

# bibliasia

Vol. **12**  
Issue **02**  
JUL-SEP 2016

**02** / A Grandmother's Story  
**20** / Forgotten Foods

**06** / The Story of Bahau  
**26** / Bygone Brands

**12** / Servants and "Mems"  
**42** / Marshall's Apple Tree



*Unsung  
Heroes &  
Forgotten  
Stories*





## OPINION

02 My Grandmother's Story

## FEATURES

06 Bahau: A Utopia that Went Awry

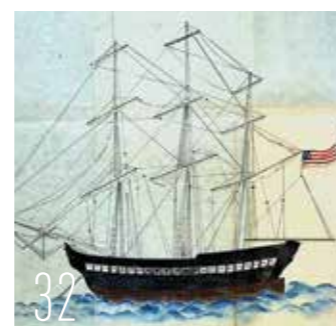
12 Mem, Don't Mess with the Cook!

20 Forgotten Foods & Mealtime Memories

26 Bygone Brands: Five Names That Are No More

32 Singapore's First Japanese Resident: Yamamoto Otokichi

36 Beach Road Camp and the Singapore Volunteer Corps



42 The Fruit of his Labour: David Marshall's Old Apple Tree

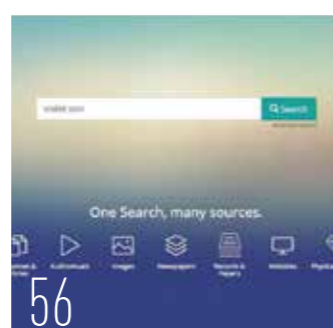
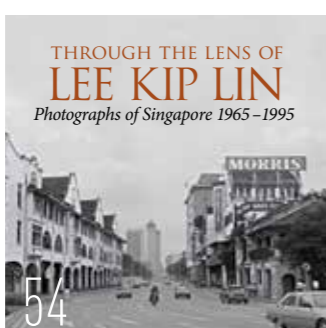
48 Angels in White: Early Nursing in Singapore

## NL NOTES

54 Best Non-Fiction Book of The Year 2016

56 Index to Singapore Information

58 Eu Tong Sen and His Business Empire 余东旋与他的商业帝国



## Director's Note

They say some stories should never be told, and indeed there are some skeletons that are best left in the closets where they belong. History is filled with many examples of perpetrators who attempt to erase – thankfully without much success – horrific crimes against humanity from living memory: the Nanjing massacre in China comes to mind, and closer to home, Cambodia's Khmer Rouge genocide.

Singapore's history, while much less dramatic, is no less interesting in its own way. Some stories have yet to be told (people always surprise me with secrets they've kept hidden for years) while there are many more stories that are in grave danger of being forgotten. This issue of *BiblioAsia* unearths some of the stories and memories of yesteryear, and celebrates the unsung heroes who have charted the course of our history.

Her grandmother's unexpected recollection of how Japanese soldiers came looking for women one fateful night in 1942 sets Yu-Mei Balasingamchow thinking about unspoken memories and the stories that haven't been written yet.

Still on the subject of World War II, Fiona Hodgkins – whose mother and her family were resettled in remote Bahau in Malaya during the Japanese Occupation years – tells a personal story of a wartime atrocity that few Singaporeans know of.

On a lighter note, food columnist Sylvia Tan recalls some of the foods and flavours she grew up with in 1960s Singapore (handmade ice balls, anyone?), while Janice Loo regales us with an engaging colonial-era account of European *mems* and their love-hate relationship with the domestic help.

Among the many intrepid early settlers in Singapore was a lone Japanese man by the name of Yamamoto Otokichi – from remote Mihama in Aichi Prefecture – who in 1862 became the first Japanese to make this island his home. Bonny Tan tells us how he ended up in Singapore.

The Singapore Volunteer Corps (SVC), which had its headquarters on Beach Road, was the precursor of the Singapore Armed Forces. Francis Dorai recounts the glory days of the SVC from its modest beginnings in 1854 to when it disbanded some 130 years later.

Nursing too has come a long way since the time of Raffles when chained convicts doubled up as nurses. Pattarin Kusolpalin pays a tribute to our "angels in white" – especially timely since Singapore celebrates Nurses Day on 1 August.

David Marshall, who became Singapore's first Chief Minister in 1955, used to deliver his fiery lunchtime speeches – often railing against the British – under an "apple tree" in Empress Place. Was it *really* an apple tree? Marcus Ng unravels this mystery.

Whiteaways, Setron and Three Rifles are just three bygone brand names that people of a certain vintage would remember. Sue-Ann Chia traces the history of these and other household names that no longer exist in Singapore.

Fortunately, the Eu Yan Sang brand, synonymous with traditional Chinese medicine, is still very much alive and thriving. Seow Peck Ngiam highlights a selection of business-related ephemera – receipts, invoices, bills, remittance notes, letters and the like – from the National Library's Rare Materials collection.

On a final note, the National Library is pleased to announce the launch of a new service, the Index to Singapore Information (ISI). The ISI is a comprehensive archive of index records that lists articles on or related to Singapore – or written by Singaporeans – in magazines and periodicals. Chris Tang and Leong Hui Chuan tell you more about this service that is now available on our OneSearch portal.

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

Mrs Wai Yin Pryke  
Director  
National Library

*BiblioAsia* is a free quarterly publication produced by the National Library Board. It features articles on the history, culture and heritage of Singapore within the larger Asian context, and has a strong focus on the collections and services of the National Library. *BiblioAsia* is distributed to local and international libraries, academic institutions, government ministries and agencies, as well as members of the public. The online edition of *BiblioAsia* can be viewed at: <http://www.nlb.gov.sg/biblioasia/>

## Editorial & Production

Managing Editor  
Francis Dorai

Editor  
Veronica Chee

Editorial Support  
Masamah Ahmad  
Stephanie Pee

Design and Print  
Oxygen Studio Designs Pte Ltd

Contributors  
Yu-Mei Balasingamchow  
Chen Jieyun  
Sue-Ann Chia  
Joey Chin  
Francis Dorai  
Fiona Hodgkins  
Pattarin Kusolpalin  
Leong Hui Chuan  
Janice Loo  
Marcus Ng  
Seow Peck Ngiam  
Bonny Tan  
Sylvia Tan  
Chris Tang

Please direct all correspondence to:  
National Library Board  
100 Victoria Street #14-01  
National Library Building  
Singapore 188064  
Email: [ref@library.nlb.gov.sg](mailto:ref@library.nlb.gov.sg)  
Website: [www.nlb.gov.sg](http://www.nlb.gov.sg)

On the cover:  
It was not unusual for European households to have several domestic servants during the colonial era in Singapore and Malaya. As seen in this illustration (from the left): houseboy ("Boy"), cook ("Cookie"), nanny (*amah*) and the water-carrier (*tukang air*). All rights reserved, Gibson, A. (1928). *The Malay Peninsula and Archipelago*. London: J. M. Dent.

All rights reserved.  
National Library Board,  
Singapore, 2016.

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

The views of writers and contributors do not reflect the views of the Publisher. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means without prior written permission from the Publisher and copyright owner(s).

Whilst reasonable care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the information in this publication, the Publisher accepts no legal liabilities whatsoever for the contents of this magazine.



# My Grandmother's Story

An unexpected recollection by her grandmother about her experience of the Japanese Occupation sets **Yu-Mei Balasingamchow** thinking about unspoken memories and the stories that haven't been told.



Yu-Mei and her grandmother at the former's one-year-old birthday celebration. *Courtesy of Yu-Mei Balasingamchow.*

My paternal grandmother and I have never really talked. This isn't due to any personal acrimony; it's just the usual generation gap, made all the more difficult as neither of us properly speak the language that the other person is most comfortable with. I live in the world of the English language; my grandmother's native tongue is Teochew, though like many Singaporeans of her generation (she's in her late 90s), she also speaks a muddle of other local languages: fluent enough Cantonese and Malay to carry on extended conversations, a decent command of Mandarin (thanks to several decades of watching TV shows on Channel 8, I suspect) and a smattering of English.

As a child, I thought of my grandmother as speaking, quite literally, "broken" English. She didn't speak complete sentences, but sprinkled sporadic words, from the straightforward "eat" to the multisyllabic "university", into her multilingual patois. On the other hand, I speak practically no Teochew. In my adult years, we got by in halting Mandarin – my grandmother's interspersed with the occasional Cantonese, Teochew or Malay term, mine embarrassingly repetitive and stilted as I fell back on the same few phrases at the tip of my tongue.

The language barrier means that my grandmother and I have never really talked about anything in depth. She did with her

**Yu-Mei Balasingamchow** is the co-author of *Singapore: A Biography* (2009) and works on history, art and culture projects. She has curated exhibitions for the National Museum of Singapore and is currently curatorial consultant for the revamp of Memories at Old Ford Factory. She is also a fiction writer and runs the website <http://www.toomanythoughts.org>.

**(Facing page)** A painting of Japanese naval bombers during World War II. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

I'm interested in stories that no one used to care about, stories that complicate or overturn the orthodox way of thinking about the present – stories that begin with questions that no one has thought of asking before.

own children – long, rambling conversations in Teochew, Malay or a litling combination of both, in which she often brought up old wounds and perambulated around old gossip. With her grandchildren, the exchanges were shorter, more fitful and unnatural, unless there was someone at hand to translate.

So while I've always known that my grandmother can be voluble, I've never asked her much about her life, and I've never been on the direct receiving end of a spiel that I could understand.

One day, almost two years ago, as she and I were sitting down to lunch, she gestured at the television, which was showing the daily Channel 8 news bulletin, and said something in Mandarin like, "Did you watch the news? There's a war going on."

My grandmother never talked about the news, so it took me a few seconds to register what she had said, and then I didn't know if the news she referred to had been about the situation in the Ukraine or the Israel-Gaza conflict.

"When there's a war, all the prices go up. The cost of food goes up," she went on as she started scooping food onto her plate of rice.

Any discussion of global economics and the cost of living was well beyond the ability of my wobbly Mandarin, so I just murmured assent.

"I've lived through two wars, you know. First when the Japanese came. Then when the British came back."

My ears perked up.

## Scratching Beneath the Surface

I've been working as an independent researcher and writer in Singapore's history and heritage fields for a decade now, and in that time I've witnessed a surge in interest in local history, as well as activism around heritage issues. A decade ago, I would not have anticipated the passionate defence and caretaking of Bukit Brown Cemetery by the volunteer group All Things Bukit Brown, or the number of local history- or identity-oriented artworks that emerged from Singaporean artists at the last Singapore Biennale, or that the government would budget \$42 million for a Singapore Memory Project to collect memories of Singapore.

My personal interest comes from wanting to find out more about Singapore, past and present, which possesses far richer, more complex and unsettling stories than the airbrushed, whitewashed *Majulah Singapura* version found in school textbooks or mainstream discourse. I'm interested in

stories that no one used to care about, stories that complicate or overturn the orthodox way of thinking about the present – stories that begin with questions that no one has thought of asking before.

For all the documentation projects, government grants, websites, Facebook pages and knick-knacks that have sprung up around "Singapore heritage", I'm often reminded that the stories that have not yet been told, the layers that have not yet been peeled back, are often staring us in the face.

Some years ago, I came across the book *Hidden Hands and Divided Landscapes: A Penal History of Singapore's Plural Society* by Anoma Pieris.<sup>1</sup> It examines Indian convict labour in colonial Singapore and how racial politics have been inscribed in our multi-ethnic society and urban history since its founding. Pieris highlights several colonial landmarks in the civic district that have been canonised as national monuments because of their architecture, an homage to the benevolence of colonial rule. Yet the convicts who built them have gone largely unacknowledged. At Bras Basah Road for instance, where the Singapore Management University now stands, there is no trace or memorial of the prison where the convict labourers were housed.

Perhaps because I spend so much time in the civic district, Pieris's observation that we take for granted the historical value of these buildings hit home. I'm reasonably informed about migrant worker issues in Singapore today, but I've never stopped to think about the men and women – and there *were* women labourers, says Pieris – whose hands brought these buildings into such fine form.

Which made me think: what other histories are we missing in plain sight?

**(Below)** A postcard of Indian convicts repairing a road in Singapore. Few people are aware that Indian convict labour was used for the construction of many colonial-era buildings in Singapore. *Courtesy of Farish Noor.* **(Below right)** Main entrance of the convict jail at Bras Basah, 1860–1899. *All rights reserved, McNair, J. F. A. (1899). Prisoners Their Own Wardens: A Record of the Convict Prison at Singapore in the Straits Settlements, Established 1825, Discontinued 1873, Together with a Cursory History of the Convict Establishments at Bencoolen, Penang and Malacca from the Year 1797. Westminster: A. Constable.*







Headlines in the 20 February 1942 and 3 March 1942 editions of *The Syonan Times* announcing the Japanese invasion of Singapore and Java. Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

### Wartime Memories

One historical subject that most Singaporeans have encountered is World War II and the Japanese Occupation of Singapore. My parents were born during the war, so they don't remember it, but I've wondered off and on, as a child and then as an adult, what my grandparents had experienced. It didn't seem like something I could bring up in casual conversation.

I've heard of school projects where students are dispatched to interview their grandparents, elderly neighbours or other hapless senior citizens about their memories of the war. This has always struck me as a potentially incendiary assignment: what if the older person doesn't want to recount those memories, and what would a student do if the interviewee became visibly distressed?

I don't like pushing people to tell stories they're not ready to tell. Their silences, or refusals to answer, say everything.

But over that lunch with my grandmother, she needed no urging. A spool of memories seemed to have unravelled of their own will, as clear and taut as if she was telling me about something as mundane as going to the hairdresser. Her story ran backwards, beginning with the return of the British at the end of the war and how they had declared the Japanese "banana" currency worthless, bankrupting entire households overnight. Then she was back at the beginning of the Japanese Occupation, living in northern Singapore with my grandfather and some of her relatives, and they knew that the Japanese were coming.

"I told my aunt to cut her daughter's hair like a boy and make her wear her older brother's clothes," my grandmother said. I'd never heard of any of these people before. "My aunt agreed, so I cut her daughter's hair for her. That was at about 3 pm. That night, at about 11 pm, there was a sudden banging at the door."

### What Has Not Been Remembered

The dominant narrative of World War II in Singapore, as it is for many societies, is of terrible suffering, violence and oppression

at the hands of the enemy. In the accounts about Singapore, the dominant tragedy of the narrative is Operation Sook Ching, where Chinese men (though some women and children were swept up as well) had to report to Japanese military screening centres, and thousands were taken away – often arbitrarily, it seemed – to be massacred.

Today, the term Sook Ching often seems synonymous with the Occupation years, and the trauma is writ so large in local history that one might get the impression of a long drawn-out process not unlike the Holocaust, when in fact the Sook Ching episode lasted only 12 days and took place only in the first month of the 3½-year Occupation.

Without diminishing the suffering of the victims of the Sook Ching and their loved ones, it is worth asking: what other histories of the Occupation have been obscured, overshadowed or not spoken? Not that accounts should be set against each other to "compete" in terms of physical violence or psychological trauma, but what *else* can be added to the spectrum of accounts told, to produce a more multi-faceted narrative of the Japanese Occupation in Singapore?

And how does one even begin to excavate memories that are likely to be traumatic or repressed, whether on an individual or societal level? How do we remember that which we cannot, or will not, remember?

The sociologist Paul Connerton, who studies memory and modernity, has said:

Koeh Sia Yong's oil painting titled *Persecution* (1963) showing innocent men dragged to execution grounds by Japanese soldiers. Operation Sook Ching, which took place in the two weeks after the fall of Singapore to the Japanese on 15 February 1942 saw thousands of Chinese men singled out for mass executions. The exercise was aimed at purging Singapore of perceived anti-Japanese elements. Courtesy of the National Gallery Singapore, National Heritage Board.



"I think that coerced forgetting was one of the most maligned features of the 20th century. For example, think of Germany after Hitler, or Spain after Franco, or Greece after the colonels, or Argentina after the generals, or Chile after Pinochet: in all these cases, there had been a process of coerced forgetting during the dictatorships.

And if, on the other hand, you think of some of the distinguished writers [of] the second half of the 20th century – Primo Levi or Alexander Solzhenitsyn or Nadezhda Mandelstam – the interesting thing about them is that they took up their pens in order to combat this process of coerced forgetting. As a result of this, I think that you could say that at the end of the 20th century there was such a thing as an ethics of memory. Memory and remembrance had acquired the quality of an ethical value."<sup>2</sup>

The ethics of memory is not something that we often talk about in Singapore. In the ongoing frenzy to remember, record and archive, we don't usually pause to ask why we *should* be doing this – if there is something ethically at risk of being forgotten, denied or erased from existence.

As my grandmother talked about the Japanese showing up in the middle of the night, I didn't interrupt her with any questions. The news bulletin was still playing on the television, we were still eating our lunch of rice, vegetables and chicken curry.

At 11pm that night, she said, there was a loud banging on the door. It was totally dark both outside and inside the house. Three soldiers entered, two Japanese, one Taiwanese, with a torchlight. They were looking for women. My grandmother was holding my uncle, her only child, who was not yet two years old. The soldiers looked

over the women in the house, including my grandmother, but the women were all dirty – *ang zhang* (肮脏), my grandmother said in Mandarin. I don't know if she meant they were literally covered in dirt or if the term is a euphemism for menstruation or some other taboo. My grandmother said the soldiers glanced at her aunt's daughter too, but dismissed her as a boy. They left the house after a while, and later she heard that they had raped another woman nearby.

Reading about war atrocities in a textbook often seems distant and unreal,

At 11pm that night, she said, there was a loud banging on the door.... Three soldiers entered, two Japanese, one Taiwanese, with a torchlight. They were looking for women.

until you realise that those horrible things might have happened to your small, frail grandmother. My grandmother talked and I listened, gingerly, until she reached the end and I could breathe again.

"The next day, my aunt thanked me for saving her daughter, for the idea of cutting her hair and disguising her as a man. I said to her, don't say like that." My grandmother went on to other stories, about her, my grandfather and my uncle hiding in a rubber plantation, then walking all the way to

This is a 10-dollar bill used during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore. Known as "banana money" because of the motifs of banana trees on the bank notes, the currency became worthless due to runaway inflation coupled with black market practices. Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.



Singapore town and finding a place to live. One year later, she gave birth to my father.

### Silent Absences

I didn't mean to make this essay about my grandmother's story. I set out to write about some of the gaps that persist in Singapore history, and how master narratives can define the way we think about the past or the present – the "lessons" of wartime suffering or the "value" of colonial monuments – to the extent that it becomes almost impossible to see any other experiences and histories that existed in the same space or time. I certainly didn't attempt to coax any memories out of my grandmother; indeed, when she offered her story, I felt uneasy, as if she had somehow read my mind and discerned what I was going to write about, and was volunteering her own account to go along with it.

I've never written about anything that was at once so personal and so distant from my own experience. I have never struggled so deeply, after writing something, about whether to publish it. My grandmother knows I am using her story here – or at least, my father tried to explain it to her as best as he could (we're not sure if my grandmother understands what the Internet is).

Even so, is it ethical to amplify a story, shared privately, on a public platform? Or does the ethical imperative of memory, as Connerton describes, take precedence?

I think about the woman my grandmother heard had been raped. Whoever she was, whatever became of her, it's impossible to know now. She is a silent figure on the horizon; we can make her out, though we will never get any closer to her. But we know she is there.

When we think about the gaps and silences in Singapore history, we typically think of the big political erasures – the experiences of political exiles and detainees, the circumstances of Operation Coldstore or Operation Spectrum. We think of minority groups whose experiences, stories and viewpoints get downplayed or erased.

But there are other kinds of absences. In 2005, the National Archives of Singapore published the scrupulously researched *The Syonan Years: Singapore Under Japanese Rule 1942–1945* by Lee Geok Boi, which draws on the archives' oral history records and other collections to provide "a Singaporean and ultimately an Asian view of the Occupation".<sup>3</sup> The index to this book contains three entries for "rape", consisting of four pages in all, and 30 entries for "Sook Ching", comprising 45 pages in all.

The dead cannot speak, nor can the mutilated or the traumatised. Their pain still exists, the violence one human did to another resides in their bodies and their minds. I suppose my grandmother, hearing about faraway wars on the news, was thinking about the things that happen to men, and particularly women, in times of war.

Amid the current mania about Singapore history and heritage, and competing claims to historical truth, it is easy to think that people are too obsessed with the past. In a smartphone-powered, social media-fuelled age, it often seems like everything is being "documented" and that everyone is engaged in "documenting".

But we should also pay attention to the silences – to the people who aren't speaking, can't speak or don't think they have any stories to tell. Not to pester them to tell all, but to be attentive to the silence. Not to interview, but to wait and listen and let them talk, if they ever can. ♦

*A longer version of this essay was previously published on Junoesq.com (vol. 1, August 2014). Junoesq is a quarterly online literary journal featuring poetry, fiction and non-fiction by women.*

### Notes

- 1 Pieris, A. (2009). *Hidden hands and divided landscapes: A penal history of Singapore's plural society*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press. Call no.: RSING 365.95957 PIE
- 2 Kastner, J., & Najafi, S. (Summer 2011). Historical amnesias: An interview with Paul Connerton. *Cabinet*, (42), 8. Retrieved from Cabinet magazine website.
- 3 Lee, G. B. (2005). *The Syonan years: Singapore under Japanese rule 1942–1945*. Singapore: National Archives of Singapore and Epigram. Call no.: RSING q940.53957 LEE-[WAR]



# BAHAU

## A UTOPIA THAT WENT AWRY

The resettlement of Eurasian and Chinese Catholics in the jungles of Malaysia during World War II has been largely forgotten. **Fiona Hodgkins** chronicles its painful history.



The story of Bahau has long been a footnote in the larger story of World War II in Singapore, preserved mainly as an anecdotal record among families who have had the misfortune of being part of this experiment.

When I first started looking for information on Bahau in 2008, the only publicly available records in Singapore were found at the Memories at Old Ford Factory<sup>1</sup> and the World War II galleries of the Eurasian Association<sup>2</sup> in Ceylon Road. Unfortunately, as the association is seldom visited by non-Eurasian visitors, its Bahau exhibition – which opened in 2006 – documents the memory of a place for people who are already familiar with the story.

It's probably true to say that many readers of this publication, however much they know about the story of World War II in Singapore, will likely not have heard of Bahau...

### Where is Bahau?

Bahau<sup>3</sup> is a town in the state of Negeri Sembilan in Malaysia. Today it is a somewhat nondescript semi-industrial town surrounded by plantations, and is not particularly known to most Malaysians. Indeed, since publicity surrounding the publication of my book<sup>4</sup> about the settlement of Bahau emerged in 2014, various

people have come forward to speak to me at public events – interested not so much in the historical angle of my research, but in the fact that the tiny, obscure town they came from was actually interesting enough to be talked about.

In the 1940s, Bahau did not have the industry that it thrives on today, but was known simply as a small town along the Gemas train line travelling north-east through the Malay Peninsula. Founded in a slightly elevated position and surrounded by jungle, it was this off-the-beaten-track location that was chosen as a resettlement area for a wartime civilian population from Singapore. Bahau, which was set up in 1943 by the Japanese army in Singapore, with the express approval of the local Catholic Church, was home to around 3,000 mainly Singaporean Catholics for nearly two years.

Although the settlement was located about five miles from the town centre of Bahau, it is still commonly referred to as Bahau. Many residents of Bahau town are blissfully unaware of the existence of this wartime camp at their doorstep and what took place there.

### My Interest in Bahau

So what led me in 2008 to find out more about this forgotten settlement in Malaysia?

I was born in Japan in 1966 to a British father and Eurasian<sup>5</sup> mother (originally from Malacca in Malaysia), and brought up as an expatriate child in Japan, Europe, Singapore and Malaysia – places where my father's work took him. It was only when my mother, Mary Alethea de Souza, died in England in 2004 that I sought to find out about my heritage, both for my own sake and that of my children, as I did not want them to grow up not knowing the background of their maternal grandmother. When I returned to Singapore in 2008, I wanted to revisit old memories from when I had lived here as a child in the 1970s and 80s, to satisfy my thirst for the past and, more importantly, to find out more about my family history.

Having visited all the usual historical sights in Singapore, I finally made the trek to the Eurasian Association at Ceylon Road. This was where I learnt more about Bahau. Until then, my only knowledge of Bahau was through the childhood stories my mum told of the time when she and her family lived in the jungle and when wooden huts used to collapse whenever elephants needed to scratch their backs against the bristly walls of these makeshift dwellings. I thought it was a quaint fairy tale: never did I imagine that it was a real story.

A chance meeting at the Eurasian Association with the education officer there

led to an introduction to the people who had set up its war galleries. My hunger to find out about my own roots aligned with their quest for more information about Bahau, and that is how my research project was born.

Historically, the Eurasian community in Singapore has never exceeded more than five percent of its total population. The community has always been a close-knit one with many shared experiences and plenty of inter-marriages within the group.

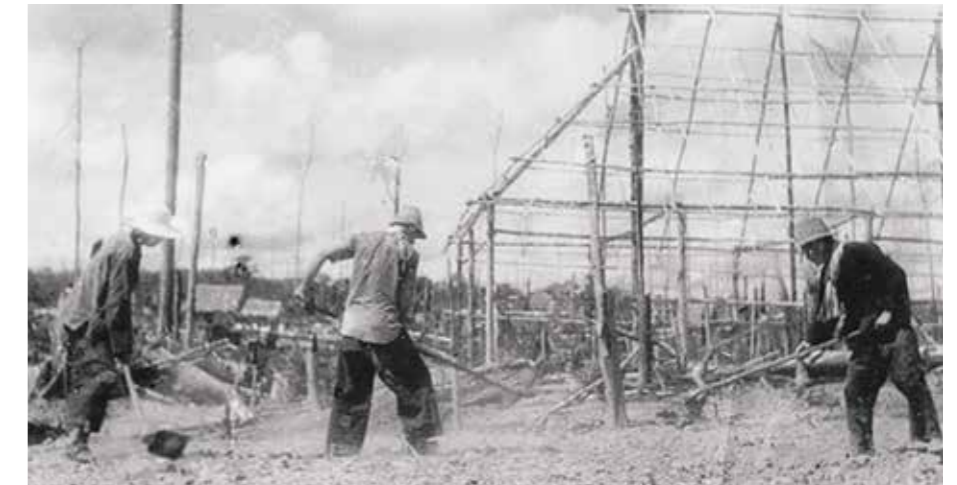
So, the story of Bahau is also the story of the Eurasian community in Singapore; there is not a single Eurasian family from living memory who either did not live in Bahau or had friends or relatives or forebears who did. As the story of Bahau was passed down informally from one generation to the next, it became preserved within the community and never gained wider coverage. Approaching the narrative from the outside as such, it soon dawned on me that the Bahau story was much bigger than

this, and that it actually had resonance for anyone who is Singaporean.

### Wartime Singapore

The hardships and deprivation caused by the Japanese Occupation of Singapore (1942–45) has already been widely documented. What I wish to focus on specifically are its effects on the Catholic community in Singapore.

Before the war, there were a number of Catholic religious orders here, including the De La Salle (or Christian) brothers and the Holy Infant Jesus nuns, whose primary task was to set up schools. After Singapore fell to the Japanese in 1942, these missionary teachers were forced to teach within the confines of the rules and regulations set by the Japanese curriculum. The fact that many of the brothers and nuns were Europeans – usually Irish brothers and French sisters – made them figures of suspicion among the Japanese authorities.



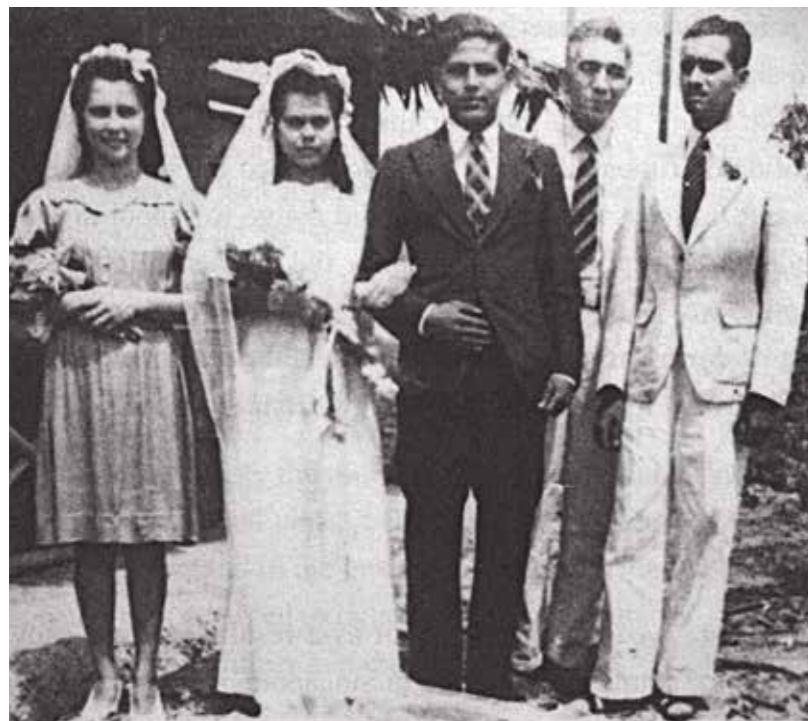
**(Right)** Bahau settlers at work on their land (Japanese propaganda photo). *Courtesy of Father René Nicolas.*

**(Below)** The first settlers to Bahau – mainly young, single men – had to clear the land, build a rudimentary road from the train station to the camp and set up basic infrastructure before the families started to arrive (Japanese propaganda photo). *Courtesy of Father René Nicolas.*



**Fiona Hodgkins**, a history graduate whose professional life has revolved around history and education, spent 14 years in Singapore. Her research into Bahau arose from a personal quest as well as a passion for social history. *From Syonan to Fuji-Go* (2014), which chronicles her research, is her first book.





## THE SYONAN SHIMBUN

Published By Syonan Shimbun Kai,  
Toshio Ono, Chairman.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 15, KOKI 2604, SYOWA 19.

### Eurasians—Bahau Calling!

**(Top)** Wedding photo of Luke de Souza and Flo Chopard. [From the left]: Gwen Perry, Flo Chopard, Luke de Souza, Bill Hutchinson and an unknown person. In spite of the difficult circumstances in Bahau, several weddings were celebrated there. *Courtesy of the family of Luke and Flo de Souza.*

**(Top right)** The morning roll call was a daily ritual at Bahau camp (Japanese propaganda photo). *Courtesy of Father René Nicolas.*

**(Above)** An announcement in the 15 January 1944 edition of *The Syonan Shimbun* exhorting the Eurasian community to apply for the Bahau settlement scheme, which “all Eurasians who are fit and strong enough to go on the land should avail themselves of enthusiastically”. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

This, coupled with the general hardships of the Occupation years – including chronic food shortages, lack of health-care and indiscriminate rounding up of people for questioning – made the idea of an alternative life outside of Singapore appealing to the Catholic community here. Their saviour was a Japanese official by the name of Mamoru Shinozaki<sup>6</sup>, who sought to protect various communities in Singapore who were most at risk from the Kempeitai (Japanese secret police). He had earlier helped the Chinese by setting up a settlement in Endau,<sup>7</sup> in nearby Johor, and now turned his attention to the Eurasian community.

Shinozaki gained an ally in the Catholic Bishop of Singapore, Adrien Devals,<sup>8</sup> who championed the idea of a self-sufficient settlement outside of Singapore to

protect Catholics, both lay and religious, from suppression by the Japanese. Bishop Devals and Shinozaki managed to convince the Japanese authorities that if large numbers of people were moved out of Singapore, there would be fewer mouths to feed and much less pressure on the local infrastructure. Additionally, whatever surplus crops the people in this overseas settlement produced, could be sent back to Singapore.

Now, while the majority of Eurasians in Singapore were Catholic, there were small numbers of Chinese Catholics too, especially among the Peranakan community – which is likely why their role in Bahau has been largely overlooked by many. In fact, over 1,000 Chinese Catholics, nearly as many as Eurasians, settled in Bahau. The Chinese Catholics came mainly from

the parish of Holy Innocents in the Serangoon area, Church of Saints Peter and Paul at Queen Street, and St Theresa’s Church at Kampong Bahru Road. Many Catholic Chinese were eager to move to Bahau as the memories of the horrific Sook Ching massacres were still fresh in their minds.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to these Catholics, a small group of Protestant European families and neutrals from countries like Switzerland, Denmark, Romania and Russia chose to go to Bahau too, thinking that they would be safer there under the care of the Catholic Church than left to the mercy of the Japanese authorities in Singapore.

#### Life in Bahau

It was in late December 1943 that the first settlers from Singapore – including Bishop Devals – left for Bahau with whatever belongings they could carry: meeting first at the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd on Queen Street, then travelling by overnight train to Gemas; followed by a local train to Bahau town and finally walking the last five miles to the site chosen as the settlement.

Stretching over an area of some 40 square miles, the land chosen for the settlement had previously been cleared and rejected by the Japanese for use as an airfield and then by the Chinese who chose to settle in Endau instead. Both groups had allegedly rejected the site because of fears of contracting malaria. The fact that the Catholics accepted the offer to resettle in Bahau reflected the sheer desperation of their situation at the time.

Given its inauspicious start, it’s not surprising that the site did not turn out to be the bucolic paradise that the Catholics had been promised. This was made worse by the fact that what had originally started out as an “optional” resettlement programme seemed more like forced internment once the people arrived there. The Japanese name for the camp, Fuji-Go, which means “beautiful village”, was ironic given the fact that an estimated 500 settlers died over an 18-month period between 1944 and 1945.

The first settlers, mainly young, single men, lived communally in four sheds constructed by the authorities. They were first assigned to clear the land still overgrown with primary jungle, build a rudimentary road from the train station to the camp and set up basic infrastructure before the families started to arrive. Each family was allocated 3 acres of land to grow crops and build their own home using whatever they could find from the jungle – basically split timber and palm fronds – although some of the more fortunate families could afford to pay local contractors to build sturdier structures.

