanjaan mereka ke Mekah. Tertarik dengan keadaan Singapura yang aman mantap dari segi ekonomi dan pekerjaan, lantas kedua-duanya menetap di sini dan 'membuka' Kampung Pasiran.

Cikgu Kader Suradi, 73 tahun (cicit Haji Latib Samyidin), penduduk asal kampung itu mengimbau bahawa ibunya, Hajah Siti Haji Siraj (Wak Siti) lahir di Kampung Pasiran pada tahun 1910. Dari tarikh kelahiran ini dapat dirumuskan bahawa Kampung Pasiran telah wujud sebelum awal abad ke 20 lagi.

Kampung Pasiran dan keluarga Alsagoff

Di belakang perkampungan Pasiran (sekitar Chancery Lane / Novena / Thomson Road) terdapat ladang getah dan ladang kopi dalam kawasan yang dikenali sebagai Bukit Tunggul milik hartawan Arab, pemilik tanah, pemungut hutang dan syekh haji terkenal iaitu Syed Omar bin Mohamed Alsagoff (pemilik firma S.O. Alsagoff, 1850-1927). Banglo kediamannya yang lengkap dengan stabel kuda (kereta kuda digunakan sebagai pengangkutan ketika itu) menjadi tarikan dan perhatian pendatang baru untuk mencari nafkah dan pekerjaan di situ. Banglo beliau "Omaran" ini terletak di atas Bukit Tunggul di Chancery Lane, merupakan tempat berlangsungnya pesta-pesta perayaan keluarga itu.

Pada tahun-tahun 1920-an, tapak ladang-ladang ini kemudiannya didirikan rumah-rumah kediaman pegawai kerajaan British. Ladang kopi pula diubah lanskapnya menjadi tasik persiaran dan taman riadah untuk keluarga Alsagoff. Stabel kuda dijadikan tempat penginapan pekerja-pekerjanya dan menjadi Kampung Bukit Tunggul.

Salah seorang anaknya, Syed Ibrahim Omar Alsagoff (1899-1975) mengambil alih perniagaan selepas kematian bapanya. Di antara pekerja-pekerja perniagaan keluarga Alsagoff ialah Haji Abdul Latib Samyidin, mandor yang mengawasi pekerja-pekerja estet di situ, Haji Siraj Mohd Noor (bapa Haji Buang) yang pernah menjadi tukang kebun di estet dan Hj Noor Abdul Hamid (anak kepada Haji Abdul Hamid Embong) yang berkerja sebagai drebar peribadi keluarga Alsagoff.

Lantaran tarikan ekonomi untuk berkerja di estet keluarga Alsagoff ini, pendatang-pendatang baru dan penduduk dari kampung lain (seperti Kampung Haji Alias di Coronation Road) datang ke Kampung Pasiran dan Bukit Tunggul. Justeru, keluarga Alsagoff memainkan peranan yang penting dalam penempatan awal Kampung Pasiran kerana ia telah memberi ruang dan peluang ekonomi sekali gus membaiki taraf kehidupan orang-orang kampung di kawasan itu.

Nostalgia Kampung Pasiran

Pada awalnya terdapat kurang dari 10 pintu rumah-rumah papan setingkat beratapkan zink didirikan di situ. Setiap unit rumah yang dapat menampung lebih 18 ahli keluarga dari 3 generasi mempunyai 3 hingga 4 bilik tidur, bilik tamu, bilik makan, dapur dan bilik air tersendiri. Penduduk kampung yang berkemampuan telah membina rumah-rumah bersebelahan rumah induk mereka dan disewakan dengan harga 5 hingga 6 dollars sebulan (termasuk kos bekalan api dan air pada tahun-tahun 1950an. Sewa rumah ini kemudian meningkat kepada \$50 (sebulan di tahun-tahun 1970an).