Then began the difficult task of survival. Those who toiled hard in their allocated land parcels never went hungry with bountiful harvests of vegetables such as tapioca, *kangkong* (water convulvulus) and *bangkwang* (Chinese turnip). But although they might not have gone hungry, their diets certainly lacked essential nutrients; some resorted to eating jungle animals (such as snails and iguanas) or killing goats, which had been kept as family pets, for protein. The harsh living conditions and poor diets

made the settlers vulnerable to malaria and a host of tropical ailments and diseases. Not surprisingly, the death toll was high.

Still, some settlers remember happy days, a testimony of the human ability to see the positive in the face of adversity. Gwen Lange née Perry, who was then a teenager, recalls enjoying greater freedom than she would have been permitted in Singapore, including being allowed to attend monthly parties held in a neighbour’s house in the settlement. People would walk 45 minutes in pitch dark to get to the house, where some would bring musical instruments to play and homemade rice whisky would be shared in an atmosphere of conviviality.

However, in spite of a measure of freedom within the settlement itself, there was no escaping from Bahau; the inhabitants were hemmed in by the surrounding dense jungle and the only road access was guarded round the clock by sentries. Only those with exit permits for special reasons were allowed temporary release.

While the true conditions of the settlement were hidden to the outside world by the Japanese authorities who made regular visits and censored information that went out, the settlers managed to come up with ingenious ways to keep their loved ones in Singapore informed about what Bahau was really like, and warn them from electing to resettle there. For example, one settler had arranged with his loved ones to write the letters in ink if the situation at Bahau was favourable and in pencil if it was not. Another used the phrase “singing the prisoners’ love song” in the letter to mean everything was well at the camp, but if the letter said people were “not singing the prisoners’ love song”, then things were not looking good.

But it was not all gloom and doom in Bahau. Budding romances that had begun in Singapore blossomed in the settlement and resulted in marriages. There were also some who were fortunate to meet their future spouses at the settlement.

#### The Legacy of Bahau

Bahau was finally liberated on 3 September 1945, a few weeks after the official end of the war in Southeast Asia, when a team from Force 136<sup>10</sup> followed up on leads about the possible existence of a civilian camp in the jungles of Bahau. For the settlers, this was a heaven-sent escape from the brief period when communist guerrillas in Malaya replaced the departing Japanese garrison in Bahau. Many remember the short communist takeover as the most frightening part of their stay in the settlement. Following the arrival of Force 136, it took another six weeks to organise the

repatriation of the settlers. It was only in mid-October 1945 that the last of the settlers were evacuated.

The Japanese Occupation in Singapore left an indelible mark on everyone who survived the period: many lived in constant fear, lost loved ones, and had to make do with much less than before the war. The Bahau experiment that went horribly wrong was very much a variation of this theme.

My extended family members in Bahau were some of the lucky ones. In one house was my mother who lived with her parents, three sisters and an uncle. They were later joined by her maternal grandparents and three cousins. In a second house nearby lived my mother’s paternal grandparents, two uncles and an aunt and their spouses. Of this large group, only one of my great grandmothers, who already had a pre-existing condition (of course exacerbated by the ravages of jungle life), died there. We are fortunate in that we know where she is buried: in the cemetery in Seremban. Many families, whose loved ones may have initially been buried in the Bahau settlement, do not know where their remains rest now.

My grandfather Herman de Souza (Jnr), despite having had a good relation-



The author, Fiona Hodgkins, was born in Japan in 1966. Her father is British and mother is Eurasian. This is a photo of Fiona and her mother taken in Japan, circa 1970. *Courtesy of Fiona Hodgkins.*





### The Bishop Who Led by Example

Bishop Adrien Devals, who led the first group of settlers in Bahau and tragically died there, should be more widely credited for his leadership there under adverse circumstances. Although Bahau failed as an experiment, it does not detract from Devals' altruistic reasons for approving the resettlement plan.

Born in 1882 in Quins, France, Devals entered the seminary of the Société des Missions étrangères de Paris (MEP) in 1900 and was ordained a priest six years later. He arrived in Penang in September 1906 where he was initially the assistant at the Church of the Assumption, and later its parish priest. In 1934, he was appointed Bishop of the Diocese of Malacca, which included Singapore, and served in that role until his death in 1945.

When Mamoru Shinozaki offered Bahau to the Catholics as a settlement, Devals saw it as a way to protect both his flock and the religious communities



**(Left)** Bishop Adrien Devals was a French priest who became the leader of the Catholics in Singapore from the late 1930s. He led the first group of settlers to Bahau and tragically died there. *All rights reserved, Pilon, M., & Weiler, D. (2011). The French in Singapore: An Illustrated History (1819–Today). Singapore: Editions Didier Millet.*

**(Above)** The highest point at around the 5-mile mark on Colony Road was believed to be the location of Bishop Adrien Devals' house in Bahau. *Courtesy of Fiona Hodgkins.*

for whom he was responsible. Although he was already 60 years old, Devals led by example and moved to Bahau too, among the first convoy of settlers who left Singapore in December 1943. The priests, brothers and nuns, including the bishop, lived in the same conditions as everyone else in Bahau.

Devals was in charge of the day-to-day running of the settlement and took charge from the start, assigning roles to the settlers, such as setting up anti-malarial teams and liaising with the Japanese authorities. He did not accord himself special privileges, sleeping in the same communal lodgings with the others and eating the same food. A few months later, as people began to move into the houses they had built, so too did the Bishop. He lived in a spartan hut that afforded him a bit of peace and quiet time for prayer and contemplation.

In the early days in Bahau, Devals relied heavily on the religious brothers for leadership and organisation as well as a core of lay people whom he knew and trusted. But as time went on and conditions in the settlement did not improve, Devals struggled to provide effective governance in the face of growing dissent from members of the laity. Still, he

maintained his position in his belief of the motto "Non mea voluntas sed Tua" – Latin for "Not my will but Yours", from the gospel of St Luke.

Unfortunately, Devals' health was failing – the physical hardships of Bahau, including malaria, took their toll. To make matters worse, he suffered from diabetes, and a bad scratch on his right foot sustained from farming eventually became infected and turned gangrenous, requiring the amputation of his leg. Sadly, the operation was not enough to save Devals and he died in a hospital in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan, on 17 January 1945, having spent just over a year in Bahau.

Devals' body was taken to Singapore where "a requiem mass was held at the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd, attended by all the top ranking Japanese officers... almost a state funeral" performed with dignity and respect from Singaporeans and Japanese.<sup>11</sup> Shinozaki described him as a "noble and fearless man" and said that at the funeral he "kissed the corner of the coffin" because he had "always held him in respect as a God-fearing man."<sup>12</sup>

ship with Shinozaki, felt so strongly about the Japanese that he refused to visit their country when my parents lived there from 1965 to 1972 because of my father's job. Thankfully, my grandmother, who lost a sister and brother-in-law in the war and having suffered terribly in Bahau, was able to put family above her animosity

towards the Japanese; she visited Japan on a number of occasions, including for my birth.

Many people who lived in Bahau have tried to put the experience behind them, or indeed to bury the memory altogether by not talking about it to their children at all. As a result, the story has become largely

forgotten over the years; only those who were impacted by the experience recall the unspoken pain.

I feel very privileged to have met so many survivors and have had access to so many previously unpublished documents, making it possible for me to unearth the story of Bahau and record it for others. ♦



Mamoru Shinozaki was instrumental in saving many lives in Singapore immediately after the surrender of the British on 15 February 1942. *All rights reserved, Shinozaki, M. (2011). Syonan, My Story: The Japanese Occupation of Singapore. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions.*

### Mamoru Shinozaki: The Japanese Schindler

Mamoru Shinozaki, often described as the "Japanese Schindler", was instrumental in saving many lives in Singapore immediately after the surrender of the British on 15 February 1942.

Shinozaki worked with the Catholic Bishop in Singapore, Adrien Devals, to gather a number of Catholics from the so-called "clean-up operation"

assembly points and take them to a church where they were subsequently released.<sup>13</sup> He also issued between 20,000 and 30,000 "protection cards" to people. This was a card with a stamp saying "Special Foreign Affairs Officer of Defence Headquarters"; each card stating that the bearer of the pass was a "good" citizen and requesting Japanese soldiers to "please look after him and protect him". According to Shinozaki, these cards were issued to "everyone asking for them" and he "gave hundreds to community leaders to distribute". He made no attempt to find out whether the cards "went to communists or anti-Japanese elements or bad hats."<sup>14</sup> He was just intent on saving lives.

Shinozaki helped set up the settlement of Endau, in nearby Johor state, for the Chinese, then three months later, Bahau for Catholics. He visited both settlements regularly and many settlers in Bahau have fond memories of him. However, in spite of the good Shinozaki did and the high regard in which he was held by many, he was also viewed with a degree of suspicion by some. After the Japanese surrender in 1945, the British arrested him and charged him with espionage together with other Japanese officials (he had been similarly charged with espionage by the British before the war; see Note 6).

Shinozaki was held briefly at the British Field Security Force headquarters at Balmoral Road in Singapore until some Bahau residents, along with other civilians,

petitioned the British and secured his release. Shinozaki subsequently worked for the British army as an interpreter and served as a key witness, providing evidence for the war crimes trials held in Singapore against the Japanese soldiers involved in Operation Sook Ching.

My grandfather, Herman de Souza (Jnr), who worked with Shinozaki in the Education Department during the Occupation and later in Bahau, recalled what Shinozaki said to him in 1942: "I was in the diplomatic service of the Japanese, I was trained in Germany, and I had great ambitions. I was going to rise in the consulate world. But when the British interned me in this place, I had time to think, and I have now only one ambition. ... My ambition now is to do good to people. Doesn't matter who they are."<sup>15</sup>

After the war, a letter published in *The Straits Times* on 19 August 1946 made the case for allowing Shinozaki to stay in Singapore. The writer of the letter was my great-uncle, P. F. (Pat) de Souza, a lawyer who personally knew Shinozaki through his practice in Singapore before the war, and later during his internment in Bahau. He closed his letter by saying: "I do feel that Shinozaki's public spiritedness and achievements – at a time when we who were there were subjected to all kinds of degradations – characterise him as a great humanitarian and a great gentleman."<sup>16</sup>

### Notes

- Museum commemorating the site of the British surrender of Singapore to the Japanese on 15 February 1942. Located at Upper Bukit Timah Road, it is currently closed for renovations and will open in the first quarter of 2017.
- Established in Singapore in 1919, the Eurasian Association is one of the earliest community associations set up to look after the interests of Eurasians.
- Bahau is the principal town of the Jempol district. The name Bahau is believed to have derived from a Chinese phrase, 馬口, literally translated as "Horse's mouth".
- Hodgkins, F. (2014). *From Syonan to Fuji-Go: The story of the Catholic settlement in Bahau in WWII Malaya*. Singapore: Select Publishing. Call no.: RSING 307.212095957 HOD
- The term Eurasian refers to a person of mixed European-Asian ancestry. Historically, it refers to anyone who descended from the first European-Asian

- unions in the region between the 16th and 18th centuries. Most Eurasians in Singapore trace the European part of their ancestry to the Portuguese, Dutch or British.
- Mamoru Shinozaki had been in Singapore before the war as a press attaché at the Japanese Consulate. Interned by the British for espionage, he was subsequently released by the Japanese when Singapore fell on 15 February 1942. He was then appointed as a senior Japanese official initially with a remit for education and later welfare (see text box on page 11).
- A small town in Malaysia located on the northern tip of east Johor and the southern tip of Pahang, whose name became synonymous with the Chinese settlement set up in September 1943.
- Bishop Adrien Devals was a French priest who became the leader of the Catholics in Singapore from the late 1930s (see text box above).
- Following the fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942, Chinese males between 18 and 50 years of age were ordered to report to designated centres for mass

- screening. Many of these ethnic Chinese were then rounded up and taken to deserted spots to be summarily executed. This came to be known as Operation Sook Ching [the Chinese term means "purge through cleansing"]. It is not known exactly how many people died; the official estimates given by the Japanese is 5,000 but the actual number is believed to be much higher.
- Force 136 operated in Japanese-occupied Southeast Asia during World War II and was the general cover name for a branch of the British World War II organisation, the Special Operations Executive (SOE).
- Wijeyesingha E., & Nicolas, R. (2006). *Going forth...: The Catholic Church in Singapore* (p. 140). Singapore: Nicholas Chia. Call no.: RSING 282.5957 WIJ
- Shinozaki, 2011, p. 136.
- Shinozaki, M. (2011). *Syonan, my story: The Japanese Occupation of Singapore* (p. 23). Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions. Call no.: RSING 959.57023 SHI-[HIS]
- Shinozaki, 2011, pp. 159.
- Tan, B. L. (Interviewer). (1985, August 17). *Oral history*

- interview with Herman Marie de Souza. [Transcript of MP3 Recording No. 000592/06/03, p. 28]. Retrieved from National Archives of Singapore website: <http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline>
- De Souza, P. F. (1946, August 19). Spy and humanitarian. *The Straits Times*, p. 4. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

### References

- Books**
- Hodgkins, F. (2014). *From Syonan to Fuji-Go: The story of the Catholic settlement in Bahau in WWII Malaya*. Singapore: Select Publishing. Call no.: RSING 307.212095957 HOD
- La Brooy, M. (1987). *Where is thy victory?* [S.l. : s.n.]. Call no.: RSING 940.5481 LAB-[WAR]
- O'Donovan, P. (2008). *Jungles are never neutral: War-time in Bahau: An extraordinary story of exile and survival: The diaries of Brother O'Donovan fsc*. Ipoh, Malaysia: Media Masters Publishing. Call no.: RSING 940.5308827178 ODO-[WAR] [previously published as: *Under the Hinomaru*, Ipoh: The La Salle Brothers, 1978]

- Oehlers, J. (2011). *That's how it goes: The way of the 90-year life journey of a Singapore Eurasian*. Singapore: Select Pub. Call no.: RSING 617.6092 OEH
- Shinozaki, M. (1975). *Syonan, my story: The Japanese Occupation of Singapore*. Singapore: Asia Pacific Press. Call no.: RCL0S 940.548252 SHI
- Van Cuylenburg, J. B. (1982). *Singapore: Through sunshine and shadow*. Singapore: Heinemann Asia. Call no.: RSING 959.57 VAN-[HIS]
- Wijeyesingha, E., & Nicolas, R. (2006). *Going forth...: The Catholic Church in Singapore 1819–2004*. Singapore: Nicholas Chia. Call no.: RSING 282.5957 WIJ-[SRN]

### Newspapers

- The Straits Times*
- The Syonan Shimibun*
- The Syonan Times*

### Unpublished sources

- Heine, Major K.R.R. Royal Engineers. (1945). *Operation*

- Galvanic Slate*. From the private papers of G. Tack. Imperial War Museum, London.
- Meissonnier, P. (1947). *Memories of Bahau: December 1943–October 1945*. [Translated by René Nicholas. Originally published as *Un évêque missionnaire, chef du STO en Malaise* "Missionnaires d'Asie, no 29-30-31].

### Oral history interviews

- [available at the National Archives of Singapore]
- Bogaars, George Edwin (1983) [Accession nos.: 000032, 000379]
- De Souza (Jnr), Herman Marie (1985) [Accession no.: 000592]
- Marcus, Philip Carlyle (1982) [Accession no.: 000183]
- Woodford, Esme (2007) [Accession no.: 003267]

- For a full list of references behind the research, see Hodgkins, F. (2014). *From Syonan to Fuji-Go: The story of the Catholic settlement in Bahau in WWII Malaya*. Singapore: Select Publishing. Call no.: RSING 307.212095957 HOD



# Mem, Don't Mess with the Cook!

European families in colonial Singapore had a retinue of servants – cook, chauffeur, nanny, gardener and houseboy – but this did not guarantee a life of ease, as **Janice Loo** tells us.

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



Malay Police Constable no. 623 was on duty at Anson Road on the afternoon of 21 February 1907 when a European lady with a bloodied nose appeared, dragging a Chinaman firmly by his queue. Mrs Muddit had been attacked by her Hainanese cook, Lim Ah Kwi, and she was not about to let him get away.

The next morning, Ah Kwi was brought before the magistrate and charged with using criminal force on his employer. The furious Mrs Muddit alleged that the cook had defied her orders and wanted to do as he pleased with the dinner menu (how dare he!). Indignant at being rebuked, Ah Kwi brandished a knife at his mistress before striking her on the face with a piece of wood.<sup>1</sup>

Mrs Muddit was far from alone in her troubles for the management of domestic servants was an everyday ordeal for the European wife, or *memsahib*<sup>2</sup> (often truncated as *mem*), in Singapore and Malaya.

## Arrival of the Mems

European women began arriving in larger numbers from 1910 onwards as improve-

ments in living conditions made the prospect of travel and residence in Malaya less daunting. While a fraction of the European female population comprised single women who were engaged in teaching, missionary or medical work, the majority were wives of men in government service and those engaged in private enterprise.<sup>3</sup>

As homemakers and mothers, *mems* were crucial to the re-creation of domestic and social life in colonial settings. These women were regarded as a civilising influence on a community that, in the words of E. M. M., writing in *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, "consisted almost entirely of men, whose ideas of household management and the running of their homes were in most cases nil."<sup>4</sup> Seen from a larger perspective, the domestic role of European women in the colonies carried a political significance: by upholding the standards of Western domesticity, *mems* maintained the collective identity and prestige of the ruling elite, thereby reinforcing the divide between the subject races and their colonial masters.<sup>5</sup>

The availability of domestic help meant that the *mem* did not so much keep house as oversee its upkeep.<sup>6</sup> European families engaged a minimum of three and often more than six servants, comprising a houseboy ("Boy"), a water-carrier (*tukang air*), a cook ("Cookie"), a syce or chauffeur, a gardener (*kebun*), a washerman (*dhoby*) and a nanny (*amah*) to look after the chil-

It was not unusual for European households to have more than a dozen servants: a houseboy ("Boy"), a syce or chauffeur, a gardener (*kebun*), a washerman (*dhoby*) and a nanny (*amah*). Most of these positions were held by men, except the *amah*. Photo by G. R. Lambert & Co. Fotoalbum Singapur (1890). All rights reserved, National Library Board, Singapore.





dren.<sup>7</sup> These positions were typically held by men, with the exception of the *amah*.

Chinese male immigrants from Hainan dominated the domestic services, forming some 90 percent of servants in European households.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, there existed a degree of occupational specialisation along racial lines as a British resident in the 1930s notes: “Cookie and Boy are usually Chinese. The Kaboon [sic] is almost invariably a Tamil...the Sais [sic], or chauffeur... is usually a Malay.”<sup>9</sup>

In the absence of plumbing, gas stoves, electricity and other modern amenities, housework was a primitive and strenuous affair made even more irksome in the sweltering heat. The presence of servants in the home was absolutely essential to the well-being and status of the European community, as one *mem* pointed out, “doing all the cooking [and by association other chores] involves not only a loss of prestige but loss of looks and health in the long run.”<sup>10</sup>

Such views created the impression that all *mems* were idle, having “nothing to do all day except to seek amusement”<sup>11</sup> or at best, “only one duty, to have an interview with Cookie once a day.” Yet the management of servants was viewed as a formidable task in itself, judging by the slew of complaints, tips, comments and advice from white women (and men) on the subject. Among the servants, the cook represented the biggest challenge to the *mem’s* authority – he occupies “the head

of the hierarchy... presides in the kitchen, does the marketing, keeps order amongst the servants, and occasionally consults his mistress, the *Mem*, on matters of policy. He is the household tyrant...”<sup>12</sup>

### Beware the Servant

“Chinese are excellent domestic servants. They are sober, industrious, methodical, and attentive to their duties,”<sup>13</sup> writes J. D. Vaughan in *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese in the Straits Settlements* (1879). Although the Hainanese were “in every way the men best adapted for domestic service”,<sup>14</sup> grievances against their alleged insolence, dishonesty, and the incompetence of cooks and houseboys were regularly aired in the press and other literature.

The hiring process was fraught with uncertainty as employers lacked the means to verify the character and employment history of prospective servants. Written testimonies were often unreliable, as the following account published in the *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* on 3 May 1901 illustrates:

“A few days back, a so-called cook offered me his services and on my asking for his testimonials he produced two letters, signed by well known names of former residents, long since dead. One

was dated 1883, the second one, 1891... I also asked how long ago he had left his second master; the answer was ‘A few months back.’ And each successive lie was uttered with that superb aplomb which is such a distinguishing feature of the latter day Hylam servant. Nor did he show the least chagrin when I quietly tore up before him the two so-called testimonials and gave him the pieces. ‘Better luck next time,’ is all he thought about it and, no doubt, he is by now provided with new testimonials, quite as genuine as the old ones.”<sup>15</sup>

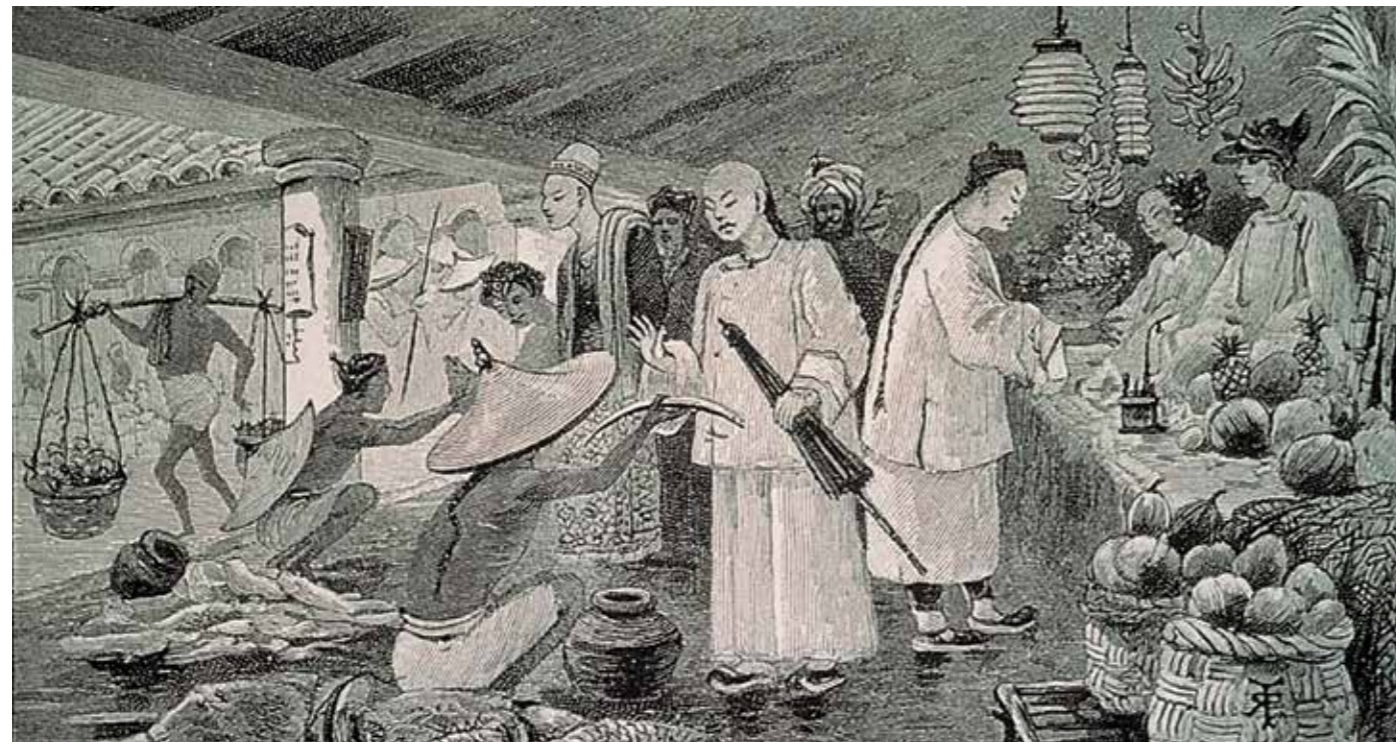
Given the widespread practice of using borrowed, rented or stolen letters of recommendation, employers often had no practical alternative but to take a servant on trial in order to determine his ability. This brought the danger of “introducing into a household an incorrigible thief, who speedily levies toll on his new employer’s possessions and then ‘silently fades away’”. In such a situation, it was virtually impossible to track down the errant servant for householders rarely knew the real names of their cook and houseboy.<sup>16</sup> A more insidious nuisance was cheating employers through overcharging, where the cook would regularly add on a few cents to each item in his daily marketing and pocket the difference – “one of those



(Above) Portrait of a Chinese *amah* and a European child, early 1900s. Many European children were brought up by their *amahs*, or nannies, with whom they often shared a lasting bond. Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.

(Above right) A group of European men and their male servants in the 1890s. The Europeans are in sarongs, usually worn at home as they were a cooling and comfortable attire in Singapore’s tropical climate. Boden-Kloss Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

An engraving of a “Town Market” in Singapore. Cooks in colonial households were invariably Chinese males, and going to the market to buy fresh produce was part of their early morning chores. All rights reserved, Liu, G. (1999). *A Pictorial History 1819–2000. Singapore: National Heritage Board and Editions Didier Millet.*



long standing customs of the country it is no longer any good fighting against.”<sup>17</sup>

The crux of the problem, as the European community saw it, lay in the absence of regulation that would enforce discipline and standards as well as check the influence of the Hainanese *kongsi*, the guild and secret society that controlled the recruitment of servants. Servants were said to have no qualms warning their employers that the *kongsi* they belonged to would stop others from working for them. “And this is no idle threat,” wrote H. B. Roper in a letter to *The Straits Times*, “for how many of us have not been obliged to do without servants for days, and were candidly told by those whom we at last managed to secure that they were in mortal fear of being beaten by members of the Kongsees.” In banding together and forming a *kongsi*, the servants – in a reversal of roles – “have completely succeeded in becoming the masters and dictators of those whom they are supposed to serve.”<sup>18</sup>

To the European community, the sense that they were at the mercy of a crime syndicate operated by domestic servants is encapsulated in the following letter to the press on 1 May 1901:

“... practically the whole bulk of the male domestic servants in Singapore are Hailams, and that these very men therefore presumably constitute the

rank and file of this Secret Society, all who are familiar with the troubles caused by servants – the steady mysterious leakage of jewellery, cash, cutlery, under-linen, and minor domestic articles – the difficulty of getting new servants, under the open institution of a boycott – the constant assumption of false names and the use of borrowed or forged characters – must be well aware that the house-holder is, necessarily, for want of protection, the passive victim of organised Hailam exploitation.”<sup>19</sup>

### Protection for Hapless Employers

The many cases of theft and violence committed by servants fuelled public anxiety such that in July 1886, some 200 European residents, among them the “heads of the leading mercantile firms, leading professional men, and proprietors of all the large hotels and boarding houses, and the Secretaries of the different important Clubs,”<sup>20</sup> petitioned the Governor of the Straits Settlements Frederick A. Weld to introduce registration of domestic servants. The appeal was heard and a bill that provided for the appointment of Registrars and a system of registration was drawn up and passed on 30 December 1886.<sup>21</sup>

Under the Domestic Servants Registration Ordinance, any person employed

or seeking employment as a servant may apply – although it was not mandatory – to the Registrar with his name, age, nationality, details of previous employments, together with a \$1 fee. Once these requirements were satisfied, the Registrar would record the information in the Register of Servants and issue the applicant an official pocket-register containing his particulars. Householders were encouraged to hire only registered servants and update the servants’ pocket-registers upon commencement or termination of service, and notify the Registrar within three days. Anyone found guilty of supplying false information or impersonation was liable to imprisonment for a period not exceeding three years, or a fine of up to 10 Straits dollars, or both.<sup>22</sup>

The ordinance came into force on 1 January 1888 and was repealed on 26 October that very year due to fierce resistance from the Hainanese *kongsi*.<sup>23</sup> As a result of the strike mounted by the *kongsi*, numerous European households “found themselves servantless, and had to break up, and migrate to hotels.”<sup>24</sup> The registration proved such a farce that one observer wryly commented that the Registrar “set idle in his office, drawing caricatures on his blotting paper daily and drawing his pay monthly.”<sup>25</sup> Employers attributed the failure of the ordinance to its voluntary nature and continued to press for compulsory registration.



In an ironic twist, a letter published in *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* from a reader “Ang Mo Kongsi” on 19 April 1905 gave the European community a start. The writer claimed that a police raid on a Hainanese *kongsi* had unearthed records of all the Europeans in Singapore containing information such as the wages they paid, the amount of work required, whether they beat the servant, what time they returned home at night, if they locked up their possessions and so on – “a sort of complete ‘Registration of Europeans!’”<sup>26</sup>

In 1912, *The Straits Times* polled 600 European employers and found near unanimous support for the compulsory registration of servants. While a bill providing for such a measure was passed in 1913, it was never put into operation.<sup>27</sup>

### Mem-in-charge

Most European men were relieved to hand over the management of the household and its trifling frustrations to their wives. For servants long accustomed to lax supervision under a male employer, the arrival of a new mistress, especially one who took to her domestic duties with a certain zealotry, spelled trouble. The *mem*'s struggle to establish authority was likened to a military campaign, for “however capable she might have been in her house at home, [she] had a stiff battle to fight before she could gather the reins of her new household's government into her own hands.”<sup>28</sup>

Housekeeping in Malaya was a whole new ball game. From the outset, it was clear that a rudimentary knowledge of the Malay language was indispensable when communicating with the servants. Until the *mem* had familiarised herself with the basics of the language as well as housekeeping conditions, one solution was to employ – through recommendations from friends – experienced servants who had previously worked for European families. Although their wages were higher, they were said to be “well worth [the] extra expense, in order to enable the young mistress to feel her feet without loss of dignity.”<sup>29</sup>

Phrasebooks such as Maye Wood's *Malay for Mem*s came in handy. Published in 1927 and reprinted well into the 1950s, the book aimed “to place before newcomers, especially women, the most ordinary and necessary words and phrases required in household management.” Written in the imperative, the book features the “most useful” and “most generally required” vocabulary and expressions drawn from the author's personal experience, such as:

“You must follow the mem”, “Go at once”, “I want the car”, “Call the cook”, “Polish the floor well”, and “Wait until master comes”. Peppered with helpful hints to facilitate communication between mistress and servant, Wood notes that “Chinese servants speak Malay very badly, owing to their inability to pronounce certain letters”. For example, they pronounce “R” as “L” such that *roti* (bread) becomes *loti*, and they have difficulty with words beginning with “D” or “S” so that *dapur* (kitchen) becomes *lapur* and “stew” is *setu*. The reader is also apprised of the social norms and power relations attached to language, for example, “*Tabeh*”, a general greeting that means “Good-day” and “How do you do?”, was “not used by Europeans unless a Native has said [it] first”.<sup>30</sup>

### Bad Cooking, Dirty Food

Aside from their alleged criminal tendencies, another bugbear was the “filthy, and disgusting methods”<sup>31</sup> of Chinese servants and the resultant risks to the health of their employers. The common advice was “never to enter or look into a kitchen where food is being prepared by a Chinaman if you would preserve your

peace of mind and enjoy your meals.”<sup>32</sup> One family discovered that the unappetising odour and taste of the food served by their cook were “due to everything being fried in pig-oil, a horrible black oil beloved of all Chinese servants but which made one shudder only to look at!”<sup>33</sup>

Another dreaded aspect was the prevalence of venereal diseases among Chinese male servants, giving rise to fears of contagion from consuming food prepared by them. The fear found voice in the following letter from “A Householder” to the *Straits Times* on 4 August 1891:

“It is no exaggeration to estimate the number of diseased cooks and boys at one in every three, suffering from the effects of their own conduct... and by no means scrupulous and careful, when engaged in cooking and handling the food of delicate ladies and European gentlemen... Let Europeans stop to realise the dangerously unprotected manner in which they are living, and there is little doubt that a strongly indignant appeal will rouse public attention and end in safeguarding the interests of the few white men, who

Portraits of Europeans and their servants in Singapore at the turn of the 20th century. The class divide between local people and their colonial masters is readily apparent in these two images, with the servants, albeit well groomed and attired, standing beside their seated European employers. Servants were often included in such commissioned photographs as they were an indication of wealth and status. It was not uncommon for well-to-do Europeans to send such studio photographs to family and relatives back home. Photos courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.



### Mrs Kinsey to the Rescue

More than a means of self-instruction, the cookbook was used as a manual to train the servants and was instrumental to the *mem*'s efficient management of the household. This was why *The “Mems” Own Cookery Book* by Mrs W. E. Kinsey was regarded as a godsend when it was published in 1920. It consisted of “420 tried and economical recipes” with additional information on the market prices of ingredients, the total cost of each dish and the number of servings, thereby helping the mistress to “combat the pernicious policy of the native cooks who not only overcharge for local commodities, but generally will not produce them, or attempt to raise non-existent difficulties.”<sup>34</sup>

A review of the book in *The Straits Times* declared: “With this guide at her elbow... [the new *mem*] can either prepare herself or instruct “cookie” in a host of dishes which should do a great deal to remove the charge of monotony which is sometimes levelled at food in Malaya.”<sup>35</sup>

Another popular resource was *The Y.W.C.A. International Cookery Book of Malaya*, which was updated and republished nine times over three decades since it made its debut in 1932. Aside from recipes, the book provides

are compelled to live in a tropical climate exposed to many many dangers, not the least of which centres in the servants on whom they must depend for food.”<sup>38</sup>

The *mem*'s civilising mission included the training of servants in modern concepts of hygiene and nutrition. Grouses about the monotony of the European diet in Malaya and the dearth of cookery skills among Chinese cooks provided further justification for *mem*'s intervention. One *mem* laments in an article – expressing condescension of the Chinese cook while bemoaning the white woman's burden:

“Why do we, in these civilised days, tolerate the way a Chinese cook serves any kind of bird?... If left to his own devices the average Chinese cook will serve up the same kind of meals day in day out for all time. In a bachelor mess where the occupants cannot spare the time to deal with cookie this is unavoidable, but where there is a woman in the house it is little short of a disgrace... It is up to the women in Malaya to

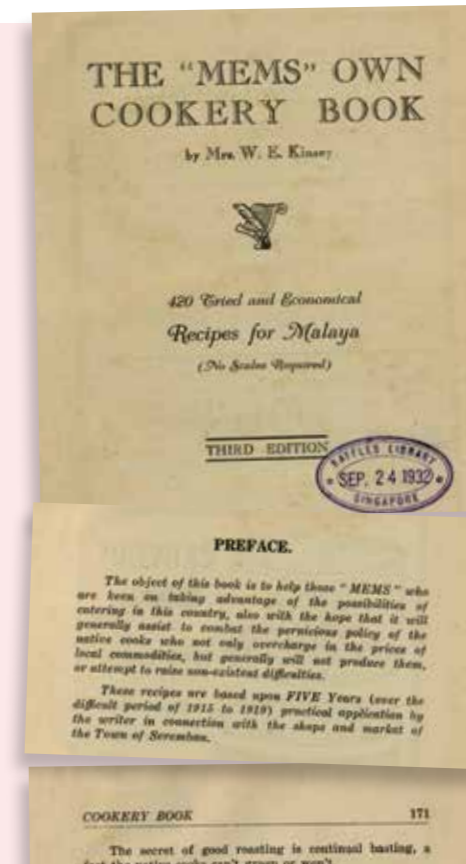
guidance on meal planning, tips on buying local ingredients and other preparatory steps before the actual cooking. Assessing the second edition from the standpoint of an older *mem* who has long grappled with the question of diet in Malaya, Mrs K. Savage Bailey writes in *The Straits Times* on 1 August 1935 on the book's usefulness. She praises, in particular, the section on local market produce with the names for each item given in both Malay and English:

“The young housewife in this country always finds her greatest difficulty is making her cook understand what she wants him to buy in the local market, and as the cook knows that the unfortunate *Mem* is badly handicapped by lack of knowledge as well as language, he puts on an even [more] stupid air than nature gave him, and goes off to market to buy just what he wants to, and his own price! This article on vegetables will put a stop to that sort of thing, for each vegetable is carefully named, so that there can be no excuse that cookie 'did not understand Mem's Malay.’”<sup>36</sup>

In time to come, it was hoped that the *mem*, having acquired the necessary knowledge, would find it a breeze to direct the running of the household “with the calm assurance of one who really knows what she is talking about.”<sup>37</sup>

break down these awful “customs of the country”. If we only take the trouble to try and teach cookie something of Western ideas and Western methods we shall not find him too unintelligent... But we must have patience and be willing to teach him, often showing him the same thing over and over again.”<sup>39</sup>

The *mem* was encouraged to acquire cooking and housekeeping skills so that she could instruct the cook using practical demonstrations instead of trying to explain her wishes in halting Malay. On top of cooking and Malay language classes at the local Young Women's Christian Association (Y.W.C.A.), it was also useful for the *mem* to set aside a small room for use as a private kitchen, where she “would be free to make experiments without the embarrassment of servants being present to witness any failures”. The beginner is advised to proceed methodically and to persevere as she must first “accustom herself to the working of the stove, and, with the aid of a good cookery book, gradually work through a whole menu, while trying one item only at a time.”<sup>40</sup>



Title page and extracts from *The “Mems” Own Cookery Book*. All rights reserved, National Library Board, Singapore.

### Closing One Eye

Cookbooks like *The “Mems” Own Cookery Book* and *The Y.W.C.A. International Cookery Book of Malaya* (see text box above) and other well-meaning domestic advice espoused the ideal of a well-run home that *mems* could aspire to. In reality, according to one “*Sylvia*” in a *Straits Times* article dated 13 July 1906, servants held the upper-hand for they “too often regard their services as indispensable, and as for knowledge there is little indeed that they do not know with regard to the exact state of the *Tuan*'s finance, the *Mem*'s losses, or gains, at Bridge, and the hundred and one small things which go to form the sum total of a household's existence in the Far East.”<sup>41</sup>

Persistent difficulties with servants often threw doubts on the abilities of European women to carry out their role. While some attributed the problem to lazy wives who neglected to coach and supervise their domestic staff closely, others were of the view that it was precisely *mem*'s petty habit of nitpicking and meddling that was the source of all troubles.<sup>42</sup> On the difference in managerial styles between the sexes, a male observer commented:





(Above) A European family taking a carriage ride, circa 1890s. Their male servant is controlling the reins of the horse. Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.



(Left) A Chinese houseboy serves his European master who is sitting under a *punkah* (a large screenlike fan hung from the ceiling and operated by a servant or by machinery). Photo by G. R. Lambert & Co., 1890. Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.

“Men usually have the sense not to bother as long as they get what they want whereas women must, on top of that, get it in their own way. I suspect that a good deal of the “unbelievable stupidity” that women always “have to put up with” from perfectly good servants, is simply “put on” to get even with the mistress for treatment received that was lacking in appreciation of service rendered.”<sup>43</sup>

Even when the Hainanese servants were being roundly condemned, there were those who spoke up on their behalf, asserting that the Hainanese “respond well to kindly and sympathetic treatment”, which implied that employers ought to reflect on how they behaved towards their servants.<sup>44</sup>

Picking up on the story of Mrs Muddit and Ah Kwi at the start of this article, the latter, in his defence, alleged that Mrs Muddit had asked him to do the impossible – make a pudding without eggs.<sup>45</sup> His attempt to reason with her was met with abuse and he was fired on the spot. When Ah Kwi requested for his wages, *mem* threatened to go to the police. She then seized the cook by his queue and thrashed him with a piece of firewood. While one may have been mortified at what happened to Mrs Muddit at the outset, it is clear that she was also at fault.<sup>46</sup>

All in all, successful household management was not so much about bending servants to the *mem*'s will but rather to administer with a light and even hand. The mistress should pick her battles with care, as Margaret Wilson sagely advises in *Malaya: Land of Enchantment* (1930):

“The Chinese have their own methods of work and follow a fixed routine they have evolved. It is pretty hopeless to try to instil other methods into their minds – and as to nagging – they simply won't stand it. I have heard instances where the whole staff has walked out for this reason, and there would be the greatest difficulty in replacing them. The word would speedily go round, and it is a well-known fact that the “East

has ears. Therefore, so long as the work is done reasonably well, the wise *Mem* leaves them alone – only pulling them up occasionally, if the necessity arises.”<sup>47</sup>

The *mem* is also urged to respect the off-duty hours for “nothing so disgruntles a servant as to be called in the middle of a nap... to do something that could just as well wait until later.”<sup>48</sup> Susan Clinton, the writer at *The Straits Times* who recommended this principle declared that “an ordered household with a minimum of friction and discontent had been the result.”<sup>49</sup>

With regard to organising the household, a roster system may seem sound on paper but in practice could be more trouble than it was worth, given the supervision needed to ensure that servants followed the schedule. “The better plan, and the one which causes the mistress the least grief,” recommended one writer, “is for her to give... a rough outline of what she wants done and let the servants arrange it among themselves.”<sup>50</sup>

Above all, the mistress should strive to cultivate forbearance and see humour in the exasperating situations that could arise, as deftly captured in Wilson's words:

“In his daily marketing the cook probably makes a bit for himself on the transaction – that is an understood thing. But, so long as the “bit” is not too blatant, the wise *Mem* shrugs her shoulders and says “Tid' Apa” [Tidak apa] What a marvelous phrase! It sums up the

whole philosophy of the East. It means “No matter,” and not until a person has reached that stage of being above the petty annoyances incidental to dealing with an alien race, will she settle down to enjoy life in Malaya. It is not always easy, but it pays in the long run. When you find the Amah carefully washing your tooth brush in the soapy water in which you have washed your face... the only thing to do is to put your tooth brush beyond her reach. And when you find that your treasured navy-blue shoes have been cleaned with black polish you can only murmur “Tid' Apa,” and rejoice in the possession of a perfectly good pair of black shoes which, you tell yourself, will go with anything...”<sup>51</sup>

Losing one's temper was to risk being the subject of ridicule and gossip. Unlike their employers, the servants in Malaya “don't rush into print with their tales of woe but give vent to their feelings in the coffee-shop and if they are good mimics, their mistress's little peculiarities and dramatic rages, furnish hilarious amusement for the audience.”<sup>52</sup> In light of this, perhaps the apparent indifference of some *mems* towards household management was not so much about “laziness” but a pragmatic response to the prevailing circumstances.

### A (Not So) Trivial Matter

The aforementioned “Sylvia”, who in *The Straits Times* article of 13 July 1906 had

said that servants often held the upper-hand, summed up the master-servant relationship thus:

“The servant question would, at present, seem to be one of the most wearisome little things in Singapore. Go where you will, and when you will, the subject is ever and always being discussed. From a man's point of view it is a little question, out of all proportion to the amount of time and anxiety wasted upon it. And yet is it so insignificant after all? Are not whole households, in Singapore, more or less dependent on their servants for their comforts?”<sup>53</sup>

The management of the household and domestic servants may seem a trivial matter next to the masculine enterprise of building the British Empire. Yet one cannot completely divorce the two: by having the *mems* supervise the servants and the households, the husbands were free to concentrate on their work. In this sense, the efficient organisation of the home had a profound and far-reaching impact on the lives of the European community in Singapore and Malaya.

Despite the presence of servants, the setting up and running of a home in the colony was not a walk in the park for European women. The smooth administration of the household called for tact, finesse and most of all, the ability to appear cool and in control even in the most infuriating of situations. ♦

### Notes

- 1 Pudding without eggs. (1907, February 22). *The Straits Times*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 2 Literally translated as “Madame Boss”, the term is of Anglo-Indian origin and was commonly used by servants and non-whites to address married or upper-class European women during colonial times. “Mem” is likely a corruption of “Madam” while “Sahib” was the term of respect used to address European men in colonial India.
- 3 Butcher, J. G. (1979). *The British in Malaya 1880–1941: The social history of a European community in colonial South-East Asia* (pp. 23–24, 134–135, 142). Call no.: RSING 301.4512105951033 BUT
- 4 The housewives of Malaya. (1933, April 25). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 5 Brownfoot, J. N. (1984). Memsahibs in colonial Malaya: A study of European wives in a British colony and protectorate 1900–1940 (pp. 189–190). In H. Callan & S. Ardener, S. (Eds.). *The incorporated wife*. London: Croon Helm.
- 6 Brownfoot, 1984, p. 196; George, R. M. (1994). Homes in the empire, empires in the home. *Cultural Critique*, 26, 108.
- 7 Butcher, 1979, p. 142; Malayan Information Agency.

- 8 [1932]. *British Malaya: General description of the country and life therein* (pp. 28–29). London: The Agency. Call no.: RCL05 959.9 MAL. According to Ashley Gibson, all except the gardener were named as “essential units of the staff required by a European family”, costing some 170 Straits dollars a month. See Gibson, A. (1928). *The Malay Peninsula and Archipelago* (p. 120). London: J. M. Dent. Call no.: RCL05 959.9 GIB
- 9 According to comments by the Superintendents of the censuses of the Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States and Other Malay States for the years 1921 and 1931. See Nathan, J. E. (1922). *The census of British Malaya* (p. 83). London: Waterlow. Microfilm no.: NL 7366; Vtieland, C. A. (1932). *A report on the 1931 census and on certain problems of vital statistics* (p. 81). London: Crown Agents for the Colonies. Microfilm no.: NL 3005
- 10 MacCallum Scott, J. H. (1939). *Eastern journey* (p. 15). London: Travel Book Club. Call no.: RCL05 959 MAC
- 11 “European women, the cookie and the kitchen.” (1940, May 9). *The Straits Times*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 12 Lockhart, R. (1936). *Return to Malaya* (p. 110). New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. Call no.: RCL05 959.5 LOC
- 13 MacCallum Scott, 1939, p. 14.
- 14 Vaughan, J. D. (1879). *The manners and customs*

- 15 [1932]. *British Malaya: General description of the country and life therein* (pp. 28–29). London: The Agency. Call no.: RCL05 959.9 MAL. According to Ashley Gibson, all except the gardener were named as “essential units of the staff required by a European family”, costing some 170 Straits dollars a month. See Gibson, A. (1928). *The Malay Peninsula and Archipelago* (p. 120). London: J. M. Dent. Call no.: RCL05 959.9 GIB
- 16 According to comments by the Superintendents of the censuses of the Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States and Other Malay States for the years 1921 and 1931. See Nathan, J. E. (1922). *The census of British Malaya* (p. 83). London: Waterlow. Microfilm no.: NL 7366; Vtieland, C. A. (1932). *A report on the 1931 census and on certain problems of vital statistics* (p. 81). London: Crown Agents for the Colonies. Microfilm no.: NL 3005
- 17 MacCallum Scott, J. H. (1939). *Eastern journey* (p. 15). London: Travel Book Club. Call no.: RCL05 959 MAC
- 18 “European women, the cookie and the kitchen.” (1940, May 9). *The Straits Times*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 19 Lockhart, R. (1936). *Return to Malaya* (p. 110). New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. Call no.: RCL05 959.5 LOC
- 20 MacCallum Scott, 1939, p. 14.
- 21 Vaughan, J. D. (1879). *The manners and customs*
- 22 of the Chinese in the Straits Settlements (p. 20.). Singapore: Printed at the Mission Press. Microfilm no.: NL 2437
- 23 Hylam v. European. (1891, September 1). *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, p. 3. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 24 Untitled. (1901, May 3). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 3. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 25 The servant problem. (1926, April 24). *Malayan Saturday Post*, p. 12. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 26 “Cookie.” (1929, October 26). *The Straits Times*, p. 15. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 27 Our Hylam servants. (1891, September 1). *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 28 Wednesday, May 1, 1901. (1901, May 1). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 2. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 29 Straits Settlements. Legislative Council. *Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements for 1886* (1886, November 23). No. 44. Papers laid before the Legislative Council by Command of His Excellency the Governor. Registration of Domestic Servants. (p. C655). Singapore: Published by Authority. Microfilm no.: NL 1107
- 30 Straits Settlements. Legislative Council. *Straits*

- 31 Settlements Government Gazette. (1887, January 7). The Domestic Servants Ordinance 1886 (Ord. XXIII of 1886, pp. 11–14). Singapore: Published by Authority. Microfilm no.: NL1016
- 32 Straits Settlements Government Gazette, 7 Jan 1887, The Domestic Servants Ordinance 1886, Ord. XXIII of 1886, pp. 11–14.
- 33 Song, O. S. (1923). *One hundred years' history of the Chinese in Singapore* (pp. 238–239, 482). London: John Murray. Call no.: RCL05 959.57 SON
- 34 Registration of domestic servants. (1912, July 15). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 31. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 35 Tuesday, July 23, 1912. (1912, July 23). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 6. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 36 The servant problem. (1905, April 19). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 3. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 37 Song, 1923, p. 482; Servants' registration. (1914, March 19). *The Straits Times*, p. 8. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 38 *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 25 Apr 1933, p. 1.
- 39 The world of women. (1935, September 19). *The Straits Times*, p. 18. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 40 Wood, M. (1929). *Malay for mems* (pp. 5, 7, 10, 12, 14, 21).

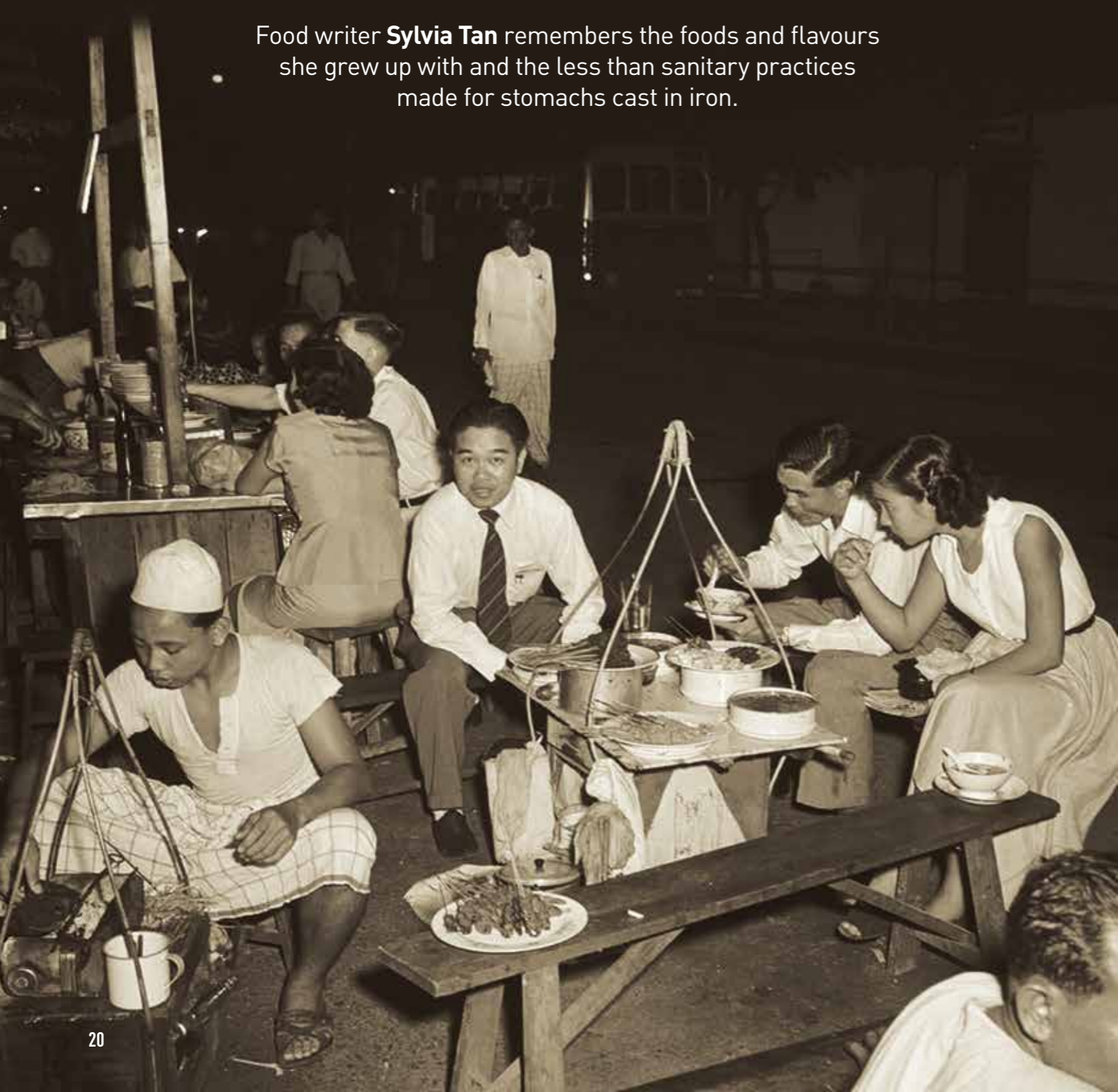
- 41 Singapore: Kelly and Walsh. Microfilm no.: NL 9824
- 42 Registration of servants. (1911, July 25). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 5. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 43 *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, 1 Sep 1891, p. 9.
- 44 Housekeeping in Malaya. (1926, July 2). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 4. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 45 Kinsey, W. E. (1929). *The “mems” own cookery book* (p. 3.). Singapore: Kelly and Walsh. Microfilm no.: NL 9852
- 46 The literary page – New books reviewed. (1930, January 31). *The Straits Times*, p. 17. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 47 Savage-Bailey, K. (1935, August 1). An old resident on Malayan cookery. *The Straits Times*, p. 22. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 48 *The Straits Times*, 19 Sep 1935, p. 18.
- 49 Our domestic servants. (1891, August 4). *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, p. 10. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 50 *The Straits Times*, 26 Oct 1929, p. 15.
- 51 *The Straits Times*, 19 Sep 1935, p. 18.
- 52 The little things of life. (1906, July 13). *The Straits Times*, p. 8. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 53 Lowrie, C. (2015). White mistresses and Chinese ‘houseboys’: Domestic politics in Singapore and

- 54 Darwin from the 1910s to the 1930s (p. 222.). In V. K. Haskins & C. Lowrie. (Eds.). *Colonization and domestic service: Historical and contemporary perspectives*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. Call no.: RSEA 331.76164091712 COL
- 55 The value of the ‘boy’ depends upon the master. (1934, April 29). *The Straits Times*, p. 5. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 56 The Hylam servant. (1926, January 26). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 5. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 57 *The Straits Times*, 22 Feb 1907, p. 7.
- 58 Brownfoot, 1984, pp. 196–197.
- 59 Wilson, M. (1930). *Malaya: Land of enchantment* (pp. 78–79.). Amersham: Mascot Press. Microfiche no.: NL 0007/027–028
- 60 Servants have only one pair of hands. (1940, August 8). In *A Malayan Bungalow, Straits Times Weekly Supplement*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 61 Clinton, S. (1939, October 5). Is your household organized? Suggestions for who does what and when. In *A Malayan Bungalow, Straits Times Weekly Supplement*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 62 *Straits Times Weekly Supplement*, 8 Aug 1940, p. 1.
- 63 Wilson, 1930, pp. 79–80.
- 64 *Straits Times Weekly Supplement*, 8 Aug 1940, p. 1.
- 65 *The Straits Times*, 13 Jul 1906, p. 8.



# Forgotten Foods & Mealtime Memories

Food writer **Sylvia Tan** remembers the foods and flavours she grew up with and the less than sanitary practices made for stomachs cast in iron.



Former journalist **Sylvia Tan** has chalked up nine cookbooks to her name, including *Mad About Food*, a compilation of her much-loved newspaper columns, *Singapore Heritage Food* and *Modern Nonya*. She also writes a regular column, Eat to Live in *The Straits Times*' Mind Your Body section. You can follow her on [www.facebook.com/SylviaTanMadAboutFood](http://www.facebook.com/SylviaTanMadAboutFood)

with the satay man counting the sticks left behind by your plate to tote up your bill. Everyone happily dipped into the same pot of gravy – germs and parasites be damned!

At the old People's Park in Chinatown in the 1950s – a collection of tumbledown stalls and lean-tos before it was destroyed by fire in 1966 – you could find Chinese food skewered on sticks. This Cantonese street food called *lok mei* is still available on the streets of Hong Kong but not in sanitary Singapore anymore.

Plates were not necessary at the *lok mei* pushcart. Instead you picked from the various skewers threaded with virulently coloured morsels of cooked octopus, cuttlefish, chicken wings, pork belly, pig's ears and other innards. You paid for the sticks you chose and dipped them into tins – again communal – filled with various sauces and condiments such as chilli and *hoisin* sauce (made from soybeans and garlic) among others, laid out in front of the stall before you went away, happily munching on this takeaway delight.



**W**hat could be more off-putting than dipping sticks of charcoal-grilled satay into a communal pot of peanut gravy at a roadside stall literally metres away from belching buses?

Yet I recall that time with sweet nostalgia, quite forgetting the lung-clogging smoke from the buses that ended their journey at the Tay Koh Yat depot along Beach Road, or worse, dipping a half-eaten stick of satay or cube of *ketupat* (rice cake) into the communal pot shared with goodness knows how many others who'd just done the same.

Just as no one bothered if the ice ball man, now long gone, had washed his hands before manhandling and shaping shaven ice into balls for us to lick and suck into. All that concerned us was how generous he was with the multi-coloured syrups he drizzled over these ice balls, finished off with swirls of creamy evaporated milk. What could be more refreshing than icy sweetness crowned by milky creaminess? You could even share the ice ball if you didn't have enough money, for he'd cut it into half, enough for two.

Today, you cannot buy ice balls for love or money, although satay is widely available, albeit no longer served the old-fashioned way. Today, most hawker dishes, no matter their origins, are served in the same cookie-cutter style using disposable crockery and cutlery.

Time was when you didn't even have to call out your order of satay. Instead, you'd just find a seat and the satay man would grill an assortment of bamboo sticks, threaded with chicken, beef or mutton, which he placed on a communal platter for you to help yourself to. You shared a table with strangers, sitting companionably side by side on low stools. And you paid only for the sticks you took,

## Home Delivery, Singapore Style

This was a time of mobile food – when hawking was still allowed on the streets – served by pushcart hawkers who'd set up shop at dedicated street corners, completely exposed to the elements. Equally common were itinerant hawkers who made their daily rounds, carting their foods past your doorstep and calling out for customers.

Growing up in post-Independent Singapore in the 1960s, I remember spending lunchtime after school perched on my mother's stone bench outside the gates of our house at the end of a narrow unpaved *lorong* (road) in Ponggol, waiting for the *konlo mee* man to pass. *Konlo mee* is Cantonese dry noodles as we still know it today, dressed with a chilli sauce, garnished with a few slices of *char siew* (barbequed pork) and perhaps two or three plump *wanton*, meat dumplings filled with minced pork and scented with sesame oil.

But unlike today's hawkers, this noodle seller would cry out his wares, in between clacking a set of wooden paddles, which he and other *tok-tok* men, as they were called, used to announce their arrival in the neighbourhood. The cry of the *konlo mee* seller was just one of the myriad ways in which hawkers used to jostle for attention in the past.

The *ting-ting* man who used to peddle his tray of rock candy too is no more: he'd use a small hammer and chisel to break into the hard white candy, the resulting high-pitched clatter of metal against metal giving the name *ting-ting*. Also long gone



**(Facing page)** Roadside satay stalls opposite the Tay Koh Yat bus depot along Beach Road, 1955. *Source: The Straits Times* © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Permission required for reproduction.

**(Top)** Sylvia Tan in a *sarong kebaya*, a nod to her Peranakan heritage. *Courtesy of Sylvia Tan.*

**(Above)** An Indian ice seller drizzling multi-coloured syrups and swirls of creamy evaporated milk over an ice ball, 1978. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*





is the Indian *tikam-tikam* man tooting the horn of his small van, a treasure trove of bits and bobs as well as fairground goodies such as candy floss and a shocking pink sweet wafer disc sold from large tins, for which you gambled or played *tikam-tikam* (Malay for “game of chance”) with the vendor.

Meanwhile the *lor ap* or braised duck man would cry out “lor ap” in a long nasal cry, carrying his soy-braised ducks, a Teochew speciality, as well as his wooden chopping block, in baskets balanced on a pole across his shoulders. He would chop up the duck as you liked it. You could even ask for just one drumstick, as my grandmother would do, sinking her teeth into its unctuous flesh without waiting for it to be cut up first. Or you could ask for braised innards and duck webs, which modern *lor ap* sellers of today are unlikely to purvey.

Hawkers today would not dream of pounding the streets in search of customers, lugging their wares on their shoulders as the *lor ap* man of old did daily. Government restrictions on food handling have put paid to such unsanitary practices. Using just one pail of water to wash dirty crockery throughout the day would not have been tolerated today.

### Food on the Go – Literally

I remember these hawkers with fondness for they offered an amazing variety of foods. You could count among this foot army of food sellers the Indian *kacang puteh* man, who sold a variety of roasted and boiled nuts on a tray balanced precariously on his head, and the *putu mayam* man who also carried his lacy white rice flour pancakes, eaten with bright orange sugar and shredded coconut, in a basket balanced on his head.

When public housing came into the picture, the *nasi lemak* boy (they were always boys) would carry packets of banana leaf-wrapped rice with spicy *sambal*, fried fish or omelette in a basket almost as big as himself along the common corridors of the flats. People hearing the sing-song call of “naaa-si lemaaak” of these boys would scurry out of their flats to buy these savoury coconut-rice parcels for breakfast or a mid-morning snack.

In the days before environmentally destructive styrofoam and plastic takeaway containers appeared on the scene, itinerant hawkers would rely on a range of novel food wrappers, including recycled exercise book paper, fresh banana leaves and dried *opeh* (palm) leaves to hold their roasted nuts, lacy pancakes, *rojak* or fried noodles.

This mobile food army also thought of ingenious ways of transporting their food: in baskets, on trays (including a folding trestle stand), which they would balance on their heads, in pushcarts and later, on bicycles, tricycles or small vans, equipped with horns to advertise their arrival – no need for vocal cord-shattering cries or clattering implements anymore.

I remember the piercing call of the *loh kai yik* hawker, crying out “lo-oh kaaai yiiik”, or braised chicken wings in Cantonese, as he traversed the neighbourhoods, sitting

comfortably on a tricycle, his pot of stew – coloured pink with *tau ju*, a fermented soya cheese – gripped between his legs, while his long-suffering assistant pedalled hard to bring him around. He sold a rich stew filled with not only with chicken wings, but also pork belly, innards such as pig’s liver and intestines, *ju her* (cured cuttlefish), *kangkong* (water convolvulus) and soya bean puffs. This is an old Cantonese dish that no longer exists, at least not in the food centres.

Shout out to him and his assistant would pedal right to your doorstep where the *loh kai yik* man would swing into action: you specified what you wanted and he’d fish them out from his simmering pot, snip them into smaller pieces with his trusty scissors – an old-fashioned pair with curled handles – and dish them onto enamel plates for you to enjoy – with chilli sauce of course.

### Lost Foods

Over the years, plenty of foods have disappeared for various reasons. Take pig’s blood pudding for instance. It used to be cooked in a clear Teochew-style soup, together with minced pork and lavish handfuls of Chinese celery. Pig’s blood, coagulated and cut into squares, was freely sold at

**(Above left)** *Loh kai yik*, or braised chicken wings, is a Cantonese dish made of chicken wings, pork belly, pig’s liver and intestines, *ju her* (cured cuttlefish), *kangkong* (water convolvulus) and soya bean puffs. All rights reserved, Tan, S. (2011). *Modern Nonya. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Cuisine.*

**(Below)** A noodle seller along a five-foot-way, 1950. *Singapore Chinese Clan Associations Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

**(Below right)** An itinerant hawker in Singapore in the 1920s. In the 1960s and 70s, actions were taken to legalise and house these vendors in purpose-built hawker centres. By the late 80s, street hawkers had practically disappeared from the landscape. *Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*



A watercolour painting of itinerant food and vegetable vendors from the 1960s by an unknown painter. *Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*

markets back in the 1950s. My Teochew father would buy and cook it in a clear soup on Sundays (he belonged to a family where the men took up the ladles on weekends while the womenfolk prepped and cleared up afterwards). Sadly, this soup is no more to be found at home and at hawker centres. Pig’s blood is no longer sold, following the outbreak of Japanese encephalitis at pig farms in Malaysia in 1999.

As for innards, you’d have to specially order it these days from the butchers, doubtless because of dwindling demand from customers more accustomed to less exotic fare. There are few stalls today selling *ter huang kiam chye*, that tangy Teochew soup made with salted mustard leaves and all manner of pork offal, just as you have to specially order *satay perut* (beef tripe) from the satay seller if he was

coming to your house to cater for a party. Also, I can no longer find that spicy and sour Hainanese mutton innards soup spiked with kaffir lime leaves and chilli called *perut kambing* (literally goat’s stomach) that used to feature on the menus of *tok panjang* dinners, named after the long tables used for these Peranakan (Straits Chinese) feasts more than 40 years ago, and whipped up by Hainanese chefs.

This narrowing of food tastes, at least for exotic animal parts – those were the days when nothing went to waste – has also led to the disappearance of two classic dishes: *feng*, a speciality of the Eurasian community, and *tee hee*, a festive dish eaten by the Peranakans. Both dishes rely on pig’s lungs, which are no longer sold at the wet markets, and are tedious to prepare. Wee Eng Hwa, daughter of the late President Wee Kim Wee, laments this fact in her cookbook, *Cooking for the President*.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1960s, I remember my mother boiling the whole lung in a pot, leaving the windpipe hanging out of the container to drain out its murky juices until the lung, a veritable sponge, could be squeezed clean. The boiled lung was then cut into strips to be fried with *tau cheo*, a salted soya bean paste, garlic and lots of ginger, together with pork belly and bamboo shoot strips.

The lung was similarly the star ingredient in the Eurasian dish called *feng*, prepped for cooking the same laborious way and then fried together with a mix of spices that included coriander, turmeric and cumin. Aside from lung, you’d also find pig’s liver, ears, belly, heart and other innards, all cut into strips, in the mix. This dish was a speciality at Eurasian households during Christmas, as was *tee hee*, fried together with the shredded meats and vegetables, for Peranakan families at Chinese New Year.

In the days of pre-refrigeration, the liberal use of vinegar in *feng* and salty *tau cheo* in *tee hee* kept these dishes from turning rancid during the festive period. Both were eaten with white rice and *sambal belacan*, a condiment of toasted shrimp paste and chilli, but crusty French loaves – often the bread of choice to accompany curries and stews of the past – were a good match too.

### Flavours of My Childhood

I am reminded of the stews that I used to eat, made with chicken or corned beef. While chicken curry is firmly established in the Singaporean lexicon of classic dishes, who has recently eaten chicken stew, seasoned with soya sauce, or corned beef thrown into a pot with canned peas, carrots and potatoes? A concoction of Hainanese cooks who worked in European and wealthy Peranakan households, these stews were wonderful marriages of East and West: a European-style stew of peas, carrots and potatoes, but seasoned with soya sauce. Corned beef stew was whipped up when tinned food – pork luncheon meat, sardines and yes, corned beef – appeared on the shelves.

All manner of recipes were created using these canned standbys, in case an extra guest popped in for dinner, or simply because cooks felt compelled to tweak somewhat bland Western convenience foods for an Asian palate. For those who haven’t tried it, try cooking a corned beef

Breuder cake, of Dutch-Sri Lankan and Eurasian origins, is a bread-like cake that follows the tradition of the Italian panettone and other yeast cakes, except that in the case of Breuder, toddy or fermented coconut water is used as a raising agent. Food writer Christopher Tan’s version uses both coconut water and yeast. *All rights reserved, Tan, C. (2015). Nerd Baker: Extraordinary Recipes, Stories & Baking Adventures from a True Oven Geek. Singapore: Epigram Books.*







**(Left)** *Belimbing* (carambola) is another fruit that is seldom seen today. It is cooked in a *sambal* with prawns here. *All rights reserved, Tan, S. (2011). Modern Nonya. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Cuisine.*  
**(Below right)** The piquant Peranakan cucumber and stuffed chilli pickle cannot be bought off the shelf, and is only occasionally made in home kitchens by energetic aficionados of the cuisine. *All rights reserved, Tan, S. (2011). Modern Nonya. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Cuisine.*

sugar. A staple at teatime, which is another dying habit with increasing numbers of households of working parents, love cake can also be made with corn or rice semolina.