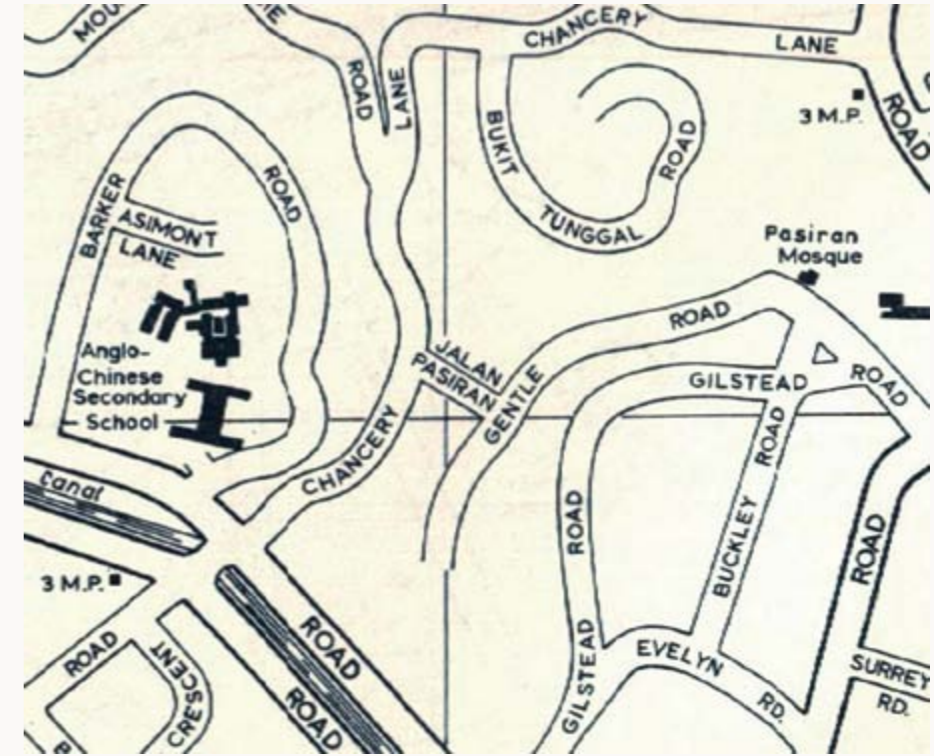
Bekalan air minum dan masak adalah dari sebuah perigi bersebelahan sebuah kolam sedalam lebih 10 kaki ini yang dikatakan tidak pernah kering dan tidak diketahui siapa penggali kolam itu.⁶ Selain itu setiap rumah mempunyai perigi mereka sendiri yang digunakan untuk pembersihan. Mereka menggunakan lampu minyak tanah dan dapur kayu untuk memasak dengan memungut kayu-kayu dari estet kawasan sekitaran.

Selain kaum Jawa, Boyan dan Melayu, terdapat juga keluarga-keluarga Cina, India dan Serani yang tinggal di rumah-rumah batu sebandung berdekatan Gentle Road. Sebuah pondok orang-orang Bawean dikenali sebagai; "Pakherbung" di Buckley Road merupakan jiran terdekat orang-orang Kampung Pasiran.

Era Pendudukan Jepun 1942-1945

Selama pendudukan Jepun, kawasan persekitaran Kampung Pasiran dijadikan kawasan kediaman askar-askar Jepun. Pegawai tinggi Jepun tinggal di Buckley Road sementara Lieutenant General Tomoyuki Yamashita (1885-1946) (yang mengetuai serangan tentera Jepun ke atas Singapura) pernah tinggal di daerah Bukit Tunggul (banglo bekas pegawai-pegawai Inggeris).⁷

Kampung Pasiran tidak menyimpan banyak peristiwa dengan askar-askar Jepun kerana hubungan baik penduduk kampung dengan askar Jepun. Askar-askar Jepun juga dikatakan sentiasa memantau kampung itu khususnya kegiatan pemuda-pemuda kampung dengan meronda kawasan itu terutama waktu malam. Ada juga penduduk Kampung Pasiran yang mempunyai pertalian keluarga di Johor telah melarikan diri kerana khuatir dijadikan buruh paksa pembinaan jalan kereta api maut di sempadan Siam-Burma. Hajah Satimah Mohd. Said, 81 tahun (bekas penduduk asal kampung) mengimbau ingatan hubungan penduduk kampung dengan askar-askar Jepun yang saling hormat menghormati walaupun tentera Jepun sering mengambil air dari perigi dan ubi kayu, keledak serta keladi atau meminta telur ayam penduduk kampung itu tidak dengan paksaan.



Lokasi Kampung Pasiran. Sumber: Singapore street directory and sectional maps 1966, Singapore: Ministry of Culture.

Menurut beliau, lazimnya penghuni yang pintu rumah-rumah mereka di tampal dengan sijil penempatan keamanan ("ankyosho"—senarai ahli keluarga bagi setiap rumah) yang dikeluarkan oleh pihak Jepun, tidak akan diganggu. Begitupun kebanyakan penduduk tetap curiga dengan mendirikan kubu kecil yang boleh memuatkan hingga 8 orang. Untuk melindungi dari tentera Jepun, tanah liat ditampal di dinding luar kubu dan ditanam rumput. Kelihatan seolah-olah rumah itu bersebelahan busut kecil yang sebenarnya kubu untuk menyembunyikan diri terutama apabila siren tanda bahaya berbunyi.