Such cakes are rarely found these days, unlike Peranakan *kueh* – delectable combinations of rice flour, coconut and *gula melaka* (palm sugar) – which seems to have been rediscovered and is popular not only with aspiring home chefs but also commercial establishments offering them for sale.

Not so, however, are the array of pickles and condiments, aside from *sambal belacan*, that a stay-at-home wife would have turned out in years past. Of course, you can still find commercial varieties of *achar* or pickles on supermarket shelves, especially the ever-popular Penang *achar*, a sweet and nutty concoction. But the piquant Peranakan cucumber and stuffed chilli pickle cannot be bought off the shelf, and is only occasionally made in home kitchens by energetic aficionados of the cuisine.

Rarer still is *jerok* from my father's time – a mustard leaf pickle fermented with *ahm*, or rice porridge water, and fresh coconut water. Together with *achar*, it used to be offered with gin and tonic that the *mem* and *tuan besar* – as the British housewife and her husband in colonial households were referred to – would quaff down at sundown.

Neither seen these days is *assam sinting*, pickled window-pane shells or local oysters that one could forage from the beach at Tanah Merah. People would remove these bivalves from their pretty mother of pearl shells, stuff them into empty brandy bottles together with salt and leave the mixture to cure. Thankfully, *cinjalok*, fermented *grago* or shrimp fry, can still be bought, but it's not a patch on the homemade variety. Also no longer found are baby clams, or *remis*, that one could dig up along the old beach at Telok Paku and pickle them, shells included, in dark soya sauce.

All these cured seafoods were invariably eaten with sliced fresh chillies, shallots and lime juice, although there were variations with some families adding a few drops of sesame oil to the *cinjalok* and others sprinkling roasted rice powder to *assam sinting* for an aromatic finish.

If the rise of the working woman didn't kill such domestic activity, land reclamation and coastal pollution certainly put an end to beach foraging; indeed who forages for periwinkles, the curled shellfish, these days? As a child, I used to pick these from the beach at Telok Paku where they'd burrow into the sand, leaving a tell-tale rectangular hole behind. To catch them, you'd scoop out a good handful of sand around the hole, trapping the shellfish and picking them out, one at a time, until you had a sizeable haul for the pot.

The Malays would cook these snail-like shellfish in a spicy gravy enriched with *santan* (rich coconut milk), but the Chinese would simply boil them. Also known by the rather rude Malay name "hisap pantat", literally "suck the backside" because you had to suck the meat out from the bottom of the shells, the cooked shellfish used to be sold by hawkers at the jetty at the end of Ponggol Road. You'd sit on low stools at these stalls to eat the delicacies, boiled in their shells, which the stallholder would serve with a sweet chilli sauce topped with nuts, while enjoying the sea breeze.

### Forgotten Fruits

These were idyllic times I enjoyed just as much as I relished the long afternoons spent at the fruit orchards in rural Pong-

gol. There was a time in the 1960s and early 70s where people could pick their own fruit from these orchards for a fee. You'd pluck off the tree only what you could carry (or eat); the pickings included not only common tropical fruit such as rambutan and mangosteen, but also now hard-to-find varieties such as *buah pulasan*, a rambutan-like fruit with a hard red shell.

Elsewhere on the island, you could find forgotten fruit growing wild, like *buah binjai* (*Mangifera caesia*), a cousin to the mango. This is a sour fruit, but there is also a sweet variety – and both smell strongly ambrosial. Just a whiff brings me back to the days of my childhood when lunch could be just fried fish with rice and a fiery *sambal* made with *buah binjai*. This fruit is rarely sold commercially these days, but if you go to Binjai Park, the housing estate off Bukit Timah Road that takes its name from the fruit, you should be able to see *binjai* trees growing along the roadside. A few diehard residents are attempting to plant new trees in the neighbourhood, which was previously a *binjai* plantation.

Today, few would know what to do with this fruit. Older people would tell you that it can be cooked in a spicy tamarind gravy but is more often served as a dip, mixed with *sambal belacan*, dark soya sauce and sugar. The same fate could befall other local fruit I used to enjoy during my

childhood. They include the sour *belimbing* (carambola) that my mother used to pickle when in season to add to curries and soups or mashed into a chutney. I still have a tree in my garden and I regularly pickle the fruit, but no one wants it because they don't know what to do with these *belimbing*!

Fewer still would have eaten durian flowers from the durian tree. You fry them with chilli paste or cook it with spices and coconut milk to make a *lemak* (spicy coconut gravy). The pretty white flowers, which have a short lifespan, fade quickly upon falling. But these days, how many people would have access to a durian tree to pick the fresh flowers anyway?

Then there are the sweet fruit I used to enjoy eating straight off the wayside trees during my youth. Then, a typical afternoon after school could find me picking *buah susu*, the local passionfruit, to suck out its sweet pulpy juices. Another day, it could be *pak kia*, the pink-fleshed guava, which was sweeter than the Thai variety – today the only guava sold, it seems. Or *buah kedondong* – or *buah long long* as the Chinese were apt to mispronounce its name – a crunchy and sour fruit that was sometimes sold in its pickled form. Many gardens also had *jambu air* trees, the smaller local version of the Thai rose apple, which we'd dip into black soya sauce, sliced red chilli and sugar before eating.

**(Below)** The writer used to pick *pak kia*, or guava, from wayside trees on her way home from school. This variety with sweet, pink flesh is rarely found these days. This is one of the paintings that William Farquhar commissioned Chinese artists to do between 1803 and 1818 when he was Resident and Commandant of Malacca. *Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*

**(Right)** Durian flowers can be fried with chilli paste or cooked with spices and coconut milk to make a *lemak* (spicy coconut gravy). *Courtesy of Sylvia Tan.*



### Notes

- 1 Wee, E. H. (2011). *Cooking for the president. Reflections & recipes of Mrs Wee Kim Wee.* Singapore: Wee Eng Hwa. Call no.: RSING 641.595957 WEE
- 2 Tan, C. (2015). *Nerd baker: Extraordinary recipes, stories & baking adventures from a true oven geek.* Singapore: Epigram Books. Call no.: RSING 641.815 TAN



# BYGONE BRANDS

## FIVE NAMES THAT ARE NO MORE

Sue-Ann Chia traces the birth and death of five companies, reliving the forgotten stories of some of Singapore's biggest brand names.

Do you remember Chung Khiaw Bank, Setron TVs and Three Rifles shirts? They were household brand names during their heydays and were very much part of the Singapore landscape. At their peak, many residents would have owned these products, used their services or at the very least, heard of these brands. Popularity, however, does not guarantee longevity. Over the years, the following five brands disappeared due to a variety of reasons, some more dramatic than others.

### Whiteaway, Laidlaw & Co. (1900–62)

It was called the “Selfridges of the East”, the poshest chain of department stores this side of the Suez.<sup>1</sup> Shoppers looking for high-end European products during the early 20th century would make a beeline for this iconic store – Whiteaway, Laidlaw & Co.

Founded by two Scotsmen, E. Whiteaway and Robert Laidlaw, the first store was set up in Calcutta in 1882, where both men were based. Their business boomed, with branches sprouting in over 20 cities in India and the Straits Settlements (Singapore, Penang and Malacca), and in places such as Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Taiping, Seremban and Klang.<sup>2</sup>

The department store catered to Europeans living in these cities and affluent locals who could afford its pricey goods. Whiteaway, Laidlaw & Co. specialised in furnishings, haberdashery and tailoring as well as imported household items.

Whiteaways – as the chain was more commonly referred to – reached the shores of Singapore in November 1900. The store first opened its doors on D’Almeida Street at Raffles Place, purveying household goods, shoes and crockery. “In Singapore, as elsewhere, they have made a name for themselves as the leading drapers of the

Sue-Ann Chia is a journalist with over 15 years experience covering politics and current affairs at various newspapers, including *The Straits Times* and *Today*. She is currently the Associate Director at the Asia Journalism Fellowship and a Director at The Nutgraf, a boutique writing and media consultancy.

place... and their spacious showroom will best give an idea of the variety and immensity of the business,” said author Arnold Wright.<sup>3</sup> The other two department stores in Singapore that offered similar luxury items and catered to the well-heeled were John Little’s and Robinson’s.<sup>4</sup>

When its Raffles Place lease ended in 1904, Whiteaways moved to a new building at the corner of Hill Street and Stamford Road. As the store was the main tenant, the new three-storey Oranje Building – renamed Stamford House in 1963<sup>5</sup> – was designed with Whiteaways’ requirements in mind.

Nine years later, in 1915, Whiteaways moved again to its final home on Battery Road, right next to the General Post Office building that is today the Fullerton Hotel. This time it owned the building, having bought the land where Flint Building – named after Captain William Flint, brother-in-law of Stamford Raffles – once stood. Flint Building, which housed the famous Emmerson’s Tiffin Rooms, was demolished following a major fire in 1906.<sup>6</sup>

The owners of Whiteaways purchased the land on a 50-year lease from the Flint family and developed a new four-storey building that was described as the most modern establishment in Singapore at the time. The store cost \$300,000 to build and was designed along the lines of modern emporiums in London. It covered 12,200 sq ft of space and soared about 100 ft from basement to roof with beautiful display windows, lifts and steel structures.<sup>7</sup>

Around the time of the store’s opening, founder Robert Laidlaw – who lived 20 years in Calcutta before returning to England and becoming a Member of Parliament from 1906 until 1910 – died on 3 November 1915; he was 59. Knighted in 1909, Laidlaw was instrumental in growing the Whiteaways business empire. Not much is known about E. Whiteaway, the other founder, other than he used to work at another department store, Harrison and Hathaways, in Calcutta before setting up Whiteaways with Laidlaw.<sup>8</sup>

During World War II, the Japanese military took over the Whiteaways building and allowed the Japanese retailer Shirakiya – better known as Tokyu Department Store today – to use the premises. When the war

ended, Whiteaways rebuilt its business at the same location. It managed to claw back its reputation as a premier shopping destination and held Singapore’s first fashion show on 3 November 1948.<sup>9</sup>

In 1957, Britain’s largest retailer, Great Universal Stores Ltd, acquired Whiteaways for nearly £600,000. It retained the directors and staff, and pledged to expand Whiteaways’ business in Singapore. But the opposite happened. Whiteaways abruptly closed in February 1962. The store manager cited the approaching termination of its land lease and poor trading results as reasons for the closure.<sup>10</sup>

The Whiteaways building was bought by Malayan Banking Limited (Maybank) for \$1.4 million in October 1961 and used as its headquarters. It was demolished in 1997 to make way for the present 32-storey Maybank Tower.<sup>11</sup>

### Chung Khiaw Bank (1947–72)

Set up by tycoon and philanthropist Aw Boon Haw – one half of the famous Haw Par brothers – Chung Khiaw Bank took pride in being the “Small Man’s Bank”, a bank for the ordinary man.

Chung Khiaw Bank was incorporated in 1947 and started operations on 4 February 1950 on Robinson Road. Aw, dubbed the “Tiger Balm King” for building his family’s business empire from selling the trademark cure-all ointment, was the founder and first chairman of the bank’s board of directors, which included other prominent Chinese businessmen in Singapore.

Aw, who had moved from Burma to Singapore in the 1920s, had envisioned the bank as not only serving businessmen but all segments of society. “It is our intention to help the middle and lower classes – to give them a break... we will finance the small man, thus helping him, the community and the country,” he said in an interview with *The Straits Times* before the bank opened in February 1950.<sup>12</sup>

When Aw died in 1954 at age 71, Chung Khiaw Bank was placed in the good hands of his nephew-in-law Lee Chee Shan, who was credited with making the bank a household name in Singapore.

The bank started with an authorised capital of \$5 million and paid-up capital of \$2.5 million. By 1971, it was Singapore’s second largest local bank in terms of assets. The bank had a total of 32 offices – 14 in



A Whiteaways advertisement in the 1937-38 issue of *The Singapore Cinema Review* introducing the “... exciting new perfume” called Mischief – all for the princely price of \$1.75 or \$2.75 a bottle. © *The Singapore Cinema Review*.

Singapore, 16 in East and West Malaysia and two in Hong Kong – and ambitious expansion plans in the pipeline.<sup>13</sup>

Chung Khiaw’s unique reputation as a small man’s bank was the backbone of its success. The bank proved that it did not need the patronage of the wealthy for business to be lucrative. Over the years, its clientele included small traders, labourers and even students under 12 years old. “No customer is too small, and no account is too big” was the motto of the bank.<sup>14</sup>

The bank was the first to introduce several innovative ideas to keep ahead of the competition. Lee Chee Shan’s philosophy was “little drops make a mighty ocean”. In 1956, the bank printed promotional pamphlets in the four main languages – English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil – departing from the usual practice of only targeting a particular Chinese dialect group. All this was part of its plan to encourage the public to make banking a greater part of their lives. The bank also launched mobile banking, literally a bus that drove to six rural areas regularly to bring banking facilities to the doorsteps of villages.<sup>15</sup>

Baby boomers will remember the coins bank which was introduced in 1958 specifically for children. It encouraged children to save by issuing metal “piggy” banks that later morphed into other animal shapes such as rhinoceros, camel, elephant and squirrel. Within two years, the bank received an astounding \$3.5 million in coin deposits from children.<sup>16</sup>

Chung Khiaw Bank was ahead of the curve in many ways. Another pioneering



In 1915, Whiteaways moved to its final location on Battery Road, right next to the General Post Office building that is today the Fullerton Hotel. Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.



move was the “Lady in Pink” service, started in June 1962<sup>17</sup> to woo women to open bank accounts. There was even an “All Ladies Bank” – a sub-branch opened in August 1963 in Selegie House that was manned entirely by female staff.<sup>18</sup> The bank encouraged women to join its workforce at a time when banking was still the traditional preserve of men. A “good number” of its top executives were women and Chung Khiaw has been credited for opening up careers in banking for women in the region.<sup>19</sup>

The bank’s run of good fortune came to an end shortly after it celebrated its 21st anniversary in 1971. Aw Cheng Chye, nephew of the late Aw Boon Haw who took over the family business when the latter died, had earlier listed the business, which included Tiger medicinal products, newspaper publishing and Chung Khiaw Bank, as Haw Par Brothers International.

On 4 June 1971, news emerged that Aw had sold a substantial stake in the company to Slater Walker Securities of the UK, giving the latter a majority holding of slightly more than 50 percent in Haw Par. Two weeks later, Slater Walker Securities sold 49.8 percent of Chung Khiaw Bank’s equity to United Overseas Bank (UOB) for \$22 million.<sup>20</sup>

In August that year, the managing director Lee Chee Shan retired from his position, saying that he wanted to give way “to a young and dynamic leadership”.<sup>21</sup> A year later, UOB completed its takeover of Chung Khiaw Bank. In 1999, UOB merged its Chung Khiaw bank subsidiary to rationalise operations. In one fell swoop, the name Chung Khiaw Bank was erased forever.

As for the Haw Par family fortune that was reportedly worth hundreds of millions, it did not last beyond the second generation. Aw Cheng Chye died in August 1971, a few months after selling Haw Par to Slater Walker Securities. After a series of bad investments by other family members, the money was whittled away. Matriarch Aw Cheng Hu, the niece of founder Aw Boon Haw – and the widow of Lee – was said to be living in a rented four-room HDB flat in Sengkang a few years before her death in 2010.<sup>22</sup>

Today, banking giant UOB not only owns Chung Khiaw Bank, but also Haw Par Corporation (formerly Haw Par Brothers International) and the Tiger Balm brand.

### Setron TV (1964–86)

The first ever Singapore-assembled black-and-white TV set rolled off the production line at local enterprise, Setron Limited, in September 1965. Television in Singapore had just been introduced in February 1963,<sup>23</sup> and given the small number of households that owned a TV set at the time – most



(Top) Opening of the New Bridge Road branch of Chung Khiaw Bank in 1957. Source: *The Straits Times* © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Permission required for reproduction.

(Above) Managing Director Lee Chee San (centre) with friends at the opening of the Tiong Bahru branch of Chung Khiaw Bank in 1958. All rights reserved, Yeap, J. K. (1994). *Far from Rangoon: Lee Chee San 1906–1986*. Singapore: Lee Teng Lay.

(Right) Newspaper advertisements by Setron such as this one in the 28 April 1966 issue of *The Straits Times* touted the latest in technology, like the “Vista-Scope Screen”, and claimed that its TV screens provided the “sharpest, clearest pictures”. © *The Straits Times*.

people watched TV at their local community centres – this was a business that showed plenty of promise.

The idea of a made-in-Singapore TV set seemed preposterous at the time, but Setron managed to pull it off. With component parts imported from Belgium, Setron TV – encased in classic teak cabinets with shutters enclosing the screen – became a fairly commonplace item in many households by the 1970s. It was not unusual for proud owners to drape their TV sets with decorative cloths and use the top as a display shelf for framed photographs and other home knick-knacks.

Founded in 1964 by a group of enterprising local businessmen led by Tan Sek Toh, Setron was granted pioneer status by the government as it was the first electronics plant in newly industrialising Singapore. After its formation, Setron immediately started a training programme for its technical staff with assistance from MBLE International of Belgium, which supplied the component parts to Setron’s local plant.<sup>24</sup>

A year of intensive training later, the company began operations at its temporary premises on Leng Kee Road while constructing its own factory at Tanglin Halt. Production began in September 1965 and Setron TV sets were sold just three months later in December.<sup>25</sup>

Setron started by assembling 400 sets a month, with plans to ramp it up to as many

as 2,000 sets a month in addition to other electronic products such as tape recorders and transistor radios once it moved to a bigger factory. In April 1966, Setron relocated to its new 80,000-sq-ft factory at Tanglin Halt, with air-conditioned workshops and a 96.5-ft-tall central tower that was used for advertisements.<sup>26</sup>

At the opening of the \$1.5 million factory, then Minister for Finance Lim Kim San said: “The idea of producing television sets in Singapore, I think, appears to some people to be extravagant hope. I believe this will come about eventually just as television is now a fact. Television – the transmission of images through the air – was an extremely unlikely idea to most people before it became a reality.”<sup>27</sup>

By 1966, one in six local households owned a TV set in Singapore, one of the highest penetration rates in the region.<sup>28</sup> That same year Setron rolled out more models, including a “25-inch luxury television set and a 19-inch economy model”. Newspaper advertisements touted the latest in technology, like the “Vista-Scope Screen” and claimed that its TV screens provided the “sharpest, clearest pictures”.<sup>29</sup> Setron TV sets cost between \$859 and \$968 each, according to an advertisement in 1966<sup>30</sup> – which was no small change at the time – competing with higher priced imported brands such as Philips, Normende, Grundig and Telefunken.

In 1967, Setron started to assemble other brands of TV sets like National and Sanyo. Philips, Siera and Nivico models were added in 1968. By 1971, Setron was a listed company and had become the largest television manufacturer in Southeast Asia. It also produced radiograms (a combination radio and record player), amplifiers and other electronic equipment, with products exported to Malaysia, Mauritius, Cambodia, Vietnam, Africa and the Philippines.<sup>31</sup>

Under the leadership of Setron’s founder and first chairman Tan Biau, a well-known business personality who was a director at United Overseas Bank (UOB), the company set up joint ventures with foreign companies and associated companies in Singapore, including local brand Acma which manufactured refrigerators and air-conditioners. Many older Singaporeans would have grown up in households that had an Acma fridge – another Singapore success story. UOB’s Wee Cho Yaw took over as Setron chairman around 1971.<sup>32</sup>

In April 1979, Haw Par Brothers International – owned by UOB and whose chairman was also Wee – made a bid to acquire Setron which by then also distributed Sony products. In July, Haw Par successfully took over Setron, controlling 60 percent of

its shares. Setron’s managing director, Tan Sek Toh, emigrated to Canada after selling his stake in the company.<sup>33</sup>

Setron continued to manufacture TV sets until the 1980s. In 1986, it became a subsidiary of Sony Corporation Japan and was renamed Sony Singapore.<sup>34</sup> Its Tanglin Halt factory is now the site of Haw Par Corporation – the former Haw Par Brothers International.

### Three Rifles Shirt Co. (1969–2006)

Many Singaporeans grew up with the trademark Three Rifles shirt, worn by their husbands, fathers or even grandfathers. It was set up by Chong Chong Chong, who left his Kuala Lumpur hometown at age 14 to strike out on his own in Singapore as an apprentice selling shirts and textiles.<sup>35</sup>

Five years later, in 1955, at age 19, Chong opened his first shop in Bukit Panjang selling shirts from different brands. It was just half a shop space, bought at a princely sum of \$7,000 – his hard-earned savings. Business was brisk; in just four years, his half shop had expanded into one full shop space. He stayed in that location for another 10 years, until 1969 when he opened a store at The President, one of Singapore’s first shopping centres (today renamed Serangoon Plaza).<sup>36</sup>

With the move to a swanky new location, Chong decided to stop selling shirts made by others and produce his own label instead. He employed a part-time designer and 10 workers, and started the Three Rifles Shirt Manufacturing Com-

Three Rifles Shirts billed its shirts as “the distinctive shirt for the distinguished man about town” in this advertisement dated 19 April 1980 in the *New Nation*. © *New Nation*.



*The Setron Factory is a sign of the faith of Setron Limited in the economic future of Singapore and we have backed up this faith with an investment of \$2½ million in our factory premises, our plant and our trading organisation. Setron Limited have great pleasure in participating in the industrialisation effort of Singapore and in serving the public of Singapore and Malaysia by the production and marketing of Setron television sets of world standards at moderate and competitive prices. We also look forward to the production and marketing of a number of other electrical appliances.*

Only SETRON gives you one year free service direct from the FACTORY

THE NEW SKY-BLUE 25" MODEL

**SETRON** THE PRECISION TV RECEIVER WITH THE SHARPEST, CLEAREST PICTURES...

- Setron's appearance — the polish of a real star among TV sets.
- Setron's performance — only Setron has VISTA-SCOPE screen for clarity and depth of vision. Wide angle extra tube. Special filter to cut off glare and to add a delicate shade of blue to the picture you receive. Easy tuning. Latest circuit design. Fully electronic. Fully automatic. And Hi-Fi sound of course.
- Prices — Highly competitive. Free purchase facilities available at all dealers.

- Setron's enclosure — blue blooded and completely Continental.
- Setron's bodylines — pure grace and elegance. Five lovely models to choose from — Sky-Blue 25"; Console De Luxe. \$1000 23" screen Console De Luxe; M500 22" Console; \$250 23" Table Model; Setron 19"; and custom-built models made to your order, to suit your ideas of interior decoration, your space needs, your taste in design etc.

ASK YOUR DEALER FOR A FREE TRIAL

**Buy SETRON — buy distinction**

Available at all leading dealers in Singapore, Johore Bahru, Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Kulim

TV MANUFACTURER: SETRON LIMITED 98, MARKET STREET, SINGAPORE-1, TEL: 72643 *Setron*



pany. Although the company produced around 1,200 shirts a month, demand soon outstripped supply. Chong needed to expand – fast.

Before opening his first factory in Geylang in 1971, Chong visited shirt factories in Hong Kong, Japan and Europe to get new ideas and contacts of textile manufacturers. Four years later, in 1975, he acquired his second factory at MacPherson. In the meanwhile, he had opened the first Three Rifles shop at People's Park Complex in 1972. Two other shops within the same premises followed, then another at People's Park Centre next door, at Peninsula Plaza, at Katong Shopping Centre and at Thomson Plaza.<sup>37</sup>

By 1981, Three Rifles was worth \$4.5 million. Chong had seven retail shops in Singapore, agencies in Indonesia selling his shirts and was looking to break into the European market to compete with established brand names such as Lanvin and Pierre Cardin. His foray into Indonesia selling high-quality shirts was so successful that 40 percent of the shirts produced were sold there in the 1970s and 80s. Again, with rising demand, Chong needed to expand his production. And again, he looked overseas for inspiration.<sup>38</sup>

This time, Chong bought machines that would automate the entire shirt manufacturing process – allowing his factory to produce more, and faster. There was even a machine just to embroider the Three Rifles logo on every shirt. Besides manufacturing its own brand of clothing, Three Rifles also imported clothing brands such as Lonner, Portfolio and Rhomberg. The company became the regional manufacturer for Emporio Armani, and from 1980, the regional representative for Italian fashion label Caserini.<sup>39</sup>

In the mid-1990s, Chong began to diversify his business. He branched into commercial and residential property development in Singapore and Malaysia with the formation of Three Rifles Land.<sup>40</sup> In 1998, sister company TR Networks, which sold beauty and lifestyle products, was established with Chong as chairman and his son-in-law Ting Yen Hock as chief executive.<sup>41</sup> In 2005, Three Rifles was bought over by TR Network,<sup>42</sup> and in the following year, Three Rifles International – now a subsidiary of TR Networks – signed a licence agreement with French designer brand Pierre Balmain to manufacture menswear under the brand and sell them in Singapore and Brunei. Within just three months, Three Rifles opened three counters to sell Pierre Balmain clothes at Robinsons and Isetan Scotts in Singapore.<sup>43</sup>

As far as we can ascertain, the Three Rifles brand does not exist anymore, and

all its stores in Singapore have since closed down.

### Thye Hong Biscuit & Confectionery Company (1929–90)

The signature bronze lion and flame-lit torch on top of Thye Hong Biscuit and Confectionery factory at the junction of Alexandra Road and Tiong Bahru Road was a defining landmark in the area at one time. Although the factory began operations in 1935, Thye Hong had been set up earlier in 1929 at 124 Neil Road.<sup>44</sup> It was owned by Lee Gee Chong, son of leading banker Lee Choon Seng and the former chairman of the Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation.

As business grew, the younger Lee built a bigger factory on Alexandra Road at a cost of \$250,000. The plant could produce 10–12 tonnes of biscuits daily under hygienic conditions – with the biscuits untouched by human hands. Thye Hong biscuits continued to gain in popularity. In 1952, the company stepped up production with a massive 18-month expansion programme that would increase biscuit production to 1,500 tonnes and confectionery production to 100 tonnes every month.<sup>45</sup>

However, tragedy struck on 20 April 1960. Lee, who had become famous as the “Biscuit King”, was ambushed near his Garkick Avenue home while being driven home by his driver. After Lee's car was forced into an embankment by another car, three men pulled him out of the vehicle and abducted him. His injured driver was left alone. Five days later, Lee's body was found wrapped in a blanket and left in a graveyard off Yio Chu Kang Road.<sup>46</sup>



Then Minister for Social Affairs Othman Wok (extreme left) visits the factory of Thye Hong Biscuit in 1975. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

Further tragedy awaited the family: five years later, in 1965, his son Lee Boon Leong who had taken over the reins at Thye Hong, was shot by armed gangsters in a kidnap bid while he was driving alone along dimly-lit Geylang Lorong 20.<sup>47</sup> Fortunately, he underwent an emergency surgery and survived.

Meanwhile, Singapore-made biscuits were “crumbling against the wall of local prejudice”, according to a media report in 1965. Its production declined while that of foreign biscuits imports rose, even though the latter was more expensive. Biscuit bosses blamed several factors, from the on-going Konfrontasi (or Confrontation, 1963–66) with Indonesia closing off a lucrative market to new duties imposed by Malaysia. Foreign packaging was also nicer, they acknowledged.<sup>48</sup>

Yet, Thye Hong appeared to be going strong. In 1964, it was reported that Thye Hong's biscuits were served on board Malaysian Airways flights, an indication of its upmarket image. Its factory in Singapore had modern machines, with a staff of over 200 – many of whom were trained by foreign biscuit experts.<sup>49</sup> Thye Hong also had another factory in Johor.

Singaporeans growing up in the 1960s and 70s will remember eating popular Thye Hong goodies such as Marie, Cream Crackers and Horlicks biscuits. One of its specialities was the Jam De Luxe biscuit, a rich shortcake biscuit sandwich with sticky pineapple jam in between.<sup>50</sup>

In 1971, one of Britain's largest biscuit manufacturers, Huntley and Palmer, entered into an agreement with Thye Hong to produce part of its range of sweet and semi-sweet biscuits in Singapore and

Malaysia – under the British firm's subsidiary Associated Biscuits.<sup>51</sup>

A decade later, in late 1981, Associated Biscuits (Huntley and Palmer) bought Kuan Enterprises, which owned Thye Hong Singapore and Malaysia, for \$12 million. With this, the familiar torch and lion trademark on the roof of the factory disappeared when the factory closed down. The site was redeveloped into an office building – Thye Hong Centre – by Thye Hong Properties and Thye Hong Development, set up in 1981 by Lee Boon Leong and his mother, Madam Tay Geok Yap. New chairman and chief executive of Kuan Enterprises Julian Scott said the company would expand the range of products under Thye Hong. Its trademark would be retained and the old emblem would be part of the new factory complex in the western part of Singapore.<sup>52</sup>

Thye Hong biscuits continued to be sold, although the brand ownership changed hands over the years. Associated Biscuits was acquired by American company Nabisco in 1982 and was eventually bought by Bri-

tannia Brands – set up by former Nabisco executive Rajan Pillai – which also owned other Nabisco brands such as Jacob, Ole and Planters.<sup>53</sup>

In 1990, Pillai struck a deal with France's biggest food company BSN Groupe to purchase Nabisco operations in Singapore, Malaysia, Hongkong and New Zealand for US\$180 million.<sup>54</sup> After this sale, Thye Hong biscuits disappeared off the landscape. ♦



Biscuit tin and paper bag of Thye Hong Biscuit & Confectionery Company from the 1950s. *Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*

### Notes

- 1 Das, S. (2008, July 1). A brief history of shopping. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from The Telegraph India website.
- 2 Vedamani, G. G. (2003). *Retail management*. Mumbai: Jaico Publishing House. Retrieved from Google Books; National Library Board. (2006). *Whiteaway Laidlaw* written by Chia, Joshua Yeong Jia. Retrieved from Singapore Infopedia.
- 3 Wright, A., & Cartwright, H. A. (Eds.). (1908). *Twentieth century impressions of British Malaya: Its history, people, commerce, industries, and resources* (p. 689) London: Lloyd's Greater Britain Pub. Call no.: RCLOS 959.51033 TWE
- 4 National Library Board, 2006.
- 5 National Library Board, 2006; Singapore. Urban Redevelopment Authority. (n.d.). *Capitol Theatre, Capitol Building and Stamford House*. Retrieved from Urban Redevelopment Authority website.
- 6 Maybank. (1998, November 27). *Background information on site of Maybank headquarters in Singapore*. Retrieved from Maybank website.
- 7 Whiteaway, Laidlaw. (1915, May 31). *The Straits Times*, p.10. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 8 The late Mr Robert Laidlaw. (1915, November 5). *The Straits Times*, p. 8. Retrieved from NewspaperSG; Vedamni, 2003.
- 9 National Library Board, 2006; Warm work for mannequins. (1948, November 4). *The Straits Times*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 10 'Gussies' chief here, plans expansion. (1957, December 14). *The Straits Times*, p. 9; Whiteaway Laidlaw to close in Singapore. (1961, December 28). *The Straits Times*, p. 6. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 11 Whiteaway building sold for \$1.4million. (1961, December 30). *The Straits Times*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG; Maybank. (1998, November 27). *Ground breaking ceremony for Maybank headquarters in Singapore*. Retrieved from Maybank website.
- 12 New bank will aid the small man. (1949, December 30). *The Straits Times*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 13 *The Straits Times*, 30 Dec 1949, p. 7; Steady progress all through the years. (1971, February 4). *The Straits Times*, p. 6. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 14 *The Straits Times*, 4 Feb 1971, p. 6.
- 15 Leo, S. (2012). [Ed.]. *Southeast Asian personalities of Chinese descent: A biographical dictionary* (Vol. 1, p.

- 497). Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. Call no.: RSING 959.004951 SOU
- 16 The \$3.5 million success story of Singapore's 'piggy' bank. (1960, February 7). *The Straits Times*, p. 5. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 17 Another venture from a family of pioneers. (1963, March 2). *The Straits Times*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 18 Another first' in banking world: An all-woman staff. (1963, August 24). *The Straits Times*, p. 15; All ladies bank a success. (1966, May 16). *The Straits Times*, p. 16. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 19 *The Straits Times*, 4 Feb 1971, p. 6.
- 20 Johnson, B. (1971, June 5). Haw Par: UK firm acquires big stake. *The Straits Times*, p. 1; Johnson, B. (1971, June 18). It's a deal: \$22m cash! *The Straits Times*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 21 Retired head of Chung Khiau to run insurance companies. (1971, August 3). *The Straits Times*, p. 11. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 22 Dato Aw dies during visit to Chile. (1971, August 24). *New Nation*, p. 1; Raymond, J. (2002, December 5). Tiger Balm's poor old lady. *Today*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 23 Raja to launch Singapore TV. (1963, February 13). *The Straits Times*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 24 Lim, B. T. (1966, April 28). First Singapore electronics factory. *The Straits Times*, p. 15. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 25 *The Straits Times*, 28 Apr 1966, p. 15.
- 26 Television assembly factory plans further extension. (1965, December 4). *The Straits Times*, p. 29. Retrieved from NewspaperSG; *The Straits Times*, 28 Apr 1966, p. 15.
- 27 Company farsighted. (1966, April 28). *The Straits Times*, p.15. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 28 One home in six has TV. (1966, April 26). *The Straits Times*, p. 15. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 29 Page 15 Advertisements Column 1: Setron. (1966, April 26). *The Straits Times*, p. 15. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 30 Ho, A. L. (2015, May 24). Setron, a bright spark in troubled times. *The Sunday Times*, p. 42. Microfilm no.: NL 33501
- 31 Setron: Five years of steady growth. (1971, April 28). *The Straits Times*, p. 20. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 32 *The Straits Times*, 28 April 1971, p. 20; Bankers, businessmen among board members. (1971, April 28). *The Straits Times*, p. 20. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 33 *The Sunday Times*, 24 May 2015, p. 42.
- 34 *The Sunday Times*, 24 May 2015, p. 42.