Penduduk-penduduk kampung diberi kupon catuan makanan asas seperti beras yang dicampur kapur, gula dan minyak. Catuan makanan yang harus diambil dari beberapa pusat khas seperti Sekolah Tanglin Tinggi (di kawasan Monk's Hill/Newton Road). Di sebalik suasana aman di Kampung Pasiran, penduduk masih dibendung rasa takut terutama sekali bila berita seorang penduduk kampung itu. Pak Sastro, 70 tahun, drebar askar Jepun telah mati dibenamkan ke dalam air sabun hanya kerana beliau tidak memahami suruhan tentera Jepun.⁸

Syarikat Kerjasama

Serbaguna Kampung Pasiran

Pengalaman pahit di tahun-tahun pendudukan Jepun telah membangkitkan semangat bantu diri dan kerjasama ekonomi di kalangan penduduk-penduduk Kampung Pasiran. Semangat gotong royong dan harapan untuk

¹ Turnbull, 2009, p. 25

² Hadijah, 2005, p. 13

³ Hadijah, 2005, p. 34-37

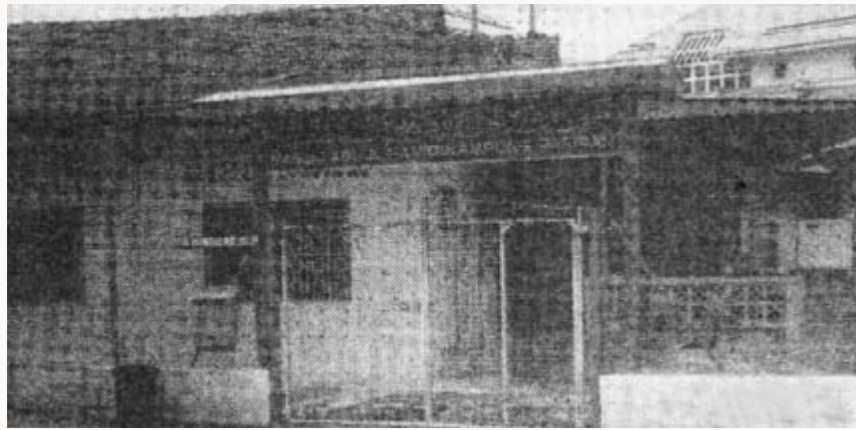
⁴ Haji Buang, 1986

⁵ Mohd. Gani, 2008, p. 16

⁶ Haji Buang, 1986

⁷ Cikgu Kader, 2011

⁸ Hajah Satimah, 2011



Masjid Kampung Pasiran (1932- 1960). Foto ihsan Cikgu Kader Suradi.



Masjid Kampung Pasiran (1961- 2001). Foto ihsan Cikgu Kader Suradi.

mempertingkatkan taraf hidup telah mencekutkan idea penubuhan Syarikat Kampung Pasiran pada 3 Disember 1946, syarikat kooperatif jimat cermat melalui simpanan tetap dari gaji ahlinya setiap bulan. Selain dapat berbangga dengan kejayaan syarikat ini meningkatkan taraf ekonomi ahlinya, ia juga merupakan di antara kooperatif kampung yang masih aktif hingga sekarang.⁹

Di tahun-tahun lima puluhan, penduduk Kampung Pasiran terus membangun dan bersaing untuk kemajuan. Hasil peningkatan taraf pelajaran anak-anak mereka, ramai yang menjadi usahawan sendiri, berkerja sebagai guru, pegawai polis, dan pegawai pemerintah.

Sementara itu suri rumah mengambil peluang berniaga kecil-kecilan dari rumah (seperti kuih muih dan kerepek pisang), membuka warung-warung makanan di tepi jalan dan menyediakan khidmat pembekal makanan untuk majlis-majlis. Mereka menjadikan usahaniaga makanan sebagai sumber pendapatan menyara kehidupan keluarga.

Tiada Sistem Penghulu

Penduduk Kampung Pasiran hidup harmoni walaupun tiada penghulu rasmi mentadbirkan kampung. Pada awal abad ke 20, Hj Noor Hj Abdul Hamid yang menjadi imam masjid Abdul Hamid Kampung Pasiran dianggap

sebagai ketua kampung 'de facto' bersama-sama penasihat-penasihatnya seperti Cikgu Boslan Abas dan Hj Ahmad Nasir.¹⁰

Masjid Abdul Hamid Kampung Pasiran

Lazimnya masjid berfungsi sebagai pusat masyarakat Melayu/Islam kerana peranan agama, sosio-ekonomi dan sosio budayanya. Tidak terkecuali Masjid Abdul Hamid Kampung Pasiran yang dibina dari hasil usaha dan peninggalan penduduk asal kampung itu. Ia mengambil sempena nama Haji Abdul Hamid Ahmad Marang, hartawan Marang, Terengganu yang membiayai pembinaannya. Beliau berasal dari Kampong Jagoh (Telok Blangah, Singapura).

Menurut sejarahnya, beliau datang ke Kampung Pasiran pada tahun 1931 untuk membeli tanah dan berjumpa Haji Abdul Latib bin Samyidin. Sejurus mengetahui niat Haji Abdul Hamid ingin mendirikan masjid di atas tapak tanah yang bakal dibelinya, Haji Abdul Latib lantas mewakafkan tanahnya yang berukuran 189,45 kaki persegi di tapak tanah nombor unit 10 dan 12, Gentle Road sebagai tapak masjid kampung itu.