- 35 Seah, R. (1981, February 3). A good shot in the right direction. *The Business Times*, p. 6. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 36 *The Business Times*, 3 Feb 1981, p. 6.
- 37 *The Business Times*, 3 Feb 1981, p. 6.
- 38 *The Business Times*, 3 Feb 1981, p. 6.
- 39 National Library Board. (2016). *Three Rifles Holdings is established*. Retrieved from HistorySG.
- 40 Tan, C. (1997, September 29). Three Rifles sets its sights on property development. *The Straits Times*, p. 48. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 41 Yap, S. (2003, April 3). TR Networks expanding market into Singapore. *The Business Times*, p. 8. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 42 Goh, E. Y. (2005, January 11). TR Networks buys Three Rifles. *The Straits Times*, p. H17. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 43 Khin, N. (2006, November 23). Three Rifles looks to open Balmain store in Singapore. *The Business Times*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 44 National Heritage Board. (2015, July 2). *Thye Hong Centre*. Retrieved from National Heritage Board website; \$250,000 biscuit plant in Singapore. (1935, March 27). *The Straits Times*, p. 13. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 45 *The Straits Times*, 27 Mar 1935, p. 13; 1,500 tons of biscuits every month. (1952, November 11). *The Straits Times*, p. 14. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 46 Ee, B. L. (1960, April 25). Kidnap: Body found. *The Straits Times*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 47 Cheong, Y. S. (1965, July 23). Biscuit king's son shot. *The Straits Times*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 48 Soh, T. K. (1965, December 12). Pride and prejudice. *The Straits Times*, p. 8. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 49 Lee, G. (1964, October 28). Local biscuits and sweets measure up to world standard. *The Straits Times*, p. 52. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 50 *The Straits Times*, 28 Oct 1964, p. 52.
- 51 English biscuits to be made locally. (1971, June 23). *The Straits Times*, p. 11. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 52 British firm buys up Thye Hong. (1982, January 12). *The Straits Times*, p. 8; Lee, Y. M. (1981, September 23). Thye Hong ventures into property. *The Straits Times*, p. 15. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 53 Tripathi, S. (1993, March 12). A year of nightmares for biscuit king. *The Business Times*, p. 10; Lee, H. S. (1990, March 9). French dough creates new biscuit giant. *The Business Times*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 54 *The Business Times*, 9 Mar 1990, p. 1.



# SINGAPORE'S FIRST JAPANESE RESIDENT

## YAMAMOTO OTOKICHI

A sailor travels halfway around the world in his attempt to return home, and becomes the first Japanese resident in Singapore in the process. **Bonny Tan** tells the story.

During the Edo period (1603–1868) under the rule of the Tokugawa Shogunate<sup>1</sup>, Japan was a very insular society and kept its doors closed to foreign influence. Japanese nationals leaving the country could not return home on pain of death, and foreigners were barred from entering the country. Only Nagasaki on southernmost Kyushu island remained open as a primary trading port for the Dutch East India Company. This period of national isolation called *sakoku* (meaning literally “closed country”) was in force for over 250 years until Commodore Matthew Perry of the US arrived with his fleet in 1853 to wrest open Japan to foreign trade.

### An Interlocutor Between East and West

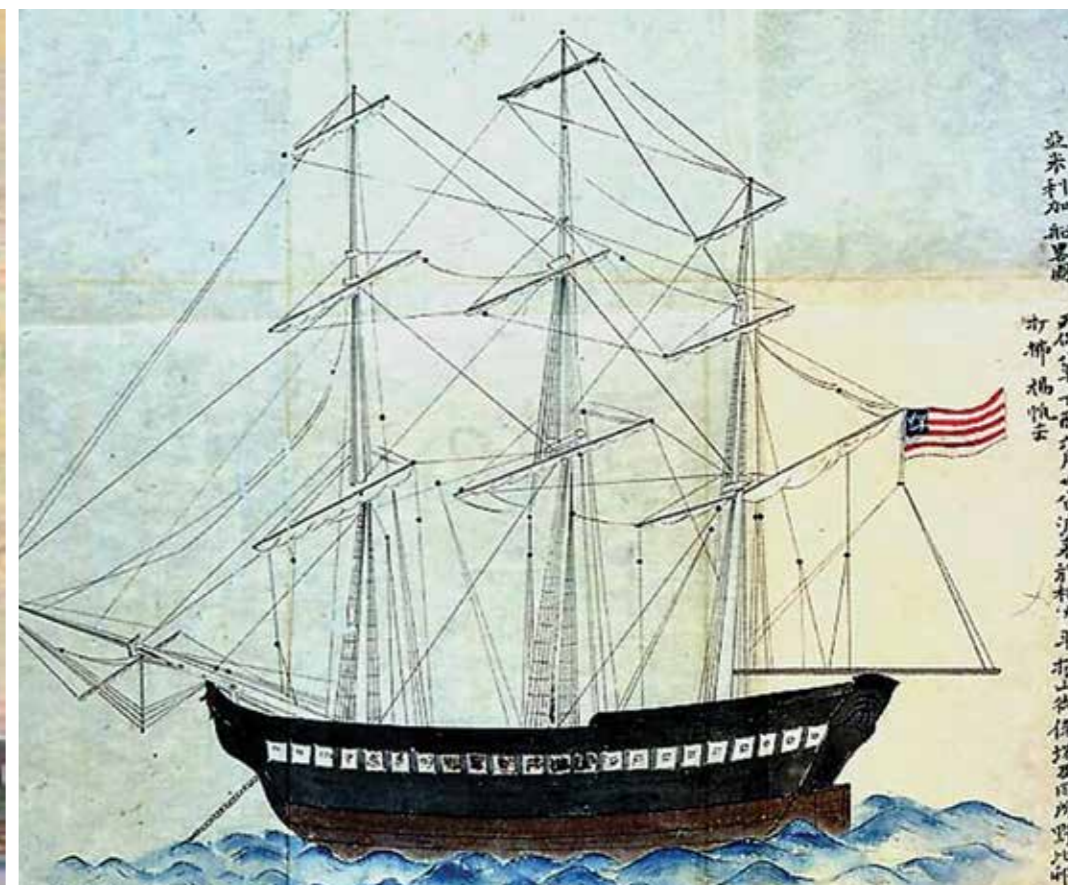
A little known figure by the name of Yamamoto Otokichi – born in 1817 in Onoura in Mihama, Japan – had an important part to play in turning the hinges that eventually

opened Japan’s doors to trade with Britain in 1854. As government missions from Japan began travelling out of the country to America and Europe during this period, many would transit in Singapore where Otokichi became their main point of contact. Otokichi, who had moved to Singapore by 1862, was a well-respected member of the Singapore mercantile community and owed his wealth to his close ties with the British.

The second overseas Japanese diplomatic mission<sup>2</sup> to Europe, led by Takenouchi Yasunori, governor of the Shimotsuke region, arrived in Singapore on 17 February 1862, and stayed here for two days. Among the members of his delegation was the interpreter Fukuzawa Yukichi who would later gain fame as one of the leading advocates for the modernisation of Japan during the Meiji era (1868–1912).



**Bonny Tan** is a Senior Librarian at the National Library, Singapore. She is a frequent contributor to *BiblioAsia* magazine.



**(Facing page)** Some members of the Japanese government mission to Europe. Photo taken in Utrecht, Netherlands, in July 1862. The interpreter Fukuzawa Yukichi, who was part of the delegation that visited Singapore earlier on 17 February 1862, is seen standing second from the left. *Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*

**(Above)** An 1849 illustration of Yamamoto Otokichi. Artist unknown. *Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*

**(Above right)** Japanese drawing of the *Morrison*, anchored at Uruga, Kanagawa Prefecture, in 1837. This was the ship that brought Otokichi and his two comrades back to Japan but was received with cannon fire instead. Artist unknown. *Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*

On the day the Japanese entourage arrived in Singapore, Otokichi met up with Yukichi and some members of the mission at the Adelphi Hotel bringing them around Singapore to view the sights, including his house. Yukichi and several others also had their portraits taken at a photo studio on Orchard Road.<sup>3</sup>

Fuchibe Tokuzo, who visited Singapore a few months later in 1862 as part of a separate mission, captured some aspects of Otokichi’s daily life in Singapore in his journal.<sup>4</sup> He described how Otokichi’s two-storey house on Orchard Road with a thatched roof was encircled by a lush garden with abundant trees and flowers. Parked outside the house was a horse cart while the back had a stable along with several outhouses. Helping to run the household were a servant and a maid.

Tokuzo also described the interior of the house. While Otokichi’s son and daughter were upstairs sleeping peacefully, the guests were served tea. Tokuzo had a sharp eye for detail and noted that “all the household furnishings, the plates and cups,

etc. were fresh and clean”.<sup>5</sup> This was the picture of idyll and success of Singapore’s first Japanese resident as described in the journals of Tokuzo.

### The Adventures of Otokichi

Who was Otokichi and how did he end up on this obscure colonial outpost in Southeast Asia? The dramatic story of struggle from obscurity and hardship to eventual victory has the makings of a film. And in fact the story of Otokichi has been captured in a film and a play as well as poetry and song.

In December 1832, the teenaged Otokichi was an apprentice sailor travelling onboard the Japanese cargo ship *Hojunmaru*. All 14 people onboard the ship were from Otokichi’s fishing village, Onoura, some of whom were his relatives.<sup>6</sup> The ship was on a routine journey carrying a shipment of rice and porcelain from port Toba, Japan. While en route to Tokyo, it sailed into stormy waters; a large typhoon tore off the mast and broke the rudder of the ship, leaving the crippled

vessel adrift and with no rescue in sight for 14 months as it traversed aimlessly in the Pacific Ocean.

Only three crew members survived the ordeal – Otokichi, then aged 14, and his fellow mates Kyukichi and Iwakichi, aged 15 and 28 respectively. When the trio finally made landfall at Cape Alava, in the north-western coast of North America, instead of finding food and shelter, their vessel was plundered by marauding Native Americans and they ended up as prisoners.

Traders from the Hudson Bay Company, at the time a major fur trading company headed by John McLoughlin, the Superintendent of the Columbia District of the company, received word of these castaways and sought to save them. Privately, McLoughlin saw in these Japanese sailors the opportunity to open up Edo Japan to mercantile trade.

When the three Japanese arrived at Fort Vancouver<sup>7</sup> in May 1834 after being rescued, they were welcomed with open arms by McLoughlin. After several months of exposure to the Christian faith and some





Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff was a 19th-century German Protestant missionary who evangelised to the Chinese and translated the Bible into different languages. *All rights reserved, Gützlaff, K. F. A. (1834). A Sketch of Chinese History (Vol. I). New York: John P. Haven. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*

rudimentary English lessons, the Japanese were dispatched to England in the fall of 1834. McLoughlin hoped that the British would bring the men home to Japan and, in the process, establish trade relations with this isolated country.

Otokichi, Kyukichi, and Iwakichi arrived in London in June 1835, becoming the first Japanese to set foot in England. However, they were only given one day to tour the city and were otherwise kept confined onboard their ship throughout its entire anchorage in England. When the ship finally set sail about 10 days later for the East, it was at Macau where they landed and not Japan as they had hoped.

In Macau, the trio met Reverend Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff, a linguistically gifted German Protestant missionary who was keen to evangelise the Chinese and translate the Bible into different languages. In the Japanese castaways, he saw the opportunity to translate the scriptures into Japanese. Gützlaff got Otokichi to teach him colloquial Japanese, while in return Otokichi and his comrades received English lessons from his wife Mary Gützlaff at the Macau Free School.

Otokichi is often credited for helping Gützlaff complete the first Japanese-translated portions of the Protestant Bible. The manuscript for “Yohannes’no tayori yorokobi”, or the Gospel of John, written in Japanese *katakana* script, was subsequently sent to Singapore where it was published by the Mission Press in May 1837. However, in 1838, the American Bible Society put a stop to further print-runs of the publication as the translation was deemed inadequate.<sup>8</sup> Copies of this rare publication can be found at the

British Library and the Doshisha University Library in Kyoto.

At some point, Otokichi converted to Christianity, taking on the baptismal name John Matthew Ottoson, likely inspired by his work on the Gospel of John. Otokichi’s luck subsequently turned when the American businessman Charles King invited Otokichi to board the *Morrison* on 4 July 1837 headed for Japan. However, as the ship entered Edo Bay on 30 July, it was met with unexpected cannon fire instead of a warm welcome. Japan was not ready to receive foreigners or returning Japanese who had been exposed to the “evils” of Western influence and foreign culture.

Crushed by this response, Otokichi and his comrades shaved their heads in a symbolic act to protest against their mistreatment and indicate that they would henceforth turn their backs on Japan. Thanks to his unique position, however, Otokichi continued to play the role as interlocutor between the East and the West, a task that would continue to grow in importance in the ensuing years.

In the meantime, China had preceded Japan in opening up its ports to trade. The opening of five treaty ports in China in 1842 saw Otokichi settling in Shanghai, where he gained employment at Dent and Co., a trading company that made a name for itself from China’s open trade with Britain. Otokichi was soon put in charge of the warehouse at Dent and Co. While in Shanghai he met and

married Louisa Brown, his second wife, who was of Malay and German ancestry and had family links in Singapore. He soon acquired a working knowledge of Chinese and even adopted a Chinese name, Lin Ah Tao.

At the same time, British agents continued to use Otokichi as an interpreter in their several attempts to establish trade with Japan. In 1854, soon after Commodore Matthew Perry of the US Navy had forcibly opened Japan to American ships, the British Admiral James Stirling engaged Otokichi’s help to serve as a translator to negotiate the opening of the port of Nagasaki to England. This time around, the Japanese Shogunate extended an olive branch by inviting Otokichi to return to Japan.

Still seething from his earlier rebuff, Otokichi refused, choosing instead to take up British citizenship. This was Otokichi’s reward from the British for his part in the negotiations along with a handsome monetary reward, which he used to relocate his family from Shanghai to Singapore where he purchased land.

### Otokichi in Singapore

Although most biographies of Yamamoto Otokichi note that he was a resident in Singapore from 1862 onwards, Leong Foke Meng’s 2005 book *The Career of Otokitchi* claims that the Japanese had visited Singapore as early as the late 1840s. Otokichi had helped Gützlaff purchase land in Singapore



Yamamoto Otokichi was instrumental in helping Reverend Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff, a German Christian missionary, translate portions of the Protestant Bible into Japanese during his time in Macau. The manuscript for “Yohannes’no tayori yorokobi”, or the Gospel of John, written in Japanese *katakana* script for the first time ever, was subsequently published by Mission Press in Singapore in May 1837. Saint John also figured in Otokichi’s life in other ways: when the latter converted to Christianity, he took on the baptismal name, John Matthew Ottoson. *Lane V. Erickson / Shutterstock.com*



The memorial to Yamamoto Otokichi, containing some of his cremated remains, at the Japanese Cemetery Park in Singapore. Photo by Aldwin Teo. *Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*

in May 1849 for the burial of the latter’s first wife, Mary.

By the late 1850s, Otokichi had decided to leave Shanghai, then in the throes of the Taiping Rebellion, for Singapore. Leong carefully traces paperwork which shows that Otokichi had resided initially on Queen Street before moving into one of the largest houses in Orchard Road, nestled in the midst of a vast nutmeg and clove plantation. In 1862, Otokichi’s four-year-old daughter, Emily Louisa Ottoson, by his first wife, died prematurely and was buried in Fort Canning Cemetery.

Otokichi eventually died of tuberculosis at Arthur’s Seat, a sanitarium in the

Siglap area on 18 January 1867<sup>10</sup>, at age 50, and his remains were buried at the Bukit Timah Christian Cemetery. His wife Louisa, who bore him two daughters and a son, subsequently remarried and took on the name Belder.

Nothing more was heard about Otokichi until enquiries were made in Singapore as early as 1937 on the whereabouts of his grave. In the 1960s, enquiries made by the Japanese Bible Society about Otokichi later sparked interest in his hometown of Mihama in Aichi Prefecture.

Otokichi’s townsfolk first visited Singapore in 1993 and the following year,

a musical on Otokichi’s life was performed at the Victoria Theatre. On 17 February 2005, the Mayor of Mihama, Koichi Saito, and his 120-strong entourage left Japan for Singapore with the intention of bringing Otokichi’s remains back to his hometown. Their departure coincided with the date that Otokichi had called upon the aforementioned Fukuzawa Yukichi exactly 143 years ago when the Japanese diplomatic mission enroute to Europe arrived in Singapore. As a gift to Singapore, the Mihama delegation performed *Otokichi Beat*, a song specially composed in his memory, at the Chingay parade that year.

Otokichi’s remains were subsequently exhumed and cremated, and his ashes put into three urns. One urn was placed at the Japanese Cemetery at Hougang, while the other two were brought back to Japan. One urn was sent to Ryosanji Temple in Onoura, Otokichi’s birthplace in Mihama, where gravestones had been laid in memory of the sailors on the ill-fated *Hyonjun Maru*. The last urn was given to Otokichi’s only known descendant, Junji Yamamoto, related through Otokichi’s younger sister.

The remains of Otokichi Yamamoto were finally laid to rest in his place of birth – 173 years after the intrepid 14-year-old had set sail from Japan on an unexpected adventure that took him halfway around the world. ♦

*The author would like to thank Mr Leong Foke Meng and Mr Akira Doi for reviewing this article.*

### Notes

- The shogunate was officially established in Edo on 24 March 1603 by Tokugawa Ieyasu. The Edo period came to an end with the Meiji Restoration on 3 May 1868.
- The first overseas Japanese mission visited America in 1860 and proved successful in building international ties. The second overseas mission was sent to Europe in 1862 with about 35 to 40 members in the entourage. En route, they stopped at British ports such as Hong Kong and Singapore.
- Leong, F. M. (2012). *Later career of Otokitchi* (pp. 7–9). Singapore: Heritage Committee, Japanese Association Singapore. Call no.: RSING 959.5703092 LEO
- Leong, 2012, p. 14.
- Fuchibe, T. (1972). *Oko nikki [Journal of a trip to Europe]* in Kengai shisetsu nikki sanshu [An anthology of diaries of a mission sent abroad]. Ed. Nihon Shiseki Kyokai. Vol. 98 (1972), pp. 18–19. In Kohl, S. W. (1982, January). Strangers in a strange land: Japanese castaways and the opening of Japan. *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, 73(1), 27.
- The village men raised a tombstone at the family temple in memory of the 14 they presumed had passed away that fateful day. See Plummer, K. (1991). *The shogun’s reluctant ambassadors: Japanese sea drifters in the North Pacific*. Oregon: The Oregon Historical Society, p. 248.

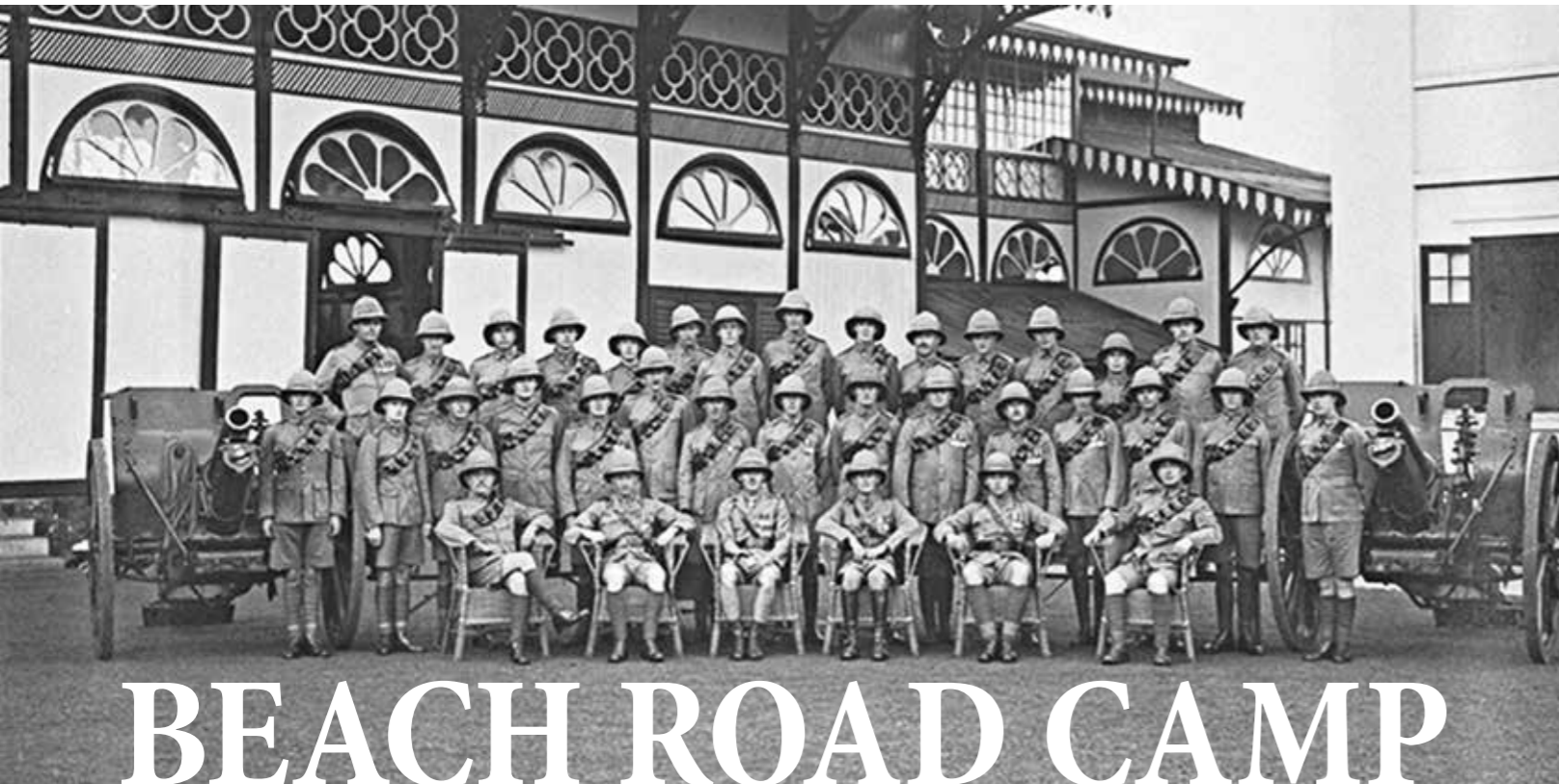
- In the 19th century, Fort Vancouver was a fur trading outpost along the Columbia River. It served as the headquarters of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s Columbia Department.
- Akira, D. (2007). *Pioneers of Japanese bible translation: The application of the Dynamic Equivalent Method in Japan* (pp. 61–63). Masters of Arts in Japanese thesis, Massey University, New Zealand.
- There is no record of the name of his first wife although she is believed to be English.
- Death date of 18 January 1867 is derived from Leong, p. 11, which references *Singapore Daily Times*, 21 January 1867.

### References

- Akira, D. (2007). *Pioneers of Japanese bible translation: The application of the Dynamic Equivalent Method in Japan*. Masters of Arts in Japanese thesis, Massey University, New Zealand. Retrieved from Massey Research Online website.
- Beasley, W. G. (1995). *Japan encounters the barbarian*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Call no.: RUR 327.52 BEA
- Cobbing, A. (1998). *The Japanese discovery of Victorian Britain: Early travel encounters in the Far West*. Richmond, Surrey: Japan Library. Call no.: RUR 914.204 COB-[TRA]
- Kohl, S. W. (1982, Jan). Strangers in a strange land: Japanese castaways and the opening of Japan. *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, 73(1), 20–28.

- Kwan, W. K. (2005, February 17). Japanese sailor going home after 173 years. *The Straits Times*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- Leong, F. M. (2005). *The career of Otokitchi*. Singapore: Heritage Committee, Japanese Association Singapore. Call no.: RSING 959.5703092 LEO
- Leong, F. M. (2012). *Later career of Otokitchi*. Singapore: Heritage Committee, Japanese Association Singapore. Call no.: RSING 959.5703092 LEO
- Lim, S. B. (Ed.). (2004). *Images of Singapore: From the Japanese perspective (1868–1941)*. Singapore: The Japanese Cultural Society. Call no.: RSING 959.57 IMA-[HIS]
- Mockford, J. (1991). The open gate of Fort Vancouver: Japan-America relations in early Pacific Northwest History. *Clark County History*, Vol. 32. National Library Board. (2008). *Yamamoto Otokichi* written by Tan, Bonny. Retrieved from Singapore Infopedia.
- Notes of the day. (1937, May 17). *The Straits Times*, p. 10. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- Plummer, K. (1991). *The shogun’s reluctant ambassadors: Japanese sea drifters in the North Pacific*. Oregon: The Oregon Historical Society. Not available in NLB holdings.
- Prewar Japanese community in Singapore: Picture and record [Senzen Shingapōru no Nihonjin shakai: Shashin to kiroku]. (2004). Singapore: Japanese Association. Call no.: RSING 305.895605957 PRE
- Tei, A. G., & Igarashi, Y. (2010). *True life adventures of Otokichi (1817–1867)*. Retrieved from JM Ottoson website.





# BEACH ROAD CAMP

## and the SINGAPORE VOLUNTEER CORPS

The SVC was the precursor of the first organised military service in Singapore and marked the beginning of a volunteer movement that would last for over a century. **Francis Dorai** has the story.

**J**ust opposite Raffles Hotel along Beach Road is the former Beach Road Camp, restored to its original glory amidst the soaring twin towers of the South Beach development. The entire strip of land opposite Raffles Hotel to its northern tip where Beach Road meets Crawford Street was reclaimed from the sea, in stages beginning from the 1840s onwards – hence its name Beach Road.

The history of Beach Road Camp is closely linked to the defence and political history of Singapore. This was where the Singapore Volunteer Corps (SVC) – the first semblance of a homegrown military force – had its headquarters at the turn of the 20th century. The SVC has a long history that

mirrors Singapore's evolution, and it is not possible to appreciate the heritage value of Beach Road Camp without understanding Singapore's military history.

### The Fortification of Singapore

In *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Walter Makepeace rues the fact that “the history of Singapore as a fortified place does not reveal any credible or consistent policy”. Stamford Raffles had approved, in a memo dated 6 February 1819, the construction of a “small fort... capable of mounting eight- or ten-pounders”, “a barracks for thirty European” soldiers, and “one or two strong batteries for the protection of shipping” on

the coast, along with a watchtower. These scant provisions in Raffles' view “render the Settlement capable of maintaining a good defence”.<sup>1</sup>

In reality, Raffles was probably too caught up with other pressing issues to pay serious attention to the fortification of Singapore. Although a skeletal police force of 17 constables had been set up as early as 1821 and its numbers beefed up in subsequent years, it soon became clear that the increasing lawlessness in the colony was too much for the police to handle. Murders and petty theft occurred on a regular basis, and Chinese secret societies and gang clashes were a constant menace. By the 1850s, there were at least 6,000 Chinese triad members looting, plundering and murdering with impunity.

### The SVC: Its Beginnings

The last straw was the violence unleashed by the horrific Chinese secret society clashes of 1854 involving the Hokkien and Teochew factions that claimed the lives of as many as 500 people and razed over 300 houses in the course of a week. What had appeared to be a minor fracas between a Hokkien and Teochew in the town market grew in intensity, and the atrocities spread to the outlying areas like wildfire, with the “heads of the dead being cut off and carried on the spears of their adversaries”.<sup>2</sup> Thousands of dollars were lost as commercial

trade in the settlement drew to a halt. As the skeletal police force was ineffective in quelling the disorder, residents and officers of ships in the harbour were roped in to help bring calm to the island.

It was clear that such security flare-ups were beyond the scope of a regular police force, so on 8 July 1854 permission was granted by the Governor of the Straits Settlements, William J. Butterworth, to form the Singapore Volunteer Rifle Corps (SVRC). There was a total of 61 members, all voluntary, mostly drawn from the European and local Eurasian communities (the latter bearing surnames like Tessensohn, Reutens and Paglar) and led by British officers. Notable Beach Road British residents like William H. Read and John Purvis were among the first volunteers and were promoted to leadership positions swiftly.

Butterworth assumed leadership as the Colonel-in-charge and Captain Ronald MacPherson of the Madras Artillery was appointed as the Commandant. The SVRC was meant to bolster the resident police force in dealing with large-scale violence and disorder, not replace it. The SVRC was the precursor of the first organised military service in Singapore and marked the beginning of a volunteer movement that would last for over 100 years.

In 1857 and 1871, the SVRC was again placed on high alert as full-scale riots by the Chinese community erupted. All this

time, SVRC members had kept themselves in top form by engaging in weapon training, drill practices and field camps. In addition, the SVRC assumed fire-fighting and ceremonial duties such as taking part in parades to mark important occasions and escorting dignitaries during their visits to Singapore.

### The SVC: 1887 to 1949

By 1887, however, the SVRC had dwindled to about half its original size, and in 1888, it was disbanded and re-organised as the Singapore Voluntary Artillery (SVA). All this while, the voluntary corps was largely European in composition. However, by 1894, there were enough Eurasians, bolstered by volunteers like J. B. Westerhout, Edgar Galistan and R. D. de Silva, to form the Singapore Voluntary Infantry No. 1 Company (Eurasian). The Straits Chinese, or Peranakans, felt there was a need to stake a claim too in the SVC, and in answer to their petitions, the Singapore Voluntary Infantry No. 2 Company (Chinese) was founded in 1901.

In 1901, these three sub-units, along with the Singapore Voluntary Rifles and Singapore Voluntary Engineers, were amalgamated under the Singapore Volunteer Corps (SVC) banner. One of the SVC's biggest roles in the following decade was the suppression of a revolt in 1915 – later known as the Singapore Mutiny, or the Sepoy Mutiny (see text box below) – by some 800 soldiers of the Indian Army against their British masters in Singapore.

**(Facing page)** Soldiers from the Singapore Voluntary Royal Artillery unit outside the Drill Hall at Beach Road Camp, 1928. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

**(Below)** William J. Butterworth, Governor of the Straits Settlements (1843–55), was the Colonel-in-charge of the Singapore Volunteer Rifle Corps in when it was formed 1854. *Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*

**(Below right)** Wealthy British merchant and Beach Road resident William H. Read was one of the first volunteers of the Singapore Volunteer Rifle Corps. *Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*



### The Singapore Mutiny

In October 1914, the British sent the Indian Army's 5th Light Infantry Regiment to Singapore to bolster the island's defences. But within four months, the company of 800 Indian soldiers, comprising mainly Muslims of Rajput origins, broke out into a bloody revolt. When the dust settled a week later, a total of 47 British officers, British residents and local civilians had been slain. The causes of the mutiny were complex, ranging from unhappiness with the British commanding officers to fears among the Muslim soldiers of being shipped out and forced to fight their brethren in Turkey. Two roads were later named in memory of the British soldiers who died in the mutiny: Harper Road and Holt Road, after Corporal J. Harper and Private A. J. G. Holt respectively.



By 1921, the SVC had two battalions with four companies each, including two British, and one each of Eurasian, Chinese and Malay volunteers, and specialist companies like artillery, engineers and field ambulance. Barely a year later, the SVC would undergo another change in structure; as part of Singapore's obligations to the Straits Settlements (comprising Singapore, Penang and Malacca), the SVC was re-organised as the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force (SSVF), joining volunteer corps from Penang and Malacca. The SVC, however, retained its identity under the SSVF umbrella, maintaining its two battalions until World War II. In the inter-war period, the volunteer forces were kept busy with recruitment and training, and were occasionally mobilised when the police force needed reinforcement.

But generally, the SVC kept a relatively low profile until World War II – when Singapore was dragged into the fray. The combined British and Allied forces, along with the SVC, were no match for the Japanese, and the “impregnable fortress” that Singapore was made out to be crumbled on 15 February 1942. The British had made a tactical error in assuming that the Japanese would invade by sea and were unprepared for the enemy's advance by land from the north. As many as 80,000 soldiers and SVC members were rounded up by the Japanese as prisoners-of-war; some were sent to Burma to work on the infamous Death Railway while others were summarily executed (about 2,000 SVC personnel were reportedly killed for their collaboration with the British).

Paul Cheah Thye Hong was only 11 years old when Singapore fell to the Japanese but the event has been permanently seared into his memory. “A few days after, the Japanese went on a witch-hunt, rounding up all male Chinese above the age of 15 for interrogation. The Chinese were targeted for their perceived loyalty to China,” he recalls. All of Cheah's four older brothers were called up, including his 22-year-old brother Thye Hean, an SSVF soldier. “Thye Hean had just returned home on the eve of the British surrender, after being instructed by his officer to discard his uniform and blend in with the civilian population”, Cheah remembers.<sup>3</sup> Unluckily, at the screening centre, Thye Hean was identified as an SSVF member by a traitor. He was bundled into a lorry with other young Chinese men, taken to a remote spot and presumably executed by the Japanese. Thye Hean's body was never found, but his name is enshrined at the Kranji War Memorial honouring the dead.



**(Above)** Medals of honour awarded posthumously to Straits Settlements Volunteer Force volunteer Private Cheah Thye Hean, who was executed by the Japanese in 1942. Thye Hean's body was never found, but his name is enshrined at the Kranji War Memorial honouring the dead. *Courtesy of Paul Cheah Thye Hong.*

**(Left)** Identity card of Captain John Evelyn Gabain, a Eurasian volunteer with the SVC in 1951. *J. E. Gabain Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

After the Japanese troops surrendered to the Allied forces in September 1945, the British returned to Singapore. But World War II had radically altered the face of global politics, and while the British were warmly welcomed as reprieve from Japanese atrocities, the conditions on the ground had changed: nationalism had been fuelled and the locals were gunning for independence. On 1 April 1946, the Straits Settlements was dissolved and the SSVF subsequently disbanded.