Masjid ini siap dibina pada tahun 1932 dan dibaik pulih beberapa kali dari tahun 1960 hingga 2002. Pada tahun 2000, kegiatan mencari dana pembangunan masjid dirancarkan melalui projek-projek seperti Teleamal, Majlis Hi-Tea, Projek Climbathon dan Jualan Nasi Amal untuk membina bangunan baru yang memerlukan S\$1.7 juta. Untuk memupuk semangat "kampung", penduduk, digalakkan bersalat jemaah serta mengadakan majlis keraian, kenduri kendara dan walimah di masjid selain majlis keagamaan seperti tahlil, maulid dan berkhathan dan lain-lain lagi.

Sebagai pusat sosial selain fungsi keagamaan, Ustaz Haji Amir Rais yang pernah bertugas di masjid itu bukan sahaja mengajar ilmu agama malah mentadbirkan kelas-kelas tuisyen bagi pelajaran sekular seperti Matematik dan Bahasa Inggeris sebelum diambil alih oleh pihak MENDAKI kemudiannya.

Dengan usaha lembaga pentadbir masjid dan sokongan dari Majlis Ugama Islam, masjid lama dirobohkan dan yang baru didirikan dengan perasmianya pada 25 Oktober 2007.

Sekolah di kawasan Kampung Pasiran

Sebuah sekolah yang terkenal di persekitaran itu dan kekal terpacat dalam ingatan generasi lama pada tahun-tahun 1960an hingga 1970an ialah Sekolah Rendah Perempuan Melayu Bukit Tunggul (SPMBT) yang pernah berdiri di Simpang Gilstead Road dengan Gentle Road (di tapak bangunan Revenue House).

Pada tahun 1959, di bawah pemerintahan Parti Tindakan Rakyat (PAP), yang

menyokong penggunaan bahasa Melayu dalam pendidikan serta ransangan politik untuk penyatuan Tanah Melayu, pendidikan aliran Melayu di Singapura menjadi penting. Ini selari pula dengan Polisi Pendidikan 1959 Pemerintah Singapura yang memberikan layanan setara pada semua pendidikan sekolah dalam empat bahasa rasmi. Sejak itu kemasukan murid-murid ke sekolah rendah aliran Melayu semakin meningkat kerana sekolah Melayu merupakan pilihan 'pertengahan' terbaik bagi masyarakat Melayu di antara madrasah dengan sekolah Inggeris.¹¹

Tahun-tahun 1960an menyaksikan banyak sekolah-sekolah Melayu dibuka termasuk bangunan dua tingkat Sekolah Rendah Perempuan Melayu Bukit Tunggul (SPMBT) ini yang dibina di tapak bekas kolam Kampung Pasiran dulu.

Sekolah ini dibuka pada awalnya kepada penuntut-penuntut perempuan darjah satu. Pelajar-pelajar darjah 2 hingga 6 adalah yang dipindahkan dari Sekolah Perempuan Melayu Scotts Road pada 3 Januari 1961. Ia dibuka dengan rasminya pada 30 Julai 1963 oleh Setiausaha Parlimen (Pendidikan) Encik Lee Khoo Choy dan dihadiri oleh Menteri Pendidikan, Encik Yong Nyuk Lin.

Di bawah kepimpinan guru besar sekolah ini, Cikgu Aishah Murkani dari tahun 1961 hingga 1974 yang dibantu oleh penolong-penolong guru besar termasuk Cikgu-cikgu Marhamah Mohd. Zain, Buang Mohd Amin, Sukinah Abu dan Jumaiyah Masbin, sekolah ini telah melahirkan ramai pelajar-pelajar perempuan cemerlang di lapangan masing-masing.

Dengan sokongan barisan guru-guru berkaliber seperti Cikgu-cikgu Alimah Lob, Asmah Alsagoff, Asnah Asraf, Badariah Boslan, Hafsa Maarof, Juminah Ehsan, Kamariah Juraimi, Jamaliah Sulaiman, Joyah Jantan, Maimunah Dahlan, Maryam Zanariah Hussin, Mariam Junid, Norsiah Sujai, Warianti Kasman, Zainab Razak dan lain-lain lagi, mereka berjaya menyemai semangat yang membawa perubahan minda dan berdaya maju kepada pelajar-pelajarnya. Menurut Cikgu Kamariah Mohd Naib, 74 tahun (mantan guru SPMBT, 1961-1972) antara pelajar-pelajar SPMBT ialah Orkid Kamariah, anak perempuan Presiden Yusof Ishak (Presiden Singapura pertama, 1965-1970).

Keunikan SPMBT

Sejak tahun 1964, pelajaran muzik mula diperkenalkan di SPMBT dan sekolah ini merupakan satu-satunya sekolah Melayu yang terpilih sebagai "Pilot School for Music Teaching" sejak 1971. Ia turut aktif dengan pasukan padu suaranya dan telah mengambil bahagian dalam Pesta Belia Singapura, Hari Ulang Tahun Singapura ke 150 (tahun 1969)



Encik Abdul Hamid Marang.
Foto ihsan Cikgu Kader Suradi.

dan turut merakamkan lagu rakyat berirama Melayu di bawah bimbingan guru-guru muzik mereka Puan Ng Eng Hoe dan Cikgu Tengku Saleha Tengku A. Ghani.¹² Pada tahun 1972, SPMBT telah memenangi berbagai peraduan muzik dan nyanyian padu suara di antara sekolah-sekolah rendah.¹³

Semasa mengimbas kenangan di SPMBT, Cikgu Mariam Junid, 71 tahun (mantan guru SPMBT, 1961-1968) menerangkan tentang beberapa kegiatan luar darjah yang diminati pelajar-pelajar termasuk pasukan Brownies, Pandu Puteri, Tarian Melayu, Bahas dan Seni Lukis. Ada juga penduduk Kampung Pasiran yang berbakat menjadi sukarelawan untuk membantu guru melatih murid-murid dalam kegiatan luar darjah. Sebagai bekas penuntut sekolah ini dari tahun 1963 hingga 1967, penulis masih ingat tentang sesi lukisan bimbingan Encik Sarkasi Said, penduduk asal Kampung Pasiran dan pelukis batik terkenal kini.

Kampung Pasiran dengan SPMBT

Acara sukan tahunan SPMBT merupakan satu pesta masyarakat meriah kerana penglibatan pelajar-pelajar, guru-guru sekolah ini dengan penduduk Kampung Pasiran. Dalam acara tahunan ini, ketara sekali penggembelingan tenaga antara penduduk Kampung Pasiran dengan guru-guru dan murid-murid. Mengikut Cikgu Mariam Junid, "semasa acara sukan, pihak sekolah meminjam peralatan periuk, gelas dulang dari masjid Kampung Pasiran untuk digunakan bagi jamuan ringan untuk pelajar-pelajar dan ibubapa mereka". Kehadiran penduduk-penduduk kampung juga dialu-alukan dalam perayaan-perayaan sekolah lain seperti Hari Penyampaian Hadiah

⁹ Cikgu Kader, 2011

¹⁰ Cikgu Kader, 2011

¹¹ Kamsiah, 2007, p. 239

¹² Aishah, 1971, p.64

¹³ Salma, 1972, p.7



Guru-guru dan pekerja-perkerja Sekolah Perempuan Melayu Bukit Tunggul (1961).
Foto ihsan penulis.

dan Pameran Seni Lukis dan Kerja Tangan.

Nostalgia SPMBT

Setiap bilik darjah dilengkapi dengan sebuah almari kecil berbentuk buku yang boleh dikatup bila tamat waktu sekolah. Ia dapat menampung hingga 40 buku yang disediakan oleh pihak sekolah serta sumbangan dari guru-guru dan pelajar-pelajar.

Kantin sekolah pula sentiasa membawa nostalgia gembira kerana sesi rehat yang dimulakan dengan goyangan tangan loceng tembaga oleh pembantu sekolah amat dinantikan. Bau harum kuah mee sup, mee rebus, tempe goreng bercalit sambal, epok-epok serta bubur kacang dan terigu yang berharga antara 5-25 sen, jualan Wak Siti dan 'Mami' mengundang barisan panjang pelajar-pelajar yang ingin 'mengalas' perut. Yang menarik, kebanyakan para penggerai kantin sekolah adalah penduduk Kampung Pasiran sendiri.

Sekitar pertengahan tahun 1970-an, permintaan bagi pendidikan sekolah aliran Melayu merosot. Murid-murid terakhirnya telah dipindahkan ke Sekolah Rendah Tanglin Tinggi bermula tahun 1974. Bangunan sekolah ini kemudiannya digunakan sebagai sekolah sementara bagi Sekolah Rendah Catholic dan Spastic Children's Association sebelum ia dirobuhkan bagi pembangunan "Revenue House".

Pada 29 Mac 2003, selepas hampir 30 tahun penutupan sekolah itu, satu majlis perjumpaan "menjunjung budi guru-guru" dianjurkan di Hotel Carlton. Majlis ini berjaya menarik lebih dari 30 bekas guru-guru dan 200 alumni bertemu mesra.

Jalan Pasiran dalam kenangan

Kini yang tinggal hanya nama "Jalan Pasiran" dan "Bukit Tunggul Road" dikenali sebagai daerah mewah di pinggir bandar Singapura.

Syarikat Kerjasama Serbaguna Kampung Pasiran Berhad (Kampung Pasiran Multi-purpose Co-operative Society Limited) pula masih aktif beralamatkan 10, Gentle Road, Singapura 309194.