Post-war Singapore was a dismal scene: inflation was high, many people were jobless and angry, and there was a persistent shortage of basic essentials. Against a backdrop of political activism, the Malayan Communist Party began a struggle for power, working through the labour unions in Singapore to instigate labour unrest and strikes. In Malaya, the armed Communist struggle became serious enough for the British to declare “a state of emergency” in June 1948. With its men and resources tied up in dealing with the situation in Malaya, the British decided to revive the SVC in 1949 as a means of dealing with domestic issues of law and order.

The SVC was reorganised and its composition became more multi-racial in character – the European, Eurasian, Malay and Chinese companies were all dropped. And for the first time, locals were given key appointments within the SVC, attracting new volunteers to join the corps. This was

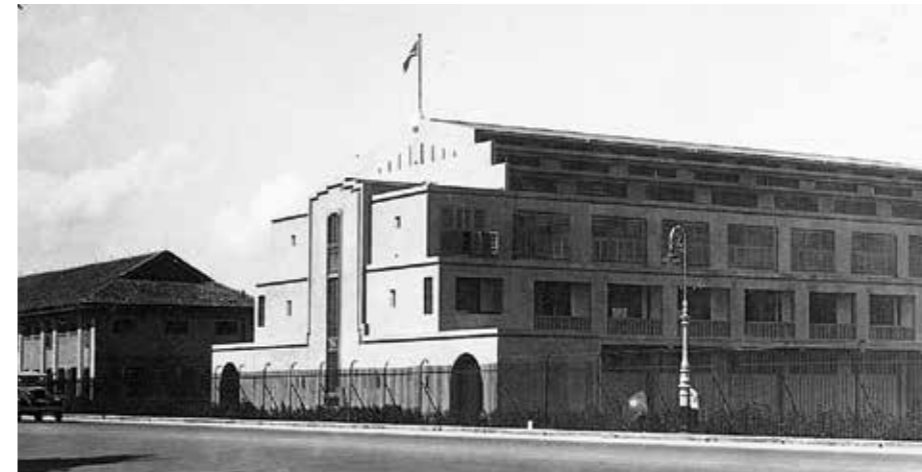
history in the making, as over time, the SVC would evolve into the modern Singapore Armed Forces.

### The SVC: Post-War Period

In the meantime, nationalistic agitations in Singapore were being whipped into a frenzy. Bowing to pressure, the British allowed for the election of six members to a new 22-member Legislative Council on 1 April 1948. This heralded the start of an 11-year struggle for self-government, resulting in the exit of the British from the Singapore political scene in June 1959.

The decade between 1948 and 1959 was a tumultuous time for the island in terms of internal security, filled with communist-instigated and racial riots as well as student and labour unrests. Both the police force and the SVC had their hands full dealing with one crisis after another. This, coupled with the shifting geopolitical landscape and concerns about external threats, led the British to pass two laws on 15 December 1953 – the National Service Ordinance, 1953, and Singapore Military Forces Ordinance, 1953. The first legislation allowed for mandatory conscription and, the second, for the formation of a military force to oversee the local volunteers and national servicemen.

Despite an outbreak of riots on 13 May 1954 by Chinese middle school students who vehemently opposed the conscription, the plans for national service went ahead.



**(Top)** The original Drill Hall was a makeshift wood-and-corrugated iron structure erected at Fort Fullerton near the entrance of the Singapore River in 1891. This would be the temporary home of the Singapore Volunteer Corps for the next 15 years. *Reproduced from a postcard donated by Prof Cheah Jin Seng, Collection of the Singapore Philatelic Museum.*

**(Middle)** In 1907, the wood-and-corrugated-iron Drill Hall at Fort Fullerton was physically moved to its new location along Beach Road and re-assembled. *Reproduced from a postcard donated by Prof Cheah Jin Seng, Collection of the Singapore Philatelic Museum.*

**(Above)** In 1933, the old Drill Hall was replaced by a permanent concrete structure designed by the colonial architect Frank Dorrington Ward. This building, Block 9, still stands today. *Courtesy of Prof Cheah Jin Seng.*

The colonial government went on a publicity blitz and notifications were sent out to all male citizens between the ages of 18 and 20. Some 24,000 young men signed up, but as the authorities could not cope with such large numbers, a public ballot was held in June 1954. A week later, the first batch of 400 recruits reported for training at Beach Road Camp. The conscripts were put through their paces by the SVC, aided by a number of British army regulars. The date 15 December 1954 marked a proud moment for these 400 soldiers as they celebrated their transition from recruits to privates at the passing-out parade held at Beach Road Camp.

At the same time, Beach Road Camp became the new headquarters of the Singapore Military Forces (SMF), which was put in charge of the training and administration of both the SVC and national servicemen for the next few years.

### Beach Road Camp: Headquarters of the SVC

Throughout its complex history and various name changes, the SVC maintained a physical presence. Its first centre – a rather modest Drill Hall of wood and corrugated iron – was built in 1891, along the shores of Fort Fullerton (today the site of Fullerton Hotel). In 1907, that structure was dismantled and moved to a strip of coastal land on Beach Road, where the Chinese Volunteer Club – headquarters of the SVC's Chinese Company – had been standing since 1904. The transplanted Drill Hall was used as the new headquarters of the SVC. This makeshift structure existed for over two decades, a reflection perhaps of the transient nature of the SVC at the time.

But all this was to change in 1930. The SVC became more entrenched, and proper space was required for both training and recreation. Construction work on the new Drill Hall – based on a design by the colonial architect Frank Dorrington Ward – began in 1931. Its location on what was prime beach-facing land at the time must have surely incensed the owners of Raffles Hotel just opposite as some of the sea views it enjoyed slowly became obscured.

The foundation stone for the new Drill Hall (Block 9) was laid on 8 March 1932 by Governor of the Straits Settlements Cecil Clementi. A year later, on 4 March 1933, the old Drill Hall was demolished and the new building, the headquarters of the SVC – or SSVF as it was known then – was declared open by Clementi and the symbolic Golden Key presented.

The architecture and facilities were something to behold at the time, with its stepped-up exterior, generous verandahs,



Art Deco detailing and a 140-ft (43-m) long column-free drill hall with a soaring 40-ft (12-m) high vaulted ceiling. The building opened up to lovely sea views on one side, although this would gradually disappear over time as more land was reclaimed from the sea. On the Beach Road side was a striking double-height narrow vertical window embellished with the SVC regimental insignia.

In subsequent years, more buildings were added to the site. The Chinese Volunteer Club (Block 1), which predates the 1907 wood-and-corrugated-iron Drill Hall, was likely expanded in later years according to historic records. Block 14 was constructed in 1939 for the Malay Company of the SVC, and the NCO Club, formerly the Britannia Club, was a 1952 addition.

### The Birth of 1 SIR

In the 1950s, the SVC was beefed up with more support units, including the Singapore Royal Artillery, Singapore Armoured Corps and the Women's Auxiliary Corps (WAC). The latter attracted both local as well as British women, and one of its most well-known local volunteers was the war heroine Elizabeth Choy.

By the early 1950s, Singapore nationalists like David Marshall, who were pressing the British for self-government, started making a case for a full-fledged regular army made up of local citizens. Marshall, who became Singapore's first Chief Minister in 1955, was himself an SVC member during World War II and was interned at Changi Prison before being sent to a labour camp in Japan. The SVC was all fine and good, the critics said, but ultimately it was an outfit set up by the British and therefore not completely independent and impartial. While the rank and file of the SVC were mainly locals, most of the officers were British, and many locals felt they were discriminated against when it came to salaries and promotions.

It was only in 1957 that the go-ahead was given to start the first independent Singapore army, laying down the foundations for the 1st Battalion, Singapore Infantry Regiment (or 1 SIR for short) – a professional fighting force of Singapore-born regular soldiers. On 15 February 1957, press announcements called for Singaporean men between the ages of 18 and 25 to apply, as long as they were “the adventurous type, fond of outdoor and rugged life, and... prepared to make the army a career”.<sup>4</sup> Some 1,420 men applied but only 237 were accepted.

Although 1 SIR was to have its base at Ulu Pandan Camp in the west of Singapore,

Beach Road Camp, the headquarters of the Singapore Military Forces, was chosen as the site of the recruitment interviews and attestation parades. On 12 March 1957, the first 22 recruits (11 Chinese, 7 Malays, 3 Eurasians and 1 Sikh) were sworn into 1 SIR by Magistrate T. S. Sinnathuray – himself a member of the SVC. Over the following months, more young men joined the army, and by October 1958, a total of 842 recruits had been sworn in at Beach Road Camp.

### End of SVC and Start of PDF

With 1 SIR and 2 SIR (the latter inaugurated in 1962) in full swing, the SVC provided an additional layer of security between 1958 and 1965. During the prickly Confrontation years with Indonesia (1963–65), soldiers from 1 SIR and 2 SIR were deployed in Borneo and Johor and, together with the SVC, protected vital installations in Singapore.

With the worst of the Confrontation over by mid-1965, Singapore found a new

problem on its hands. Having parted company with the Federation of Malaysia on 9 August 1965, it had to deal with a raft of new issues, not least of which was security.

The government therefore passed the People's Defence Force Act on 30 December that same year and the SVC was renamed the People's Defence Force (PDF). A number of SVC units were absorbed into the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) – which had been renamed from the Singapore Military Forces in 1965 – and many of the volunteer officers made the switch to the regular army. Only one battalion of volunteers remained in the new set-up: 10 Battalion PDF, which was now mooted as a citizen's army of part-time volunteers who juggled day jobs as varied as doctors and lawyers to carpenters and hawkers, and who could be mobilised for support whenever the regular army needed reinforcement.

In 1967, the government introduced compulsory full-time national service.



It realised that the cost of maintaining a sizeable full-time army of regular soldiers was too prohibitive, and relying on volunteers was not sustainable in the long term. Although the PDF was able to recruit as many as 3,200 volunteers by March 1966, the numbers petered out in subsequent years – the last intake in 1977 only saw 23 volunteers signing up. The writing was on the wall: 101 Battalion PDF (which had been renamed from 10 PDF Battalion in 1974) eventually disbanded in March 1984, bringing the curtain down on the history of the voluntary movement in Singapore.

Between 1965 and 2000,<sup>5</sup> various units of the PDF and later, the Singapore Infantry Brigade (SIB), maintained a presence on Beach Road. From 1965–68 the camp hosted the 1st Training Depot PDF and HQ SIB; from 1968–74 HQ 1st SIB; from 1974–85, HQ PDF; and from 1985–2000 HQ PDF Command – and always training an assortment of army regulars, volunteers and national servicemen. Block 14 was used as the SAF Court Martial Centre for nearly 33 years, from 1967 to 2000. It housed the Subordinate Military Court as well as the higher Military Court of Appeal, and contained within its premises a courtroom, a deliberation room, witness rooms, a holding cell and various offices for the court staff and military prosecutors.

**(Left)** National Service registration exercise in 1967. A battery of pre-enlistment health checks were conducted to ensure that all new recruits were fit enough for the rigorous military training. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

**(Below)** Group photo of the Singapore Volunteer Corps taken at Beach Road Camp, circa 1959. *David Ng Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*



### Elizabeth Choy: SVC Volunteer and War Heroine

One of the most famous SVC volunteers in the late 1950s was the war heroine Elizabeth Choy. Born in Sabah in 1910 and schooled in Singapore, Choy had a heightened sense of conscience since young. She gave up a college scholarship to work as a teacher to support her six younger siblings. During the Japanese Occupation, Choy and her husband worked tirelessly to smuggle medicine, money, letters and even radio parts to British civilians and prisoners-of-war interned at Changi Prison. Unfortunately, her husband was arrested in October 1943 and Choy herself a few weeks later. She was imprisoned and severely beaten by the Japanese over a 200-day period for being a British sympathiser. After the war, Choy was made Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) and became involved in politics and education, but it was her selfless work during the war that she is most remembered for.

Elizabeth Choy in a photo taken in 1955. Suspected of being an informant to the British during the Japanese Occupation, Choy was imprisoned and severely tortured over a 200-day period. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

On 18 February 2000, in a moving ceremony that echoed its august colonial-era opening on 4 March 1933, the same Golden Key that British Governor Cecil Clementi was presented with 67 years ago at the very same Drill Hall was handed over to the SAF for final safekeeping. In the background, a solitary trumpet played the *Last Post*, signalling the end of the day – and indeed the end of an era for a distinguished Singapore institution. ♦

*This is an abridged version of the chapter “1854–2001: History of Beach Road Camp and NCO Club” from the book South Beach: From Sea to Sky: The Evolution of Beach Road – published by Editions Didier Millet for South Beach Consortium in 2012. The S\$3-billion South Beach development, designed by the British architecture firm Foster + Partners, was launched in December 2015 and comprises a luxury hotel, offices, apartments and retail space. The four conserved buildings of Beach Road Camp have been restored and blend with the modern structures: Block 1 houses bars and restaurants; Block 9 is the hotel ballroom; Block 14 is used as meeting rooms; and the NCO Club building has been turned into a private club for hotel guests.*

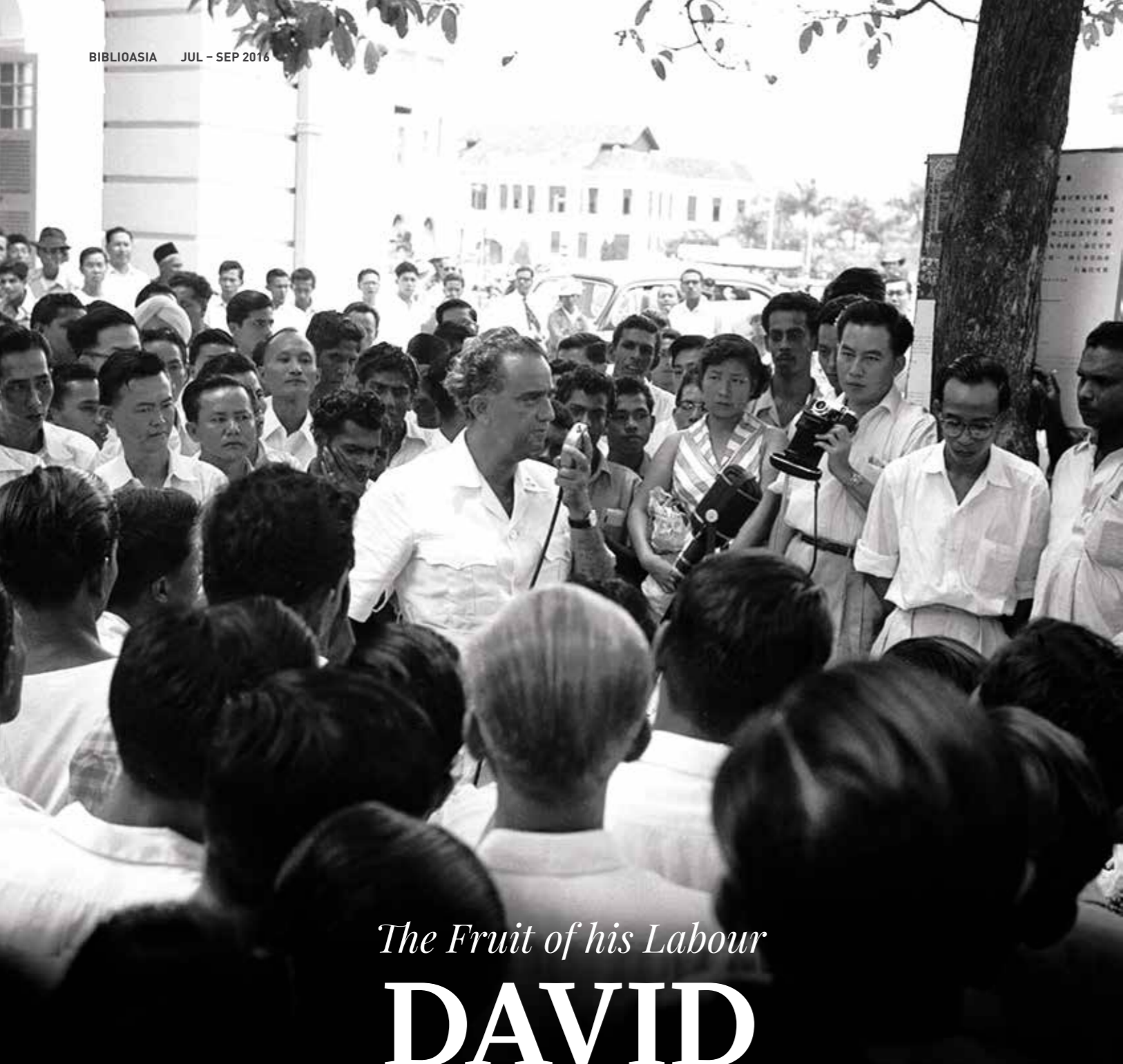
### Notes

- 1 Makepeace W., Brooke, G. E., & Braddell, R. S. J. (Eds.). (1921). *One hundred years of Singapore* (Vol. 1, p. 377). London: J. Murray. Call no.: RCL05 959.51 MAK
- 2 Makepeace, Brooke & Braddell, 1921, Vol. 1, p. 247.
- 3 Interview with Paul Cheah Thye Hong on 28 March 2012.
- 4 All set for the Singapore regiment. (1957, February 15). *The Singapore Free Press*, p. 5. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 5 Beach Road Camp was handed over to the Urban Redevelopment Authority in late 2000.

### References

- All set for the Singapore regiment. (1957, February 15). *The Singapore Free Press*, p. 5. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- Buckley, C. B. (1902). *An anecdotal history of old times in Singapore*. Singapore: Printed by Fraser & Neave. Microfilm no.: NL 269
- Gill, M. S. (1990, September). History of the Singapore Infantry Regiment, 1957–1967. *The Pointer*. Available in PublicationSG.
- Koh, J. L., & Lo, M. H. (1993). *Distinction: A profile of pioneers*. Singapore: Second Singapore Infantry Brigade. Call no.: RSING 9356.189095957 KOH
- Makepeace W., Brooke, G. E., & Braddell, R. S. J. (Eds.). (1921). *One hundred years of Singapore* (Vol. 1). London: J. Murray. Call no.: RCL05 959.51 MAK
- Savage, V. R., & Yeoh, B. S. A. (2013). *Singapore street names: A study of toponymics*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions. Call no.: RSING 915.9570014 SAV-[TRA]
- Singapore. Ministry of Defence. (2000). *Lions in defence: The 2 PDF story*. Singapore: Public Affairs Dept.: 2 PDF Command Officers' Mess. Not available in NLB holdings.
- Winstley, T. M. (1938). *A history of the Singapore Volunteer Corps, 1854–1937: Being also an historical outline of volunteering in Malaya*. Singapore: G. P. O. Call no.: RCL05 355.23 WIN





*The Fruit of his Labour*

# DAVID MARSHALL'S *Old Apple Tree*

Singapore's fiery Chief Minister used to hold court under an apple tree at Empress Place. But was it *really* an apple tree? **Marcus Ng** separates fact from fiction.

**Marcus Ng** is a freelance writer, editor and curator interested in biodiversity, ethnobiology and the intersection between natural and human histories. His work includes the book *Habitats in Harmony: The Story of Semakau Landfill* (National Environmental Agency, 2009 and 2012), and two exhibitions at the National Museum of Singapore: "Balik Pulau: Stories from Singapore's Islands" and "Danger and Desire".

**D**avid Saul Marshall (1908–95), who was born into a Jewish family of Iraqi origins in Singapore, rose to fame as the nation's first Chief Minister. He led a government that lasted a mere 14 months from 6 April 1955 to 7 June 1956. The brevity of his term – an anomaly given the subsequent dominance of the People's Action Party (PAP) – belies the symbolic break from the past that Marshall's office represented as well as the constitutional legacy that defined his tenure.

A successful criminal lawyer before he was "thrust into politics by a sense of outrage, [and] a deep sense of anger" towards colonial rule and its associated injustices, Marshall's electoral success as part of the Labour Front represented a clear departure from a political landscape that had endured 136 years of rule by fiat.

Singapore's first polls, in 1948 and 1951, had involved no more than a scant 2 to 3 percent of the population<sup>2</sup> and admitted a handful of subjects to a Legislative Council dominated by the British Governor, Franklin Charles Gimson, and his peers. The general election of 2 April 1955, however, paved the way for Singapore's first real brush with a parliamentary democracy. Held under the Rendel Constitution<sup>3</sup> that gave Singapore partial internal self-rule, the 1955 polls involved more than a quarter<sup>4</sup> of the population of 1.14 million, who voted for 25 representatives in a 32-seat Legislative Assembly. The winning party or coalition with a majority in the assembly would form a council of ministers with control over all portfolios except for external affairs, finance, internal security and defence, which were to remain in British hands.

Thanks to automatic voter registration which enfranchised a hitherto indifferent segment of the population, the 1955 election did more than just unleash a political floodtide. The results stunned the British, who had expected a comfortable romp home

by the Progressive Party, a middle-class group who preferred gentle reform to rapid independence. Instead, the Labour Front headed by Marshall, a belligerent leftist coalition firmly in favour of the latter path, plus merger with Malaya to boot, found itself sharing power with Governor John Fearnos Nicoll<sup>5</sup> (who succeeded Gimson in 1952), a man who was clearly uncomfortable with the outright cries for *merdeka* (freedom) in the august Chamber of Assembly House (later renamed Parliament House) and outside of it.

## An Office Under the Stairwell

Marshall's first days as Chief Minister set the tone for the most part of his term. Much has been made of his famous feud with Nicoll, who had assumed that Marshall would use an office in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry at Fullerton Building<sup>6</sup> across the Singapore River, as Marshall also held this portfolio. Outraged that Assembly House offered no office space for the Chief Minister, Marshall threatened to set up a chair and table "under the old apple tree" at Empress Place.

To avoid embarrassment, Chief Secretary William Goode hurriedly carved up a makeshift "cubby-hole" under the staircase<sup>7</sup>, an "office" that Marshall described as being "not more than about 14 foot long by about 12 foot wide" with "one lamp, one table, two chairs, one calendar." Marshall occupied this space, working in full view of all visitors to the Assembly House, for about a month until a general

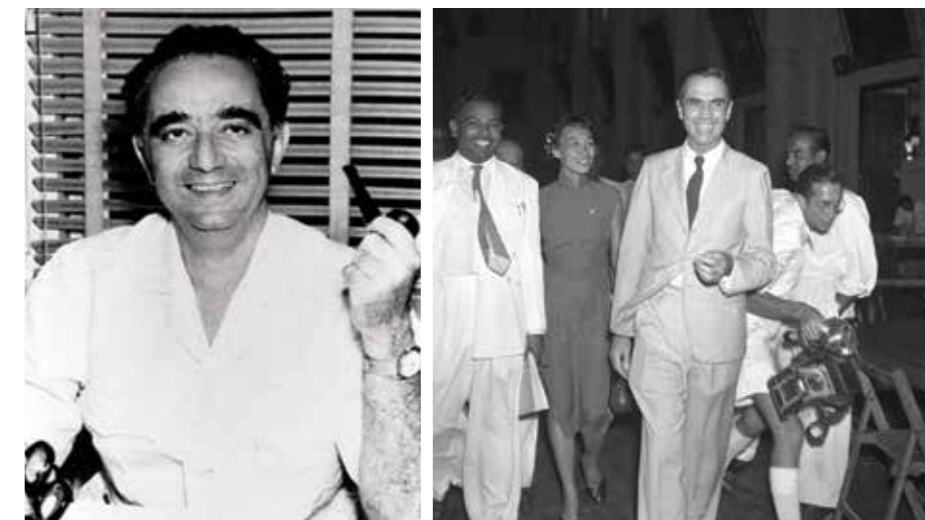
office and private quarters were prepared for him upstairs.<sup>8</sup>

## The Old Apple Tree

But what of the "old apple tree", a landmark that had become synonymous with Marshall as his preferred site for campaign speeches during the 1955 election, and where the Chief Minister addressed the people directly at rousing lunchtime rallies?

This tree served as an emblem of sorts for Marshall when he launched a political campaign in March 1955 that ended in a landslide win that few (and likely not even Marshall himself) expected. Choosing a spot by the river where Stamford Raffles first landed and flanked by the Government Offices at Empress Place – the headquarters of the Colonial Secretary, the British official who was second-in-command to the Governor – Marshall made his pitch for the Cairnhill ward. Standing under the shade of "the old apple tree", Marshall could not have chosen a better spot right in the heart of colonial Singapore to drive home his message of anti-colonialism with a socialist face.

It probably made sense for Marshall to stand beneath a sizeable tree to command his lunchtime audience. The shade would have given respite from the midday heat and encouraged the crowd to huddle under the shadow cast by the branches against the noontime sun. The resulting scenes, according to Marshall's biographer Kevin Tan, "electrified the political stage".



**[Facing page]** David Marshall addressing the lunchtime crowds under the "old apple tree" at Empress Place in 1956. Source: *The Straits Times* © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Permission required for reproduction.

**[Above]** David Marshall in a photo taken in the 1950s. Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

**[Above right]** Chief Secretary William Goode (centre) at the Victoria Memorial Hall on nomination day for the 1955 Legislative Assembly general election. Goode, who later became Governor and Singapore's first Yang di-Pertuan Negara, was captivated by the fiery speeches that Marshall made under the "old apple tree". Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.





### A Tree by Any Other Name

Was there really an apple tree at Empress Place? It doesn't take a botanist to tell you that apple trees (*Malus domestica*) do not thrive in Singapore's equatorial climate. The genus *Malus* consists of deciduous fruit trees that flourish only in the temperate zones, with southern China forming the southernmost natural limit. A real apple tree at Empress Place, even if it did not bear flowers and fruit due to the lack of seasonal triggers, would have likely attracted almost as much attention as Marshall himself, given the visual contrast to nearby vegetation and the tree's natural tendency to shed all leaves periodically.

Could Marshall's tree have been the Malay rose apple tree (*Syzygium malaccense*) that is native to Southeast Asia? This tree, also known to locals as *jambu bol* or *jambu merah*, was commonly cultivated in compounds for its edible fruit, which attract animals such as fruit bats, squirrels and birds.<sup>9</sup> The rose apple is not usually planted as a roadside tree though, as its profuse pink- and red-hued fruit tend to litter the surroundings.

A more probable candidate is *Syzygium grande* or the *jambu ayer laut*, also known as the sea apple. This large native tree grows by the coast and has long been planted as a wayside tree for shade and as a firebreak.<sup>10</sup> Many of these trees still stand in the Civic District and in housing estates, where their pompom-like blooms provide nectar<sup>11</sup> for sunbirds, flowerpeckers and butterflies, and eventually wither away to yield spherical green fruits that resemble apples.

**(Above)** An aerial view of Empress Place. David Marshall used to make his fiery lunchtime speeches under the shade of "the old apple tree" at Empress Place. The two-storey building with three arched doorways was the Marine Police Station that was demolished in the early 70s. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*  
**(Right)** The Malay rose apple (*Syzygium malaccense*) is native to Southeast Asia. Known to locals as *jambu bol* or *jambu merah*, the tree was commonly grown for its edible fruits. This is one of the paintings that William Farquhar commissioned Chinese artists to do between 1803 and 1818 when he was Resident and Commandant of Malacca. *Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*

A *Straits Times* hack (the broadsheet was no friend of Marshall's) cynically wrote shortly after Marshall's victory in 1955 that "there is a suggestion afoot that the Friends of Singapore should add the tree in Empress Place to the list of historical sites and monuments to which plaques are to be affixed, setting out the reasons why the spots deserve well in the memories of the citizens of Singapore." The reporter then recommended that the tree be renamed *Marshalliana saman* or *Enterolobium marshallense* (*Enterolobium saman* being the scientific name of the rain tree), with the qualifier that he was no botanist and the tree "might not be enterolobium at all". The tree was certainly claimed as a landmark during Marshall's tenure as Chief Minister, with *The Straits Times* including it as part of an imagined tourist itinerary for Singapore in 1956.<sup>12</sup>

Years later, in 1971, long after Marshall's retirement from politics, his former corner at Empress Place had become half-forgotten and the haunt of itinerant medicine men peddling sexual aids and pornographic images. These shifty salesmen were said to occupy a "shady sidewalk opposite the Immigration Department", which was located at the Empress Place building from 1960 until 1986.<sup>13</sup>

No tree was mentioned in the 1971 article, but in 1980, another journalist, T. F. Hwang, wrote that Marshall's tree was still standing in front of the Immigration Office at Empress Place. Hwang also laid claim

to the phrase "the old apple tree", which he coined after an old song<sup>14</sup> while reporting on a Marshall rally during his rookie days in 1955. The phrase soon gained traction and suggested that Marshall's tree was no *Malus* but rather a moniker born of a reporter's whim.

Hwang's columns offer no indication of the tree's true taxonomy, although he juxtaposed Marshall's tree with another in the area, "nearest to Cavenagh Bridge", which he identified as a bo or pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa*). This member of the fig family is usually found in the grounds of Buddhist and Hindu temples, but birds often disperse its seeds on wayside trees. The young bo tree then sends down roots that eventually reach the ground, thicken and envelop its host tree.

Curiously, another observer, F. D. Ommanney, a fisheries scientist who worked in Singapore in the mid-1950s, identified the bo, which he called "peepul", as Marshall's tree. He wrote of the Chief Minister:

"He saw [colonialism as] government by foreign bosses for foreign bosses, and saw it all the more clearly for being a foreigner himself. To this effect he thundered daily under the peepul tree, which the press called 'the old apple' tree... Mr Marshall as Chief Minister believed in the 'personal touch' and in bringing the Government to the People. To this end he held court once

a week under the peepul tree, and the masses brought their individual problems and grievances to him."<sup>15</sup>

Marshall's own account of how he began to speak under the tree is told in John Drysdale's book *Singapore: Struggle for Success*:

"In order to wake them up, I decided I would go under that tree which was then outside the Finance office, now Immigration. I called it the Old Apple Tree. It was a very tall tree, a Tembusu. There used to be a coffee store there and I asked my friend E. Z. E. Nathan to lend me his little van with a loudspeaker and I stood there at lunchtime because the clerks were there eating. I had a wonderful time. I made it loud enough so that it could be heard at the Cricket Club, the temple of British capitalism. I kept blasting away at British capitalism and British imperialism"<sup>16</sup>



A photograph from March 1956<sup>17</sup> shows Marshall addressing a crowd under his "apple tree", with his back to the distinctive arched façade of the former Marine Police Station and the Singapore Cricket Club building visible in the far background. Photographs from the 1960s<sup>18</sup> show a clump of trees<sup>19</sup> at the spot where Marshall would have stood. It is not inconceivable that this grove might have included a bo tree. The lack of detail in the 1956 image, however, makes it impossible to identify the exact tree species, but a botanist consulted for this article said it could be a *Syzygium*. Marshall's reference to the tree as a tembusu (*Fagraea fragrans*) is likely an error; the tree in the photograph has leaves that are markedly larger than those of the tembusu and the trunk lacks the latter's characteristic vertical fissures.<sup>20</sup>

The "apple tree", which had also been variously described as "in front of the Marine

Police Station"<sup>21</sup> (demolished in 1973 to make way for the Empress Place Food Centre<sup>22</sup>) or "on the spot where Raffles was supposed to have landed"<sup>23</sup>, is long gone according to Soh Beow Koon, a retired caretaker of the former Parliament House who worked there from 1954–2002. Soh, in an interview with the author of this article in October 2015, recalled that the tree stood by Empress Place close to the river.

At some point in the 1980s, Marshall's tree must have perished from natural causes or made way for urban renewal. It was not unheard of for trees in the vicinity to fall victim to disease or changing tastes: five angšana (*Pterocarpus indicus*) trees that once stood alongside the Old Parliament House were replaced by palm trees in the late 1970s, while another quintet of angšanas that gave Esplanade Park the nickname *gor zhang chiu kar* (Hokkien for "under the shade of five trees") succumbed to disease in the 1990s.<sup>24</sup> Today, the grounds of Empress Place contain neither *Syzygium* (rose or sea apple) nor bo trees. There is, however, a straggling Malayan banyan fig growing out of a sliver of soil between the white polymarble statue at the Raffles' Landing Site and the restaurants of the Asian Civilisations Museum.

As for Marshall's "old apple tree", it would have been rather fitting if it was indeed a bo tree. On 25 July 1955, during his constitutional standoff with the Governor, the Chinese daily *Chung Shing Jit Poh* referred to Marshall as a "living Buddha" and hailed his efforts to help ordinary folk. As Chief Minister, Marshall had introduced a Labour Ordinance that improved working conditions and reduced weekly hours to a maximum of 44; he also tabled a Citizenship Bill to naturalise long-time residents and pushed for the replacement of expatriate civil service officers with local staff.<sup>25</sup>

Marshall's political legacy also included weekly meet-the-people sessions – the first was held on 18 April 1955 – during which he sat with sundry members of the public in a conference room at the Assembly House to hear their woes and help them as best as he could.<sup>26</sup> Such tête-à-têtes have since become a mainstay of grassroots politics in Singapore. To be compared with the Buddha, who gained enlightenment under the shade of a bo tree, is truly a befitting testimony to a leader who valued honour over power and sacrifice above self.

The public had never "seen anyone as charismatic, as vocal, and as trenchant in his criticism of the colonial authorities."<sup>27</sup>

Goode, who succeeded Nicoll in 1957 as the last colonial Governor and later served as Singapore's first Yang di-Pertuan Negara, was himself captivated by Marshall's soap-box. He recalled in an interview in 1971:

"One of his favourite meeting places was a tree outside the front of the government offices in Empress Place. At his lunch-time meetings there 'under the old apple tree', he used to make the most absorbing exciting speeches, directed to some extent to the government officers who flocked out in their lunch hour to listen to him."<sup>28</sup>

When the election results were announced, Marshall's Labour Front emerged as the clear frontrunner with 10 seats, while the pro-British Progressive Party was in tatters, with just four seats. After learning of his triumph over the Progressive Party leader C. C. Tan, Marshall declared:

"I believe the landslide to Labour was born under that old tree in Empress Place. Now they can see who is the political baby. How I am enjoying this moment of victory. They laughed and sneered at me when I talked under the old apple tree at Empress Place."<sup>29</sup>

The Chief Minister and his cabinet – Minister for Communications and



David Marshall meeting Malay villagers in a kampong. David Marshall Collection, courtesy of ISEAS Library, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore.