Walaupun Kampung Pasiran tidak begitu dikenali berbanding kampung-kampung Melayu yang lain, namun ia telah melahirkan ramai pendidik dan para aktivis sosial serta budayawan. Antara mereka ialah mantan ahli parlimen kawasan Kampung Kembangan (1963-1968), Haji Mohamed Arif Suradi, Cikgu-cikgu Mohamed Noh Hj. Noor, Aman Jalal, Husin Suradi, dramatis Rubiah Suparman, pelukis batik Sarkasi Said, pemuzik Haji Adnan Jaafar dan penyanyi Rokiah Sukaimi. Di kampung ini lah juga pembuat capal, Haji Ahmad Abdul Shukur tinggal dan bertukang capal. Capal-capal buatannya banyak ditempah dan dijual di kedai-kedai di Arab Street dan Geylang Serai pada zaman itu.

Perpindahan penduduk-penduduk kampung ini ke estet perumahan moden dan penjualan tapak dan tanah rumah pusaka untuk pembangunan rumah-rumah mewah seawal tahun-tahun 1970an telah membawa perubahan kepada kawasan dan masjid itu. Dengan penjualan rumah sebanding keluarga Melayu terakhir di situ pada tahun 2008 dengan harga \$6.5 juta, maka tamatlah penempatan penduduk Melayu selama lebih seabad di Kampung Pasiran. Pembangunan kawasan berdekatan pula dirancakkan dengan terbinanya Stesen MRT Novena, Hospital Tan Tock Seng, kompleks pusat membeli belah canggih dan beberapa bangunan komersil lain.

Masjid Abdul Hamid, Kampung Pasiran, yang selalu dikunjungi oleh pekerja-pekerja Islam di sekitar kawasan itu terutama pada solat Jumaat, telah menjadi satu institusi sosial yang unik kerana diandaikan sebagai "wahah di bandar" (oasis in the city) lantaran kedudukan strategiknya sebagai tempat ibadah di pinggir bandar khususnya di kawasan perumahan mewah. Ia sering menjadi tumpuan dan jaringan silaturrahim bukan saja dari penduduk kampung itu sendiri tetapi juga dari penduduk kampung lain yang berdekatan yang sering "balik kampung" untuk bersalat dan bertemu teman-teman lama terutama pada bulan Ramadan serta Hari Raya Aidil Fitri dan Aidil Adha. Dengan "semangat kekitaan" yang kental terhadap masjid itu, bekas penduduk kampung merasakan bahawa setiap pertemuan mereka di situ dapat mencekutkan rasa nostalgia segar terhadap suasana dan kehidupan kampung serta keakraban hubungan persaudaraan sesama mereka.

Pastinya, Kampung Pasiran dan Bukit Tunggul kekal mewarnai sejarah masyarakat Melayu di Singapura dan kenangan kehidupan



Penuntut-penuntut Darjah 6A bersama guru-guru Sekolah Perempuan Melayu Bukit Tunggul (1962). Foto ihsan penulis.

di sini akan terus tersemat dalam ingatan bekas penduduk-penduduknya di manapun kini mereka menetap. Namun begitu generasi muda bekas penduduk kampung ini diharapkan dapat melanjutkan usaha menggali dan merakamkan sejarah kampung ini dengan lebih meluas lagi agar mereka dapat mengenali jati diri masing-masing dan mengabadikan warisan generasi lama.

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Undang-Undang Syarikat Kampung Pasiran, Singapura. Ditubuhkan pada 3 Disember 1946. (microfilm in Jawi)

Temu bual dengan penduduk-penduduk asal Kampung Pasiran :

1. Cikgu Mohamed Noh b. Hj Noor (temubual, May 10, 2011)
2. Cikgu Kader Suradi (temubual, May 24, 2011)
3. Hajah Rafeah Hj Noor (temubual, July 8, 2011)
4. Hajah Hadijah Duriat (temubual, July 14, 2011)
5. Hajah Satimah Hj Said (temubual, August 23, 2011)
6. Hajah Rohana Kasnan (temubual, August 23, 2011)

Temu bual dengan guru-guru Sekolah Perempuan Melayu Bukit Tunggul :

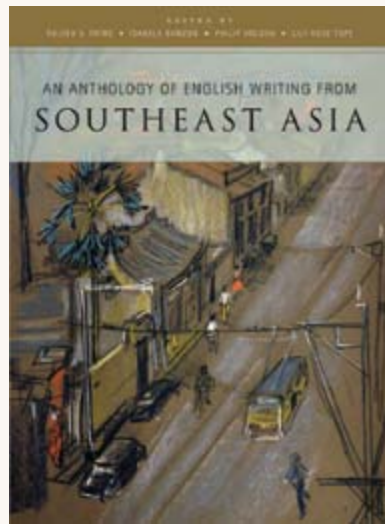
1. Cikgu Mariam Junid (temubual, September 5, 2011)
2. Cikgu Kamariah Mohd. Naib (temubual, September 26, 2011)

Book Review

“Rich and Strange”: The Manifold Remakings of English in Southeast Asian Literatures

Shirley Chew

An Anthology of English Writing From Southeast Asia is a substantive achievement and its editors are to be congratulated. All four are academics—Philip Holden and Rajeev S. Patke are from the National University of Singapore, while Isabela Banzon and Lily Rose Tope are from the University of the Philippines.



Patke, R. S., Banzon, I., Holden, P. & Tope, L. R. (Eds.). (2012). *An Anthology of English Writing From Southeast Asia*. Singapore: National Library Board.

All, as their biographical entries tell us, have specialist interest in literatures in English from Southeast Asia.

Keeping strictly to poetry, fiction and drama, the anthology draws attention to “the breadth and depth of what authors from the region have accomplished creatively in English” [General Introduction] over the last hundred years and more. This aim is underlined by a 10-section structural arrangement that is thematic and chronological, and that proffers “a regional rather than national canon” [General Introduction]. With English being the focus—but with translations from local languages into English omitted as well as the writing of “expatriates who lived and worked in Southeast Asia, for short to long periods of time” [General Introduction]—the “region” perforce narrows down almost entirely to the Philippines, Malaysia, and Singapore; in other words, countries that were once American or British colonies, and that in their post-independence eras have, to a greater or lesser extent, continued to foster the English language in education and for administrative purposes. Because outside these areas English is also used by “a handful of gifted writers” [General Introduction], there are included three items of fiction from Thailand, two from Myanmar, and a poem from Cambodia; and no doubt because of the recent revival of interest in...And the Rain MyDrink, HanSuyin by an editorial sleight of hand is considered a Southeast Asian writer and not an “expatriate”.

Like other publications of its kind, the anthology makes available significant writers and their works, and seeks to develop “a comparative and historical awareness of texts” [General Introduction]. A pleasure to be gained from the volume can be termed “genealogical”. To browse the wide-ranging items is to revisit the literary pioneers of the Philippines who had embraced English when it was imposed on the country at the end of Spanish rule in 1899 and the start of American colonisation,

for example, Ponciano Reyes, Angela Manalang Gloria, Nick Joaquin and N. V. M. Gonzalez. It is to reacquaint oneself with the Malaysian and Singapore writers who established themselves in the 1950s and 1960s, such as Lloyd Fernando, Edwin Thumboo, Wong Phui Nam, Ee Tiang Hong, Goh Poh Seng, as well as a younger generation who came into their own in the 1970s, such as Arthur Yap, Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Lee Tzu Pheng. Lastly, it is to be introduced to recent and notable voices, among them the dazzling inventiveness of Merlinda Bobis, the acute comic wit of Huzir Sulaiman, and the brooding intensities of Boey Kim Cheng.

Keeping strictly to poetry, fiction and drama, the anthology draws attention to “the breadth and depth of what authors from the region have accomplished creatively in English” over the last hundred years and more.

Despite the “differing historical trajectories” [General Introduction] of their countries, the writers of the region share a number of key concerns. One of these—given the rapid and in many respects violent changes brought about by foreign domination, war and modernisation—is to reclaim, as far as is possible, the past and the ‘local place’ through acts of memory. In the writing from the Philippines and Malaysia, the attempt to repossess an appropriated history and geography is often projected through a strong engagement with the natural environment. The examples are many. In the extract from F. Sionil José’s Po-on the father’s stump of an arm figures forth the harsh realities of getting a living from the land and the brutal practices of the Spanish colonial regime; Muhammad Haji Salleh’s “Tropics” is a lyrical evocation of “the brown people’s home,/their traditions engraved by every tide”; Tash Aw’s *The Harmony Silk Factory* delineates precisely the Kinta Valley with its traces of the early Chinese coolies who came to work in the area. If, in contrast, it is chiefly the notes of loss and alienation that are sounded

in representations of the urban environment among Singapore writers, they are nevertheless finely tuned. Characteristically double-edged, Arthur Yap’s “old house at ang siang hill” invokes and inscribes textually a personal landmark even as it apprehends the place’s erasure in the nation-state’s push towards an orderly future. Thirty years on, and different in tone and mood, Alfian Sa’at’s “The City Remembers” calls forth a grimly functional and estranging cityscape, one which has almost completely done away with the human presence.

Bound up with the writers’ acts of remembering is that of writing themselves as the subject of their stories, and the anthology’s texts encompass a broad range of emotions: Shirley Geok-lin Lim’s quietly heartrending “Pantoun for Chinese Women”, Edith L. Tiempo’s elegantly composed “Bonsai”, Lee Tzu Pheng’s tortuously defiant “Graffiti in The Ladies”, and Ng Yi-sheng’s irreverently sensuous “mock meat”. In addition, a significant number of the stories in the section “Travel and Diaspora” speak of, and for, the refugee and the migrant worker, that is, the politically and socially displaced who cannot be accommodated within the by now familiar paradigms of diasporic writing. To read Victor N. Sugbo’s “State of the Nation”, Ee Tiang Hong’s “On the Boat People”, and Jose Dalisay’s “The Woman in the Box” from *Soledad’s Sister* is to find rendered in them not a plangent nostalgia for ‘home’ nor the self-regarding delights of a hybrid identity, but extreme loneliness, the inhumanity of one’s own kind, and untimely death.