Works Francis Thomas, Minister for Local Government Abdul Hamid bin Haji Jumat, Minister for Education Chew Swee Kee, Minister for Health Armand Joseph Braga and Minister for Labour and Welfare Lim Yew Hock – were sworn in on 6 April 1955. Marshall then took the added step of presenting his team to the people under “the old apple tree”<sup>30</sup>, proclaiming the line-up as “your Government” and pledging to work for “the welfare of the people of Singapore”.

The tree served as Marshall’s totem of authority. But it was also a platform for resistance. The Chief Minister’s trademark bush jacket and pants – a sartorial affront to the morning suit that was *de rigueur* for government ministers – stemmed from a campaign promise made under the “apple tree” that he would “go in as I am”.<sup>31</sup> That the Governor was aghast at Marshall’s lack of decorum only encouraged him further. Marshall’s colleague Francis Thomas took this up a notch by turning up for Legislative



(Above) David Marshall welcoming the new Governor, Sir Robert Brown Black, at Kallang Airport on 30 June 1955. In the background are Chief Secretary William Goode and Lady Black. *David Marshall Collection, courtesy of ISEAS Library, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore.*



(Above right) Campaign card used by David Marshall for the Anson by-election in 1961, which he contested and won. *Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*

Assembly sittings in a safari jacket and sandals without socks – which exposed his ankles and provoked an audible gasp in the Chamber.

### A Sensation of Merdeka

Before his first year was up, Marshall had made good on his promise to fight for self-government. To relieve the workload of his cabinet, Marshall had asked Governor Robert Brown Black (who succeeded Nicoll on 30 June 1955) on 4 July that year to appoint three junior ministers. Marshall believed the Governor was constitutionally obliged to do so but Black thought otherwise. An administrative deadlock quickly turned into a full-blown constitutional crisis as Marshall threatened to resign and force new elections.<sup>33</sup>

An emergency session of the Legislative Assembly was held on 22 July, during which Marshall read a motion calling on the British to “grant self-government at the earliest possible moment”. This motion was seconded by Lee Kuan Yew, then leader of the opposition PAP, and passed with near unanimity in the Chamber.<sup>34</sup>

As the Chief Minister’s manoeuvres, which marshalled a united front against British intransigence, gave the Colonial Office little wiggle room, it was forced to agree to an accelerated timetable towards *merdeka*. All-party talks for a self-governing Singapore were scheduled for April 1956. In the run-up to the talks in London, Marshall continued to press the point through Merdeka Week, an island-wide campaign in March that included an informal referendum, rallies and thousands of posters,

including one stating “Singapore wants Merdeka”.<sup>35</sup> Marshall personally hammered this last poster into the “apple tree”, which he likened to “the first nail into the colonial coffin.” The poster, alas, was pilfered, prompting Marshall to say: “They can steal our posters but they cannot alter our feelings.”<sup>36</sup>

Marshall resigned as Chief Minister on 7 June 1956 after the constitutional talks in London broke down over the issue of a joint defence and internal security council. “Christmas pudding with arsenic sauce,” was his acerbic verdict of the British’s final offer of a council with a British veto.<sup>37</sup> Marshall’s successor Lim Yew Hock, who broke this impasse by offering the council’s casting vote to a Malayan delegate (with the blessing of Malaya’s premier Tunku Abdul Rahman), would win self-rule for

Singapore but ultimately had to step down in 1959, having lost the popular vote for his overt suppression of leftist students and unionists.<sup>38</sup>

Marshall regarded Lim’s constitutional achievement as a “fraud” and resigned from the Legislative Assembly on 30 April 1957, triggering a by-election for Cairnhill. At least one candidate saw the “apple tree” as a mantle of sorts during the contest for Marshall’s former ward. M. A Majid, an independent, held a lunchtime meeting under it on 27 May 1957 but fled, along with his audience of 20, to shelter when rain wrecked his act. A second attempt to rally his troops a day later was foiled when the police informed Majid that his rally site was not part of Cairnhill ward.<sup>39</sup>

During the 1959 general election for a fully elected Legislative Assembly, the

PAP sought to tap on the still-resonant symbolism of the tree. But they were denied permission to hold a rally under it – public gatherings on the left bank of the Singapore River had been prohibited whenever the Legislative Assembly or Supreme Court was in session.<sup>40</sup> The PAP shrugged off this hiccup and instead held its rally across the river at Fullerton Square, a tradition that continued in the decades to come.

Meanwhile, Marshall, who had founded the Workers’ Party on 7 November 1957 and was once again contesting Cairnhill, was reported to have “deserted his old apple tree, and... canvassing quietly from house to house”. Indeed, as *The Straits Times* had declared earlier on 26 February 1957, following Marshall’s ouster from leadership in the Labour Front, “The season of the old apple tree is over”.<sup>41</sup> ♦

### Gora Singh and his Roasted Sheep

Marshall did not enjoy a total monopoly over the tree. On 25 July 1955, Gora Singh, a wrestler from India, planned a public demonstration of his eating prowess under “the old apple tree” involving the gobbling down of an entire roasted sheep. The attempt, which actually began at the steps of the Dalhousie monument, was unsuccessful as the wrestler was mobbed by the crowd before he could finish his meal.<sup>32</sup> It is not known if Singh suffered from severe indigestion as a result of this aborted feat.

(Below) David Marshall at one of his weekly meet-the-people sessions at the Assembly House, the first of which was held on 18 April 1955. *David Marshall Collection, courtesy of ISEAS Library, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore.*

(Right) David Marshall and his British-born wife Jean with two of their three daughters, Joanna and Ruth, in their arms respectively in a photo taken in January 1964. *Courtesy of Mrs Jean Marshall.*



### Notes

1 Tan, L. (Interviewer). (1984, September 24). *Oral history interview with David Saul Marshall* [Transcript of MP3 Recording No. 000156/28/02, p. 12]. Retrieved from National Archives of Singapore website.  
 2 Yeo, K. W. (1972, January). A study of two early elections in Singapore. *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (221), 61. Call no.: RCLOS 959.5 JMBRAS  
 3 National Library Board. (2009). *Rendel Commission* written by Ng, Tze Lin Tania. Retrieved from Singapore Infopedia.  
 4 Yeo, Jan 1972, p. 64.  
 5 National Library Board. (2010). *Sir John Fearns Nicoll* written by Chua, Alvin. Retrieved from Singapore Infopedia.  
 6 Tan, K. Y. L. (2008). *Marshall of Singapore: A biography* (p. 250). Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. Call no.: RSING 959.5705092 TAN-[HIS]  
 7 Marshall will come from the under stairs to his big new office soon. (1955, May 4). *The Straits Times*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

8 Singapore. Legislative Assembly. (1955, August 5). *Special report of the House Committee – Accommodation in Assembly House*. Singapore Legislative Assembly. Sessional Paper No. L.A. 7 of 1955. Retrieved from Parliament of Singapore website.  
 9 Wild Singapore. (2008, November 10). *Jambubol*. Retrieved from Wild Singapore website; Keng, H. (1990). *The concise flora of Singapore: Gymnosperms and dicotyledons* (p. 78). Singapore: Singapore University Press, National University of Singapore. Call no.: RSING 581.95957 KEN  
 10 National Parks Board. (2014, December 30). *Sea apple*. Retrieved from National Parks Board website.  
 11 Wee, Y. C. (2012, October). *Plant-bird relationship: Myrtaceae*. Retrieved from Bird Ecology Study Group website.  
 12 Cynicus. (1955, April 9). As I was saying... *The Straits Times*, p. 6; Lim, C. P. (1956, July 15). Those tourists! Is this how the future lies? *The Straits Times*, p. 15. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.  
 13 Wee, S. (1971, December 20). Sales gimmick leaves much to be desired. *New Nation*, p. 16; Immigration office. (1960, July 11). *The Singapore Free Press*, p.

4; Wong, J. (1987, December 8). Finds at Empress Place point to colourful past. *The Straits Times*, p. 16. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.  
 14 T. F. Hwang takes you down memory lane. (1980, May 24). *The Straits Times*, p. 14. Retrieved from NewspaperSG; The song Hwang thought of may have been from *Swing Your Lady*, a musical comedy released in 1938. A recording of “The Old Apple Tree” from the film can be viewed on YouTube.  
 15 F. D. Ommanney. (1962). *Eastern windows* (p. 238). London: Longmans. Call no.: RDLKL 915.957 OMM  
 16 Drysdale, J. G. S. (1984). *Singapore, struggle for success* (p. 37). Singapore: Times Books International. Call no.: RSING 959.57 DRY  
 17 Singapore Press Holdings (SPH). (1956, March 23). *Chief Minister David Marshall speaking to crowd of supporters at Empress Place* [Image of Photograph], [Online]. Retrieved from National Archives of Singapore website.  
 18 Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA). (1965, November 2). *Singapore River – Boat Quay and Marine Police Station on the right* [Image of Photograph], [Online]. Retrieved from National Archives of Singapore website.

19 Chiang, K. C. (1960). *Aerial view of Empress Place and Padang, with the clock tower of Victoria Memorial Hall and part of Cavenagh Bridge [bottom] visible* [Image of Photograph], [Online]. Retrieved from National Archives of Singapore website.  
 20 Teo Siyang, personal communication.  
 21 Arsenic and old lace – Marshall has another go at Tan. (1955, March 11). *The Straits Times*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.  
 22 Food centre to be opened soon. (1973, August 23). *New Nation*, p. 2. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.  
 23 Television Corporation of Singapore (TCS). (1956, March 21). *Chief Minister David Marshall under the apple tree* [Sound Recording], [Online]. Retrieved from National Archives of Singapore website.  
 24 Boh, S., & Look, W. W. (2015, May 7). Mature rain trees moved to Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from Factiva.  
 25 Thum, P. (2011, July). Living Buddha: Chinese perspectives on David Marshall and his government, 1955–1956. *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 39(114), 256. Call no.: RSEA 959.8 IMW  
 26 Grumble grumble – All day. (1955, April 19). *The*

*Straits Times*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG; Thum, Jul 2011, p. 264.  
 27 Tan, 2008, p. 238.  
 28 Choy, S. (1971, July 20). The last governor. *The New Nation*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.  
 29 Labour wins – Marshall will be chief minister. (1955, April 3). *The Straits Times*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.  
 30 Tan, 2008, p. 245.  
 31 Marshall likes sarongs too. (1955, April 23). *The Straits Times*, p. 4. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.  
 32 A little snack: Whole sheep. (1955, July 22). *The Straits Times*, p. 7; Gora and the sheep – another attempt. (1955, October 6). *The Straits Times*, p. 11; ‘How can I eat when you kick me around like a football?’ (1955, July 26). *The Straits Times*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.  
 33 Tan, 2008, pp. 281–287.  
 34 Tan, 2008, p. 287.  
 35 Abisheganaden, F. (1956, March 10). 7-day Merdeka Drive. *The Straits Times*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG; *Mr. David Marshall nailing a poster on a tree at Empress Place, before 1957* [Image of Photograph], [Online]. In D. Marshall. (1957),

*Singapore’s struggle for nationhood, 1945–59* (p. 45). Singapore: University Education Press. Retrieved from BookSG.  
 36 Doubts will not be removed by nailing slogans on trees. (1956, March 14). *The Straits Times*, p. 6; Mr. M’s posters stolen. (1956, March 14). *The Straits Times*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.  
 37 Lim told: Take the helm. (1956, June 8). *The Straits Times*, p. 1; The talks fail. (1956, May 26). *The Straits Times*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.  
 38 National Library Board. (1997). *Lim Yew Hock* written by Mukunthan, Michael. Retrieved from Singapore Infopedia.  
 39 Abisheganaden, F. (1957, May 1). Marshall: Final act. *The Straits Times*, p. 1; Majid has to run from rain. (1957, May 28). *The Straits Times*, p. 7; Police bar Majid from that tree. (1957, May 29). *The Straits Times*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.  
 40 PAP told: No ‘apple tree’ rally. (1959, April 15). *The Straits Times*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.  
 41 There is no putting the clock back in Singapore. (1959, May 11). *The Straits Times*, p. 6; The united front. (1957, February 26). *The Straits Times*, p. 6. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.



# Angels in White

## Early Nursing in Singapore



Nuns from the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus at Victoria Street taking care of babies abandoned at the convent, early 1900s. Many of these French nuns took up nursing duties at the General Hospital on 1 August 1885 due to the shortage of trained professionals. *Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*

In the 1820s, some “nurses” in Singapore were actually chained convicts. **Pattarin Kusolpalin** chronicles the history of nursing from 1819 until Independence.

Singapore celebrates Nurses’ Day on 1 August each year to mark the beginnings of nursing here – when French nuns from the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus first began nursing duties in the General Hospital at Sepoy Lines<sup>1</sup> in 1885. Today, there are more than 37,000 nurses and midwives in Singapore, making up more than half of its professional healthcare workforce.

Since 1 August 2000, exemplary nurses have received the President’s Award for Nurses – the highest accolade given to nurses in recognition of their tireless contributions to society. Nursing in Singapore has certainly come a long way from the early days when “nurses” were chained convicts.

### The Beginnings of Nursing: 1800s

When Stamford Raffles arrived in Singapore in January 1819, a skeletal medical team accompanied his troops. This all-male

**Pattarin Kusolpalin** is a Librarian at the National Library, Singapore. Her responsibilities include collection management, content development, and the provision of reference and information services.

detachment consisted of military doctors, apothecaries (equivalent to modern-day pharmacists), orderlies as well as dressers (who specialised in wound dressing and bandaging).

In the same year, a wooden shed was erected near the junction of Bras Basah Road and Stamford Road to treat as well as house sick soldiers. This rudimentary shed, which was rebuilt in 1821, served as a general hospital staffed by army surgeons and is regarded today as the predecessor of the Singapore General Hospital.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, access to early healthcare back then was mostly a privilege that only colonial administrators and the military enjoyed; the indigenous people and immigrants were largely left to fend for themselves.

As there were no nurses at the time, basic “nursing” at the hospital was carried out by unwilling chained convicts.<sup>3</sup> As the convicts moved around the wards, the

awful clank and clatter of their metal chains dragging on the floor and banging against furniture did not provide much comfort to the patients.

The establishment of a British trading outpost by Raffles in Singapore soon led to its development as a port. As Singapore’s reputation grew and more people arrived on the island to trade and to seek better prospects, there grew an urgent need to provide medical facilities for residents. The available healthcare was very basic and the situation was made worse by the lack of qualified medical personnel. There were no local physicians and those who served in Singapore were mainly military doctors posted from either Britain or India.

Between the 1820s and 80s, the General Hospital moved locations several times and assumed different names while private hospitals like the Chinese Pauper’s Hospital (which later became Tan Tock Seng Hospital) was constructed to meet the growing demand for healthcare. These “hospitals” offered very basic medical facilities for the sick and were nowhere near the modern definition of hospitals as we know them today.

The main challenge of these hospitals was to recruit qualified staff – a problem the profession would continue to face in the decades to come. At the makeshift General Hospital in the Bras Basah and Stamford Road area, the fully occupied apothecaries, orderlies and dressers had to cover “nursing” duties in addition to their own work. Apart from forced convict labour, servants and even fellow patients were roped in to provide care for the sick and infirm.

As the female population increased and hospitals began admitting women, requests for female carers arose. Before the 1850s, women did not go to hospitals and received their treatments at home. It was unheard of to give birth in a hospital as most women preferred to undergo the process of childbirth in the privacy of their own homes. One can imagine the difficulties female patients and their male healthcare assistants faced in those days – this was the time when any form of physical contact between members of the opposite sex was frowned upon.

In 1856, the post of a female attendant was included in the plan for the new General Hospital and Lunatic Asylum in Kandang Kerbau district, but it was not approved. In 1861, when the hospital was completed, the Residency Assistant Surgeon, Dr James Cowpar, suggested that “one of the convicted women should be attached to the Ward as a nurse”.<sup>4</sup> Although records show that the

General Hospital at Kandang Kerbau was treating women for gynaecological problems and providing childbirth services by 1866, there was still no female attendant working there. Instead, male convicts were made to serve the female wards at this hospital as well as its adjacent Lunatic Asylum.

In January 1867, the colonial administration finally approved the request for a female attendant to work in both institutions. One can imagine the heavy workload of Singapore’s very first female “nurse”, having to run between the two premises, and earning a measly monthly wage of 22 rupees. Nevertheless, this was a significant event in Singapore’s nursing history, marking the first time a female employee was employed in the Medical Department.

In 1873, an outbreak of cholera occurred at the Lunatic Asylum at Kandang Kerbau, and patients at the General Hospital next door were evacuated to temporary premises at Sepoy Lines, located in the area around the junction of Outram Road and New Bridge Road. On 1 August 1882, the new General Hospital replaced the old buildings at Sepoy Lines. Although the inclusion of British-trained professional nurses had been suggested as part of its staffing, the recommendation was not implemented as the hospital administrators felt it would be difficult to recruit such nurses to work in Singapore. Until then, “nursing” tasks were performed largely by hospital servants, while the more serious cases were supervised by the general staff, with the assistance of more able patients.

The 1883 Medical Report submitted by Dr Max F. Simon, Surgeon in Charge of the General Hospital at Sepoy Lines, to Dr T. Irvine Rowell, its Principal Civil Medical Officer, highlighted that the “two great drawbacks to satisfactory treatment of patients

are the inferior quality of the native servants and the absence of proper nursing”. The report also recommended that the General Hospital employ “a Matron and two Nurses”.<sup>5</sup> The government agreed that the General Hospital was in dire need of trained nurses and better nursing facilities. Faced with difficulties in recruiting nurses from Madras and England, the government had to find an alternative solution. The proposed plan was to train the French nuns from the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus – viewed as the only educated and qualified European women in Singapore then – who were prepared to undertake this selfless work.

The proposal was immediately met with objections by some segments of the public. Led by European residents, a petition was submitted to the government. Nursing at the time was considered as charitable work and perceived to be very much part of one’s religious beliefs. As the nuns were Roman Catholics, there were fears that their loyalties would lie with the Catholic Church instead of the government and that medical services in the country would eventually be taken over by the Catholic bishop. In addition, there were concerns among some conservatives about placing the nuns in close physical contact with male patients, or people of different religious faiths, even when it concerned saving lives.

Despite vehement protests, the government went ahead and appealed to the convent. Thankfully, common sense prevailed and the nuns began their nursing duties at the General Hospital on 1 August 1885.<sup>6</sup> This date officially marks the beginnings of nursing in Singapore.

In 1896, the Colonial Nursing Association was formed in England to see to the nursing needs of the British colonies. In August the same year, it was reported that

A male attendant in a ward of the old Tan Tock Seng Hospital. As the first professionally trained nurses did not arrive in Singapore till 1900, male attendants took care of patients. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*





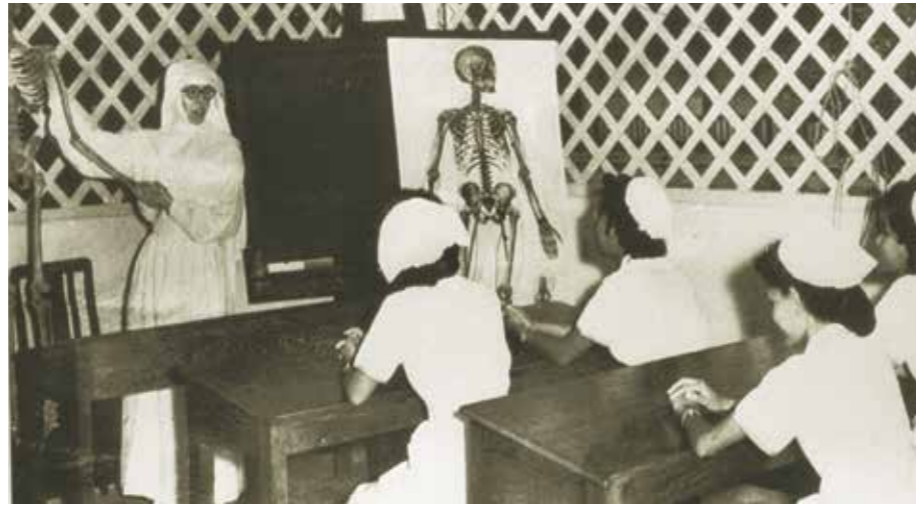
the Shanghai Municipality had employed trained nurses from England. The hospital in Kuala Lumpur also had British-trained nurses since December 1895 in its workforce. This news and similar reports piqued public interest, including that of Lady Mitchell, wife of Governor Charles Bullen Hugh Mitchell, who was most concerned over the care of patients in government institutions.

The following years saw many public letters, newspaper editorials and meetings that emphasised the need for professionally trained nurses. In 1899, *The Straits Times* accepted subscriptions and donations to fund the recruitment of nurses from England.<sup>7</sup> The public donated generously. By May 1900, the French nuns had withdrawn from their nursing duties at the General Hospital, and in the same month, four qualified nurses arrived from England and took over the care of the patients.

### Later Developments: 1900–40

The minimum entry requirement for nursing school in the early 1900s was the completion of the Junior Cambridge Examination. The very fact that trained nurses had to be recruited from overseas highlighted the dismal state of education among local women in Singapore. Most women in those days were confined to traditional domestic roles – as daughters, wives and mothers – and generally did not receive much education.

However, by the end of 1903, all the four qualified nurses from England had left their posts for various reasons: a transfer out of Singapore, marriage, ill health or completion of their three-year contracts. Although they were replaced by other expatriates, the pool of trained nurses remained largely stagnant. Subsequent arrivals succumbed to



A nun from the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood conducting an anatomy class for nurses at the Mandalay Road Hospital in 1950. *School of Nursing Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

illnesses such as tuberculosis and malaria as they were unused to working in a tropical country. In 1911, for instance, seven out of 10 Sisters and six out of 13 Nurse Probationers were admitted to hospital.

Maternal and child health was not a major concern of the colonial government in the early years of the 19th century as the migrant population was mainly male and the local Malay community had their own birth practices. It was not until 1888 that the first eight-bed maternity hospital was set up at the junction of Victoria Street and Stamford Canal. The hiring of a qualified midwife named Mrs. R. Woldstein that year is the first record of a trained midwife in Singapore.

In 1908, the infant mortality rate was 347.8 per one thousand live births, with almost 60 percent of deaths occurring during the first three months of birth. To give a sense of how far we have come, Singapore's

infant mortality rate in 2015 was 1.7 per one thousand live births.

With rising concerns over the high infant mortality rate, Miss J. E. Blundell from England was appointed as Municipal Nurse<sup>8</sup> in October 1910 and tasked to investigate early life conditions of infants. The findings confirmed that poor infant feeding was the main contributor to infant mortality. Miss Blundell was subsequently asked to instruct local mothers on the proper care of their

### Singleton Nurses of the 1920s

The nursing profession, as most people will readily admit, is one of the toughest in the world; it is a calling that requires dedication and a certain steadfastness of spirit. While nurses today face many challenges on a daily basis, it was much worse back in the 1920s. Nurses were expected to perform six weeks of continuous morning and afternoon shifts, followed by two weeks of night duty. Rest days were scant: student nurses were given one off day per month, while staff nurses had two days. Nurses were also required to live in hospital quarters and have their meals there. Each staff nurse was entitled to her own bedroom, whereas student nurses had to share a room with two other fellow students. Perhaps the most draconian ruling was that nurses working in government hospitals in the 1920s were not allowed to get married. We do not know how long this rule was enforced, but it is little wonder that the profession had difficulties attracting women.



To bring festive cheer to the patients, wards at the General Hospital were decorated with Christmas trimmings, circa 1930s. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*



This 1950 photo shows a midwife weighing a newborn baby at home. As hospital beds in maternity hospitals were in short supply in the 1950s, women were discharged 24 hours after their babies were born. Midwives would visit these new mothers at their homes to provide postnatal care. *School of Nursing Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

### Early Midwifery and the Bidan

Prior to the arrival of the British, women in Singapore had their own birth rituals and customs. As the population was mainly Malay, home births were handled by the *bidan*, usually a well-respected female member of the community. These traditional Malay midwives acquired their skills and knowledge from older, more experienced *bidan*, and in turn, imparted their knowledge to other women. It was expected of a practising *bidan* to have gone through pregnancy and childbirth herself.

In Singapore, midwifery training started earlier and advanced more rapidly than general nursing. Commencing in 1896, midwifery training was reserved only for married women until 1901, when three unmarried midwives passed the examination. In the early days, all midwives and probationers were of European ancestry; it was not until 1910 that the first course for Asian midwives kicked off. Malay *bidan*, however, preferred to stick to their own training programme that followed time-honoured Malay customs and traditions.

infants and young children. Her findings led to the start of a regular midwifery course for local women in 1910, with proper instruction and licensing of midwives. That year marked the beginning of the Maternal and Child Health Service in Singapore.

One of the earliest records of a healthcare outreach programme in Singapore was in 1911 when infant welfare nurses made house visits to inspect the living conditions of infants and to advise young mothers. The results were significant: Singapore's infant mortality rate fell to 267 per one thousand live births in 1912. In 1915, the Midwives Ordinance was passed to recognise certified midwives and require their compulsory registration in the Straits Settlements by the Central Midwives Board.

When World War I broke out in July 1914, many British nurses volunteered for service in the Armed Forces in England, including Miss M. J. McNair, then the Head Nurse<sup>9</sup> of the General Hospital at Sepoy Lines. While all this was perfectly laudable

of course, it put a severe strain on the existing nursing staff in Singapore, and it became extremely difficult to find replacements for nurses who left the country.

The shortage of qualified nurses had been a perennial problem since the concept of healthcare first emerged in Singapore. Although there had been attempts at providing some form of training for local nurses in hospitals since the 1880s, it was rather haphazard; the training was mostly unstructured and whatever nurses learnt was very much on-the-job. It was only in 1916, when St Andrew's Mission Hospital started a General Nurse Training course for local girls – adopting the established British curriculum for training and education – did coaching in Singapore take on a more formal and organised approach.

The student nurses, who were recruited on an apprenticeship model, were sent directly to the hospital wards to work and receive on-the-job training. Learning was through observation,

following instructions and assisting the staff nurses, sisters and doctors. Expatriate nurses assumed the training and supervisory roles, with the local nurses working under them.

Despite the concerted efforts, the nursing staff in 1921 consisted of just 16 trained nurses and 36 probationers in the government service. In the same year, there were only one staff nurse and three probationers at the St Andrew's Mission Hospital. Attrition was mainly due to resignations from nurses who sought better opportunities elsewhere.

In 1922, the St Andrew's Mission Hospital revised its nurse training curriculum: student nurses were put on a three-month probationary period, followed by a three-year course in General Nursing and Midwifery with examinations taken at the end of each year.

In 1924, the General Hospital at Sepoy Lines commenced its four-year General Nursing and Midwifery training programme. After six months in the programme, it was compulsory for student nurses to attend weekly lectures conducted by senior doctors and matrons as well as sit for the annual examinations. If the student nurses passed the final examination at the end of the third year, they would proceed to do a one-year midwifery training course at either the maternity block (opened in 1908) of the General Hospital at Sepoy Lines or Kandang Kerbau maternity hospital (which was converted into a specialist maternity hospital in 1924). Upon completion of the four-year programme, successful candidates received certification and were promoted to staff nurses.

In 1926, Singapore's first public health nurse, Miss I. M. M. Simmons from Scotland, was employed to provide infant and maternal health services to mothers and infants in rural areas. As a result of her recommendations, a mobile dispensary was introduced the following year. The medical team consisted of a doctor, dresser and nurse who made daily trips to rural areas. In addition, nurses were involved in various outreach activities to educate school children and the general public on hygiene and basic health. Local nurses also gained recognition when the first Asian nursing sister in Singapore, Mrs. M. E. Perera, was appointed in 1937 by the St Andrew's Mission Hospital. This was the first time an Asian was deemed to be on par with expatriate nurses and qualified to lead.

### World War II to Independence: 1940s–65

The outbreak of World War II and the fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942 brought a



halt to the development of nursing, as with most other things, in Singapore. Nurses were allowed to leave the hospitals. Those who opted to remain were transferred to the Mental Hospital (the predecessor of Woodbridge Hospital, better known as the Institute of Mental Health today) at Yio Chu Kang, together with the patients. During the Japanese Occupation, all nurses were required to attend Japanese-language lessons held in the hospitals on top of their regular lectures. Many nurses continued to serve valiantly throughout the difficult war period. With the departure of the Japanese forces after the war and the return of the British, the General Nurse Training course was reintroduced in 1946.

World War II helped to change public perception of local nurses. In January 1947, the government promoted locally trained nurses to the rank of Sister, creating opportunities for them to rise to supervisory and administrative posts. The nurses, many of whom made positive contributions during the Occupation years and survived the war, were more confident of their abilities now and lobbied for their certification to be recognised in the UK and the Commonwealth as well as internationally. In February 1949, the Nursing Registration Ordinance was

passed, requiring all nurses to be registered or admitted by examination.

While the post-war demands for nurses soared, the recruitment of student nurses was still abysmal mainly due to the lack of local women with the required level of education. To ease the shortage, nurse training for males was introduced in 1948. Existing male students from the Hospital Assistants training programme were transferred to this new course. In addition, the Catholic religious community came forward once again: nuns from the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood – many of whom were trained nurses and midwives – volunteered their services at the Tan Tock Seng Hospital between 1949 and 1962.

The early 1950s saw recruitment efforts being ramped up, with better prospects, training and promotion opportunities for nurses. Nursing was also portrayed in the media as a respectable career. The marketing efforts paid off and the number of student nurses grew considerably. But demand always seemed to outstrip supply and the nursing shortage persisted.

On 1 March 1951, the Assistant Nurse Training course was started at Tan Tock Seng Hospital to provide a bigger pool of trained nursing professionals. The course

offered a path towards a career in nursing for girls without the required level of education and admitted students with Standard VII<sup>10</sup> qualifications.

The new School of Nursing, managed by the Singapore General Hospital, opened at Sepoy Lines in 1956. With an increase in the number of nurses, it became necessary to both document and implement proper nursing procedures. Towards this end, a Nursing Education Committee was set up in 1958 to oversee and regulate the various nursing training programmes. In 1959, the first *Handbook on Nursing Procedures* was published.

This period saw great strides being made to raise the status of nursing in Singapore. The Singapore Trained Nurses' Association (today known as the Singapore Nurses Association) was founded in 1957 to promote the advancement of nursing as a profession, and in 1959 and 1961 respectively, the association was granted associate and full membership by the International Council of Nurses. Finally, Singapore nurses had attained the international recognition they deserved.

Nurses' Week was celebrated for the first time in Singapore in May 1965. Held annually for nearly two decades,

regular check-ups, free milk, referrals to hospitals, lectures and counselling. By the time Simmons retired in 1948, there were 15 full-time centres.

In 1934, Simmons was promoted to Public Health Matron for rural Singapore. During the Japanese Occupation of Singapore (1942–45), Simmons was interned at Sime Road Camp. After the war, she began rebuilding infant health services, which had been neglected under the Japanese. Infant mortality had worsened but the damage was soon reversed and services were extended to the small outlying islands of Singapore.

Simmons retired to England in 1948, after having overseen a drop in the infant mortality rate from 263 deaths per 1,000 babies in 1927 to an exceptional record of 57 deaths per 1,000 babies that year. This was a feat especially when viewed against the backdrop of a rising birth rate. She later moved to Scotland, where she died in 1958.

*Extracted from Singapore Infopedia: National Library Board. (2013, March 25). Ida Simmons written by Sutherland, Duncan. Retrieved from Singapore Infopedia.*



In 1927, Singapore's first public health nurse, Ida M. M. Simmons from Scotland, was employed to provide infant and maternal health services to mothers and infants in rural areas. *All rights reserved, Ministry of Health. (1997). More than a Calling: Nursing in Singapore Since 1885 Singapore: Ministry of Health.*

### Ida Simmons: Singapore's First Public Health Nurse

Ida M. M. Simmons was Singapore's first public health nurse. Fresh off the boat from Scotland, she joined the Straits Settlements Medical Department in December 1926 and was tasked with introducing infant and maternal health services in rural Singapore, an area then covering almost half the island.

In 1927, some 263 out of every 1,000 babies in Singapore died in their first year, while among rural Malays the number was almost 300 per 1,000 births. Simmons learned Malay and set out to visit every *kampong* (village) to uncover the extent of the problem. The health department launched a mobile dispensary to make her work easier. The vehicle travelled the rural byways and parked nearby while Simmons and her team made house calls, sending those needing medical attention to the dispensary or summoning the accompanying doctor to the house.

Simmons and her staff earned the patients' trust through their home visits and by 1930, formal welfare centres had been established. These centres focused on education and prevention, and provided



the programmes and activities organised during the week-long affair included graduation ceremonies for nurses and midwives, concerts, exhibitions, blood donation drives and charity fundraising projects. Nurses' Week was changed to Nurses Day in 1985.

Unlike most other countries, which celebrate Nurses Day on 12 May, the birthday of Florence Nightingale, Singapore

**(Above left)** Children receiving medical treatment from a mobile dispensary in 1951. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

**(Above right)** Nurses visiting a village in 1957 to carry out an inoculation exercise. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

celebrates Nurses Day on 1 August as it commemorates the exact date 131 years earlier when a group of French nuns in Singapore answered the call to become nurses – despite their lack of training

and experience, and in the face of much public objection and protests. The nursing profession today has grown exponentially since 1965, but that subject is material for another article of its own. ♦

### Notes

- 1 Sepoys were Indian soldiers recruited by the European colonial powers, including the British. Sepoy Lines refers to the area around the junction of Outram Road and New Bridge Road where the barracks for the sepoys were once located. The General Hospital moved to this area in 1882.
- 2 The General Hospital relocated several times and was known by different names until its final move to Sepoy Lines in the Outram area in 1882. New buildings were subsequently added to the existing ones at Sepoy Lines and the new hospital opened in 1929 as the Singapore General Hospital.
- 3 Singapore was once a penal colony for convicts from India, Hong Kong and Burma. The first shipment of Indian prisoners arrived in Singapore in 1825 via Bencoolen in Sumatra.
- 4 The "Ward" referred to the planned female ward of Tan Tock Seng Hospital. The term nurse at this point still referred to any female attendant providing care to the sick, and not a professionally trained nurse.
- 5 Medical report for 1883. (1884, April 12). *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, p. 5. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 6 As the nuns did not have proper training, their duties were limited to cooking, cleaning and following medical instructions.
- 7 The Strait Times Committee of Subscribers, formed in 1900, was responsible for funding the British nurses' employment.
- 8 Miss J. E. Blundell was previously employed in the Native States. Her monthly salary in Singapore was 100 Straits dollars and came with a travelling allowance not exceeding 25 Straits dollars.
- 9 The Head Nurse was in charge of the nursing staff. The term was later changed to Matron.
- 10 During that time, Standard IX was the equivalent of today's GCE 'O' Levels. Standard VII was equivalent to present-day Secondary 2.