Given the good things in the anthology, it can only be churlish to mention even a few of the shortcomings, such as the editors’ insistently descriptive accounts of the texts in their introductions to the different sections; or the frequent overlaps in subject matter, most glaringly to be found between sections one and two; or the inept choice of plays, such as Edward Dorall’s *A Tiger is Loose in Our Community* and Kuo Pao Kun’s *Mama Looking for Her Cat*, which of necessity have to depend on stage produc-

tion, not print, to convey the mix and collision of languages in Singapore and Malaysia. Finally, since the anthology purports to showcase the imaginative literatures English has given rise to in Southeast Asia, it is odd, if not also otiose, to find included a section on “Using the English Language”. Odder still is the notion put across in the introduction that, with the “colonial anguish...no longer a major issue” [See Introduction to “Using the English Language”], writers are now free to enjoy contributing to “international writing in English”. Surely a writer’s relationship with English is more complex than this progressive trajectory would suggest? Shirley Geok-lin Lim’s “Lament” might have been written out of a specific political context but it also articulates a writer’s struggle in working creatively with not just English but any language. Indeed, language, as can be seen, is constantly made new in the best items in the anthology. To mention just two instances: Arthur Yap’s “inventory” may tilt at the nation-state’s obsessive “urbanisation and modernity” [Introduction to “Using the English Language”] but it also rejoices in the often inadvertent misuses of English that can lead to comic and even strangely alluring meanings; and Catherine Lim’s construction of Singapore Colloquial English in the dramatic monologue, “The Taximan’s Story”, is Singlish as commonly heard on the streets daily and at the same time a different Singlish, one which has been skilfully transformed by the writer’s art to yield an uncommon inner music.

When the late A.K. Ramanujan, himself a distinguished poet and translator, was asked in the 1960s for his views on whether Indians should in the post-independence era attempt to write poetry in a foreign language such as English, his disarmingly cool reply was: “I think the real question is whether they can. And if they can, they will.”¹ *An Anthology of English Writing From Southeast Asia* leaves us in no doubt that the writers assembled in it can write creatively in English and will continue to do so in significant ways.

About the author

Shirley Chew is Emeritus Professor of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Literatures at the University of Leeds, and currently Visiting Professor at the Division of English, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. She has published widely in the field of literatures from Commonwealth countries, and has co-edited *Unbecoming Daughters of the Empire* (1993), *Translating Life: Studies in Transpositional Aesthetics* (1999), *Re-constructing the Book: Literary Texts in Transmission* (2001), and the *Blackwell Concise Companion to Postcolonial Literature* (2010). She is the founding editor of *Moving Worlds: A Journal of Transcultural Writings*.

Despite the “differing historical trajectories” of their countries, the writers of the region share a number of key concerns. One of these...is to reclaim the past and the “local place” through acts of memory.

¹ Lal, P. (ed.). (1969). *Modern Indian Poetry in English*. Calcutta: Writers Workshop, p. 444.

SKYLINE OF THE SINGAPORE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

The skyline of Singapore's Central Business District has changed dramatically over the last 80 years. In these images taken in 1932, 1986 and 2012, the Fullerton Building, now known as Fullerton Hotel, is one of the few buildings from 1932 to remain visible from the harbour.



L-R: Ocean Building, The Arcade, St Helen's Court, Hongkong & Shanghai Banking Corporation Building, Union Building, Fullerton Building.
Source: National Archives of Singapore.



L-R: Temasek Tower, DBS Tower, UIC Building, Shenton House, Robina House, Hong Leong Building, Asia Insurance Building, Ocean Building, Clifford Centre, Clifford Pier, OUB Centre (partially hidden), Singapore Land Tower, Tung Centre, Hongkong and Shanghai Bank Building, 6 Battery Road, Bank of China, Fullerton Building. From the Kouo Shang-Wei collection 郭尚慰收集. All rights reserved. National Library Board Singapore 2010.



L-R: Marina Bay Financial Centre, Asia Square, The Sail, NTUC Building, Ocean Financial Centre (partially hidden), OUE Bayfront, Clifford Centre, Clifford Pier, Hitachi Tower, OUB Centre (partially hidden), UOB Plaza (partially hidden), Singapore Land Tower, Tung Centre, Hongkong and Shanghai Bank Building, Straits Trading Building, 6 Battery Road, Bank of China, Maybank Tower, Fullerton Building. Courtesy of Gerald Lim, 2012. All rights reserved.