### References

Edwards, N., & Keys, P. (1996). Singapore: A Edwards,

- N., & Keys, P. (1988). *Singapore: A guide to buildings, streets & places* (pp. 340–341). Singapore: Times Books International. Call no.: RSING 959.57 EDW-[TRA]
- Fildes, V., Marks, L., & Marland, H. (Eds.). (1992). *Women and children first: International maternal and infant welfare, 1870–1945*. London: Routledge.
- Government of Singapore. (2016, May 26). *Latest data*. Retrieved from Singapore Department of Statistics website.
- Gwee, M. B., & Ang, R. (1991). Trends in nursing education in Singapore. *The professional nurse: A Quarterly Publication of the Singapore Trained Nurses' Association*, 18(3), 17. Call no.: RSING 610.73095957 PN
- Lee, C. E., & Satku, K. (Eds.). (2016). *Singapore's health care system: What 50 years have achieved* (p. 169). Singapore: World Scientific. Call no.: RSING 362.1095957 SIN
- Lee, Y. K. (1985 February). The origins of nursing in Singapore. *Singapore Medical Journal*, 26(1), 53–60. Retrieved from Singapore Medical Association website.
- Lee, Y. K. (2005, November). Nursing and the beginnings of specialised nursing in early Singapore. *Singapore Medical Journal*, 46(11), 600–609. Retrieved from Singapore Medical Association website.
- Legislative Council. (1884, December 6). *Straits Times Weekly*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- Lim, M. (1966). The maternal and child health services in Singapore. *Journal of the Singapore Paediatric Society* 8(1), 29–41. Call no.: RSING 618.92 JSPS
- Makepeace, W., Brooker, G. E., & Braddell, R. S. J. (Eds.). (1991). *One hundred years of Singapore*. Singapore: Oxford University Press. Call no.: RSING 959.57 ONE-[HIS]
- Medical report for 1883. (1884, April 12). *Straits Times Weekly*, p. 5. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- Midwives and nurses in jog to raise \$40,000. (1985, May 1). *The Straits Times*, p. 11. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- Mudliar, V., Nair, C. R. S., & Norris, R. P. (Eds.). (1979). *Development of hospital care and nursing in Singapore*. Singapore: Ministry of Health. Call no.: RSING 610.73095957 MUD

- Municipal commission. (1910, August 6). *The Straits Times*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- Municipal nurses. (1896, August 19). *The Straits Times*, p. 2. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- Municipal Singapore. (1909, November 17). *The Straits Times*, p. 6. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- National Library Board. (2010). *Singapore General Hospital (SGH)* written by Naidu, Ratnala Thulaja. Retrieved from Singapore Infopedia.
- Page 7 Advertisements Column 1. (1887, August 12). *The Straits Times*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- Singapore. Ministry of Health. (1997). *More than a calling: Nursing in Singapore since 1885*. Singapore: Ministry of Health. Call no.: RSING 610.73069 MOR
- Singapore Nurses Association. (2015). *Our history*. Retrieved from Singapore Nurses Association website.
- Singapore Nursing Board. (2016). Retrieved from Singapore Nursing Board website.
- Tan, K. H., & Chern, S. M. (2002). Progress in obstetrics from 19th to 21st centuries: Perspectives from KK Hospital, Singapore – the former world's largest maternity hospital. *The Internet Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics*. 2(2). Retrieved from Internet Scientific Publications website.
- Tan, K. H., & Tay, E. H. (Eds.). (2003). *The history of obstetrics and gynaecology in Singapore*. Singapore: Obstetrical & Gynaecological Society of Singapore: National Heritage Board. Call no.: RSING 618.095957 HIS
- The local nurse. (1951, April 4). *The Straits Times*, p. 6. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- Tong, Y. T., & Narayanan, S. (2015). *Caring for our people: 50 years of healthcare in Singapore*. Singapore: MOH Holdings Pte Ltd for the Ministry of Health. Call no.: RSING 362.1095957 TON
- Yeoh, B. S. A., Phua, K. H., & Fu, K. (2008). From colony to global city: Public health strategies and the control of disease in Singapore. In M. J. Lewis & K. L. Macpherson (Eds.), *Public health in Asia and the Pacific: Historical and comparative perspectives*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge. Call no.: R362.1095 PUB



# BEST NON-FICTION BOOK OF THE YEAR 2016



*Through the Lens of Lee Kip Lin: Photographs of Singapore 1965-1995* – a pictorial book published by the National Library Board in partnership with Editions Didier Millet – clinched top honours recently in the non-fiction category at the Singapore Book Awards. A total of eight awards, which recognises the best in Singapore's publishing scene, were given out on 11 May 2016.

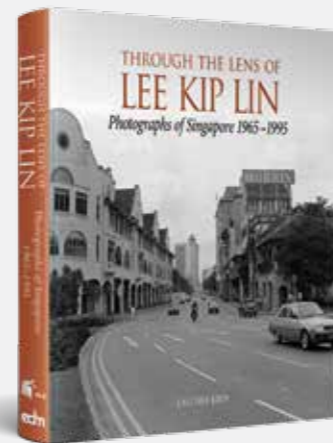
Written by architectural historian, Dr Lai Chee Kien, the 208-page hardcover book contains nearly 500 photographs that depict varied architectural forms that were prevalent in Singapore between 1965 and 1995 – many of which have since disappeared from our landscape. These are not pretty pictures that will win awards for creative photography, but they represent an important documentation of Singapore's built heritage during a period when its physical landscape was undergoing dramatic changes.

The mostly black and white photos are part of a 14,500-strong collection of slides and negatives of modern Singapore that the late Lee Kip Lin painstakingly photographed over three decades. This and other historical treasures such as maps, rare photographs and prints, and books were donated by Lee's family to the National Library in 2009.

Prominent architect Tay Kheng Soon describes *Through the Lens of Lee Kip Lin* as a "must-read document that captures the qualities and textures of Singapore's building and landscape heritage", while avid bibliophile Professor Tommy Koh says that reading the book has made him "more determined to conserve our historic buildings, places and neighbourhoods".

## About Lee Kip Lin

Lee Kip Lin (1925–2011) was an architectural historian, educator and professional architect. After graduating from University College of London's Bartlett School of Architecture in 1955, he returned to Singapore to practise, and later, teach architecture at the Singapore Polytechnic from 1961, and at the University of Singapore from 1969. As a member of the Preservation of Monuments Board, he advocated many efforts to conserve buildings and historic districts in Singapore. Lee also wrote several books on architectural and urban heritage in his lifetime, among them the seminal work *The Singapore House* (1988, reprinted 2015).



*Through the Lens of Lee Kip Lin: Photographs of Singapore 1965-1995* (hardcover, 208 pp) is published by National Library Board and Editions Didier Millet and retails at \$42. Lee's other seminal book *The Singapore House: 1819-1942* (hardcover, 232 pp), reprinted in 2015 by National Library Board and Marshall Cavendish Editions, is priced at \$46.70. Both books are on sale at major bookshops and online retailers such as Amazon and Book Depository. All prices quoted exclude GST.

Both books are available for loan and reference at the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library and branches of all public libraries.



**(Right)** Three-storey Meyer Apartments (1970), built in 1928 by the Jewish businessman Manasseh Meyer on Meyer Road in the eastern part of Singapore. These since demolished flats were among the earliest in Singapore.

**(Below)** Godown at Boat Quay (1967) belonging to Tan Kim Seng, a wealthy Hokkien merchant who migrated from Malacca to Singapore. Boat Quay took on a completely different character after it was gentrified in the mid 1980s.





# INDEX TO SINGAPORE INFORMATION

This useful index serves as the gateway to Singapore-related articles published in periodicals. **Leong Hui Chuan** and **Chris Tang** explain its value.

Have you ever had difficulty trying to recall an article you read in a magazine or journal but simply cannot remember the title of the article, or worse the name of publication? Fret not because with the National Library Board's (NLB) new Index to Singapore Information (ISI), you can now search for articles about Singapore using selected keywords.

ISI is a collection of index records describing articles on or related to Singapore – or written by Singaporeans – in periodicals published in Singapore and overseas. (Note: ISI does not provide full-text access to the articles.)

As part of preparatory work for the ISI project, NLB librarians sieved through the library's collection of periodicals for Singapore-related articles and then created an index record for each article to facilitate its search. Each index record includes key descriptions of the article, such as its title, author, subject, abstract, page numbers and the periodical title. With the ISI, there is no need to browse through physical copies of magazines and journals to look for specific articles. All the customer needs to do is access the ISI database and use the keyword search to locate articles on Singapore.

NLB's existing online catalogue provides only basic information such as the periodical title, and volume and issue numbers, but not bibliographic details of the articles found in the periodicals. With ISI, NLB has improved the discovery of Singapore-related information by providing access to a rich digital database of indexed articles that would otherwise remain "hidden" within the periodicals. In essence, ISI aims to be the first-stop access point for Singapore-related articles published in academic and research journals and government periodicals, as well as lifestyle and entertainment magazines.

Since April 2016, the ISI database can be accessed from NLB's OneSearch portal at [search.nlb.gov.sg](http://search.nlb.gov.sg). The database currently contains almost 72,000 index records of English and vernacular-language articles from about 500 periodicals published since 1847 – and it is growing by the day.

### A Tool for Both the Popular and the Academic

The ISI includes popular magazines such as *Her World*, *8 DAYS* and *Singapore Tatler*. These magazines are usually not indexed by commercial databases whose primary focus is on academic and research journals. Moreover, much of the library's collection of popular magazines do not exist in digital formats as they were published before the advent of the Internet. Even newer electronic databases that feature online magazines provide only the recently published issues of a title, and not past editions.

For researchers and historians, ISI serves as the gateway to articles on Singapore and Southeast Asia across the humanities and social sciences. These include important periodicals such as the National University of Singapore's *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* (1970 to the present) and the official publications of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, which ISI has indexed for all three incarnations of the society: the Straits Branch (1878-1922), the Malayan Branch (1923-63) and the current Malaysian Branch (1964 to the present).

*The Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia* – referred to as Logan's Journal after its well-known editor James Richardson Logan – holds the distinction of being the oldest periodical indexed in ISI. Published between 1847 and 1859, this 12-volume journal covers a comprehensive sweep of topics, including history, language, literature, ethnography, natural history, physical science, topography, agriculture and economics, and is now part of the National Library's Rare Materials Collection.


### Origins of the ISI

ISI has its roots in an indexing service called the Singapore Periodicals Index (SPI) launched by the National Library in 1969. SPI indexed articles from English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil periodicals published in Singapore, and was first produced as a print publication in 1969. This printed form

was issued annually until 1993. Between 1995 and 2006, the SPI was produced in CD-ROM format. In 2006, the SPI was renamed Index to Singapore Information and was developed and used largely as an in-house resource database until April this year when it was made publicly available.

Moving forward, there are plans in the pipeline to enhance ISI as a Singapore resource database by including the index records of book chapters about Singapore. One of the biggest

limitations in growing ISI as a service is that it does not provide full-text access to the articles. Indexing may seem archaic in the Google era, but there are distinct advantages: ISI uses English keywords and subject terms to index non-English articles, thereby extending their reach to a wider global audience. NLB is confident that ISI can continue to serve as a conduit between Singapore content and information seekers, and remain relevant in the years ahead. ♦




**Index to Singapore Information**  
A finding aid to articles on or related to Singapore, or that are written by Singaporeans, found in local and overseas periodicals in NLB's collection.

**HERE IS A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO USING THE NEW ISI:**

---

**STEP 1**  
Keyword search

Enter keyword(s) into the search box on **OneSearch** (<http://search.nlb.gov.sg/>).  
E.g. Violet Oon

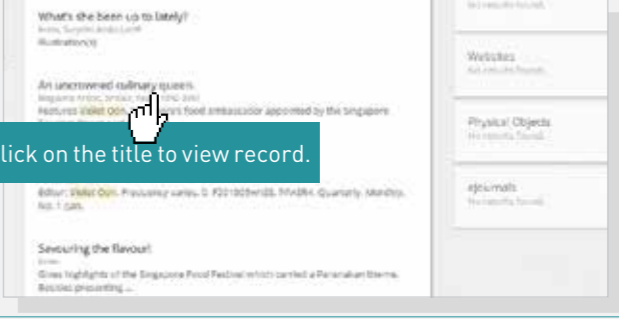


---

**STEP 2**  
Search results

Index records of relevant articles containing the words "Violet Oon" are displayed in the search results page, alongside other NLB materials related to "Violet Oon".

Click on the "title" of the desired indexed article (e.g. "An uncrowned culinary queen") to view the full index record.




Click on the title to view record.

---

**STEP 3**  
ISI record

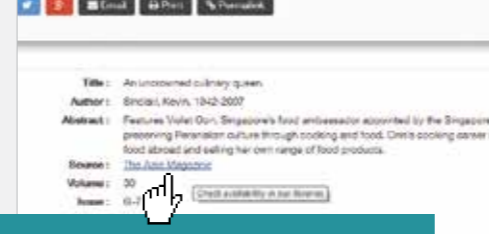
Full index record for the article "An uncrowned culinary queen" (containing the title, author, subject, abstract, year of publication and page numbers) is displayed in a new window.



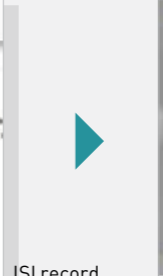
---

**STEP 4**  
Find the publication


Click on the title [e.g. *The Asia Magazine*] in the "Source" field to retrieve the catalogue record that tells you which library has the periodical.



Click on the title [e.g. *The Asia Magazine*] in the "Source" field to retrieve the catalogue record that tells you which library has the periodical.



ISI record (pop-up page)



Library catalogue

**Leong Hui Chuan** is an Associate Librarian at the National Library, Singapore. Her responsibilities include the digitisation of library materials, digital content management as well as oversight of the Index to Singapore Information service.

**Chris Tang** is a Manager at the National Library, Singapore, where he oversees digitisation and digital content management. Chris was previously involved in business reference service as well as the management of the policies and operations of the National Library's donor collections.



# Eu Tong Sen and His Business Empire

## 余东旋与他的商业帝国

The Koh Seow Chuan Collection at the National Library includes documents from the illustrious businessman Eu Tong Sen. **Seow Peck Ngiam** describes some of its highlights.

国家图书馆许少全特藏包括了著名商业巨甲余东旋文献。萧碧莹介绍了当中的一些亮点。

**Seow Peck Ngiam** is a Senior Librarian at the National Library, Singapore. Her responsibilities include the selection of Chinese materials and donor collections for the library as well as the provision of reference and information services.

The Chinese translation was edited by **Vicky Gao**, a Senior Librarian who specialises in China Studies at the National Library, Singapore.

萧碧莹是新加坡国家图书馆的高级图书馆员。负责范围包括华文馆藏采选、捐赠馆藏及为读者提供咨询服务。

华文翻译由高小行编辑。她是国家图书馆高级参考馆员，中文学科馆员。



Eu Yan Sang is a well-respected company that specialises in the manufacture and retail of traditional Chinese herbs and medicine. The company has an extensive network of outlets in Australia, China, Hong Kong, Macau, Malaysia and Singapore.<sup>1</sup>

The company has a history that stretches back to 1879 when its founder Eu Kong (also known as Eu Kwong Pai) established the first Eu Yan Sang shop in Gopeng, Perak. Just six years earlier in 1873, Eu had left his ancestral hometown of Foshan in Guangdong for Penang. After his textile dyeing and bakery businesses failed, Eu worked for a while as a debt collector for a grocery shop. In 1877, the family moved to Gopeng after the birth of his first son Eu Tong Sen.<sup>2</sup>

The first milestone was laid when Eu Kong opened the Yan Sang Medicine Shop (which means “caring for mankind” in Chinese) in Gopeng, selling traditional Chinese medicine to Chinese tin mine workers who were addicted to opium.<sup>3</sup>

In 1898, a new chapter began when Eu Tong Sen inherited his father’s business, which by then included tin mining as well as remittance and postal services. Under his leadership, the Chinese medicine business was expanded and renamed Eu Yan Sang to capitalise on the family name.<sup>4</sup>

Eu, who by then was known as the “King of Tin”, employed thousands of Chinese migrants in his tin mines, rubber estates, traditional medicine shops and property holdings.<sup>5</sup> Many of his properties still stand in Singapore today and some have become landmarks, such as The Majestic<sup>6</sup> (formerly Tien Yien Moi Toi, a venue for Cantonese opera) and the Yue Hwa Chinese Products building<sup>7</sup> (formerly Nam Tin or Great Southern Hotel), both along Eu Tong Sen Street (see text box on

page 61). Eu’s remittance business – which also came under the Eu Yan Sang company – served the overseas Chinese communities in Singapore and Malaya. The company flourished, and by the end of 1920s, was recognised as one of the biggest remittance agencies in Southeast Asia.<sup>8</sup>

余仁生是新加坡一家经营传统中医药的公司，其业务遍布新马、中港澳及澳洲地区。

余仁生的历史可追溯至1879年，创始人余广（也称余广培）在务边霹雳州开设了第一家余仁生中药杂货铺。在这之前，即1873年，余广从广东佛山祖家南下，飘洋过海来到了檳城创业。经历了布匹与面包店生意失败的挫折后，余广便在杂货店打工，负责收账的工作。1877年，随着长子余东旋的诞生后，余家便迁居至务边霹雳州。余广随后在霹雳州开设了第一家仁生中药杂货铺（译指“仁泽众生”），售卖中药给深受鸦片毒害的华侨矿工，奠定了生意的第一座里程碑。

1898年，余东旋继承家业，掀开了新的篇章。家业遗产当时不仅包括了中药生意，还有锡矿及汇款生意。在余的掌托下，家族生意得到了拓展并且改名为“余仁生”以突显其家族品牌。

这时的余东旋，已是众所周知的锡矿大王，名下的锡矿场、橡胶园、中药杂货铺、汇款生意和物业都有数千华侨工人为他打工。其产业很多仍然屹立至今，有些也成了本地的地标，如两栋耸立在余东旋街上的“大华戏院”（前“天演舞台”，专门上演广东戏曲），和“裕华国货”（前“南天大酒店”）（见第61页的文本框）。当时的余仁生公司旗下的汇款生意蒸蒸日上，为广大的马来亚和海峡殖民地的海外华侨服务。到了1920年代末，公司已成为东南亚其中最大的汇款代理商。

### The Koh Seow Chuan Collection

The National Library of Singapore has a collection of documents related to Eu Tong Sen and his company Eu Yan Sang. Donated by the architect and philanthropist Koh Seow Chuan, the collection includes payment acknowledgements, receipts, invoices, remittance notes, delivery notes, bills, notices and business correspondences dating from the early 20th century and issued by Eu Yan Sang branches in Singapore and Malaysia. There are also personal receipts and correspondences relating to Eu Tong Sen and his households in the collection.

The collection provides a glimpse into the history of prominent Chinese businessmen and serve as important primary sources in the study of Southeast Asian economic history, particularly

**(Facing page)** The Eu Yan Sang building along South Bridge Road houses the company’s headquarters. The first shop in Singapore on the ground floor of the building was opened by Eu Tong Sen in 1910. (位于桥南路的余仁生总部。设在一楼的新加坡首家店铺由余东旋于1910年开幕。) *All rights reserved, Sharp, I. (2009). Path of the Righteous Crane: The Life and Legacy of Eu Tong Sen. Singapore: Landmark Books Pte Ltd.*

**(Left)** Eu Tong Sen in a portrait taken when he was in his 50s. (50余岁的余东旋肖像。) *All rights reserved, Sharp, I. (2009). Path of the Righteous Crane: The Life and Legacy of Eu Tong Sen. Singapore: Landmark Books Pte Ltd.*



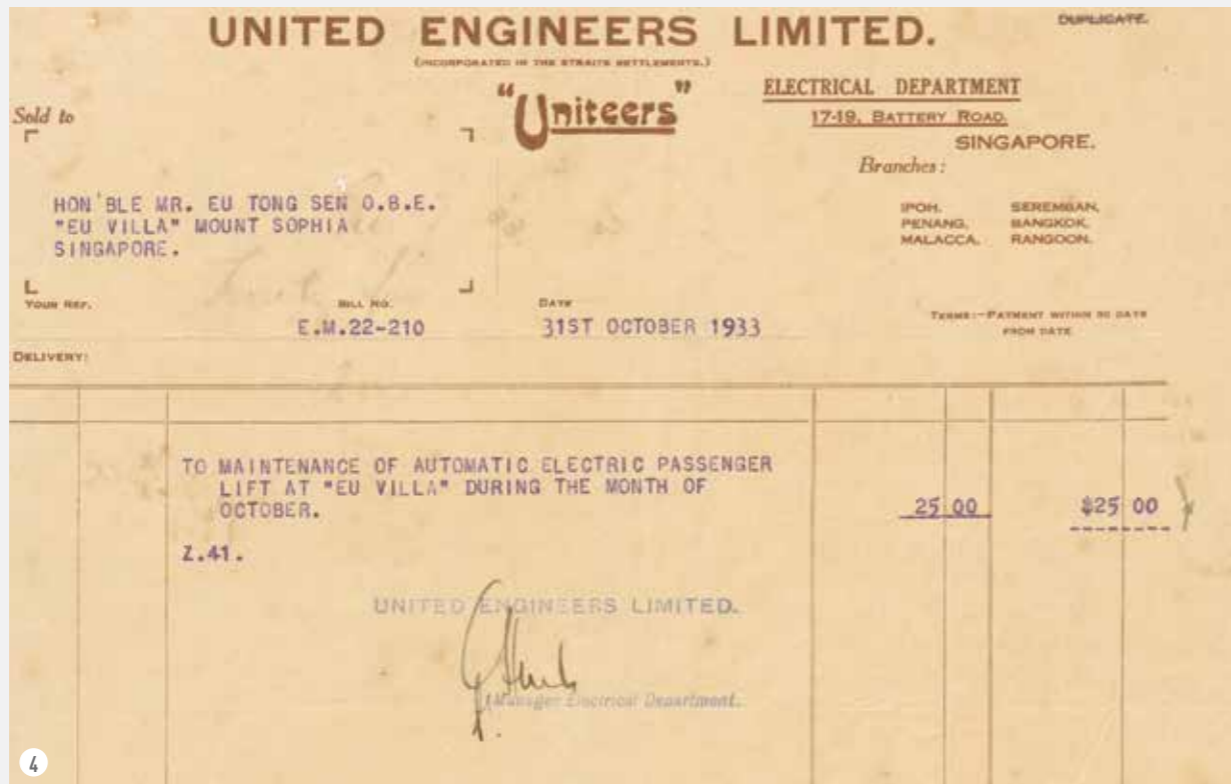
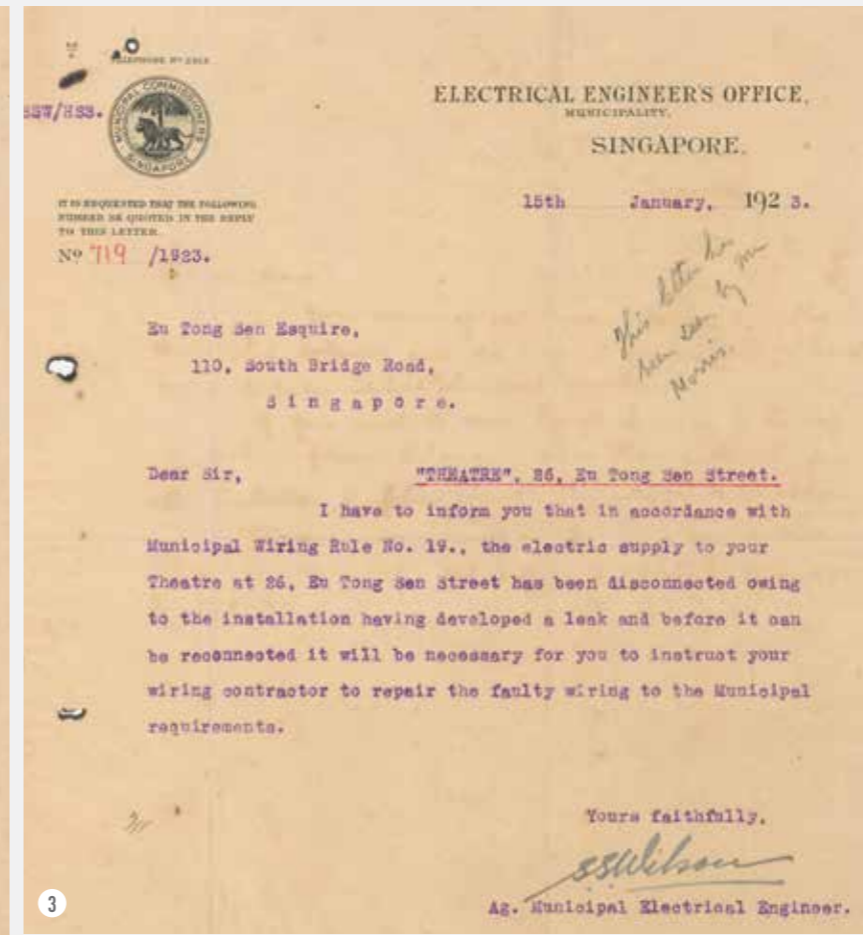
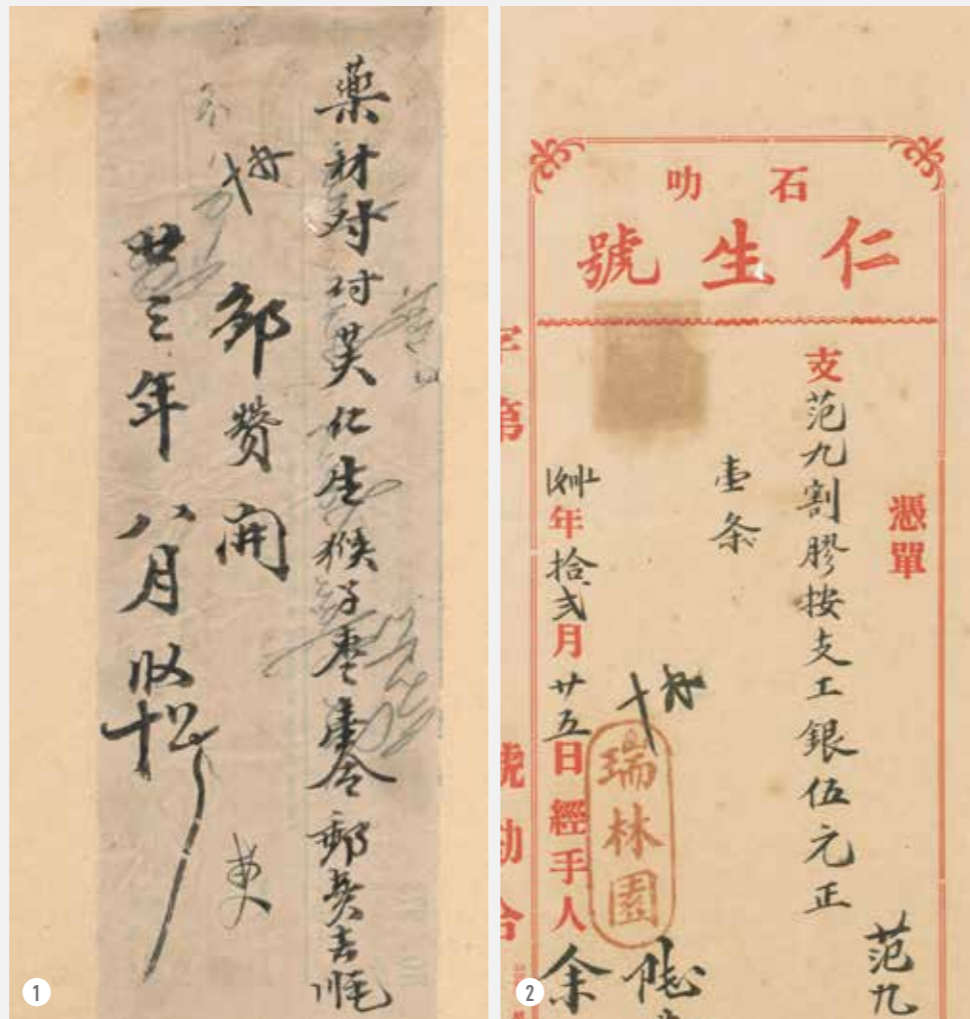
the remittance industry and the economic relations between China and Southeast Asia in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Additionally, the documents also shed light on the social history of the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia and Singapore.

Here are some highlights of the collection.

### 许少全特藏

新加坡国家图书馆有一批有关余东旋及余仁生公司的文献，它们是由本地建筑师与慈善家许少全所捐赠，主要包括二十世纪初，由余仁生新加坡及马来西亚分行所签发的凭信单、收据、货单、汇款单、通知函和商业来往文书。除此之外，文件中还有一些有关余东旋及家庭的帐单及信函。

这批文献将帮助人们从中了解早期华裔的创业史。同时，这批珍贵的文献资料对研究东南亚与新加坡华侨社会史、19至20世纪初的侨批业以及中国与东南亚的经济关系史方面有着重要的参考价值。◆



1. A postal receipt dated 24 August 1934 for Chinese red dates delivered to the Eu Yan Sang shop in Negeri Sembilan in Malaysia. The first Eu Yan Sang shop was set up in 1879 in Gopeng, Perak, selling Chinese medicine to tin mine workers addicted to opium. Over the years, Eu Yan Sang was able to make a name for itself in traditional Chinese medicine by sourcing for the best raw ingredients and producing only high quality products. 这是一张1934年8月24日寄往马来西亚芙蓉县(森美兰州)余仁生分行的邮递品收据，物品是猴手枣。第一间余仁生中药铺在1879年于边嘉坡创立，售卖中药给深受鸦片毒害的华工。多年来，余仁生能够在中药业打响招牌，凭着的就是对中草药采购的严谨，以制作出上等品质的货品。
2. Issued on 25 December 1936, this invoice from the Eu Yan Sang branch in Singapore was for a salary payment of five Straits dollars and has the words "Swee Lam estate" stamped on it. Eu Tong Sen owned some 15,000 acres of rubber plantations across Malaya. Seven rubber plantations, including Swee Lam estate in Johor, were managed by the Eu Yan Sang branch in Singapore. Interestingly, Eu named the plantations after his wives, daughters and other female relatives and friends. 这张凭单发于1936年12月25日，作为支付给范九工银伍元五的凭据。凭单印有胶园“瑞林园”书柬。余东旋拥有一万五英亩树胶园，遍布马来亚。新加坡余仁生负责管理7个树胶园，包括柔佛瑞林园。有趣的是，余东旋的树胶园都是以妻子、女儿及其他女性亲戚朋友命名的。
3. This letter from the Electrical Engineer's Office of the Municipal Commissioners of Singapore informed Eu Tong Sen on 15 January 1923 that the power supply to a theatre at 26 Eu Tong Sen Street had been disconnected and would be reinstated only after maintenance works had been carried out. [Note: the name of the theatre cannot be ascertained but it was possibly the Heng Wai Sun or the Heng Seng Peng, see text box on the right.] 此信函是市镇局于1923年1月15日通知余东旋位于余东旋街26号的戏院因事故电源已被割断，有待维修工作完成后才能重新启动。[注：戏院名称无法被确定，但有可能是庆维新或庆升平(见右边的文本框。)]
4. A bill from United Engineers Limited dated 31 October 1933 for the maintenance fee of \$25 for an electric lift in Eu Villa. Among the many properties owned by Eu Tong Sen in Singapore, the most well-known was perhaps Eu Villa at Adis Road on Mount Sophia. It was designed by Swan & Maclaren in 1914. The lift was specially installed for Eu's mother to take her to the top floor to enjoy the scenery. Eu Villa was demolished in the 1980s to make way for a condominium.<sup>10</sup> 这是United Engineers Limited于1933年10月31日在余园维修电梯的账单，费用为25元。在不计其数的产业中，位于苏菲雅山亚迪路，由双麦嘉仁建筑公司于1914年设计的余园也许是最广为人知。电梯是余东旋为能让母亲到顶楼看风景而设。余园在80年代已因公寓发展而被拆除。

### The Street Named after Eu

There are two versions as to how Eu Tong Sen Street got its name. The obvious explanation is that the street was renamed after Eu in recognition of his contributions to the community. According to the more intriguing story, one of the troupe leaders of an opera theatre at the long-gone Wayang Street had offended Eu's eighth wife, Wong Sui Chun. In a fit of anger, Eu bought up all the properties along Wayang Street and renamed the street after himself.<sup>11</sup> Among the acquired properties were the two oldest and most renowned local opera theatres, Heng Wai Sun and Heng Seng Peng. Both specialised in Cantonese opera although the latter also staged Hokkien and Peking opera. In 1928, Eu commissioned the colonial architectural firm Swan & Maclaren to build another opera theatre called Tien Yien Moi Toi along the same street. Heng Seng Peng and Heng Wai Sun theatres have since been demolished but Tien Yien Moi Toi theatre still remains today. It was renamed Majestic Theatre in 1945 after the war, and in 2003, was converted into a shopping mall known as The Majestic.<sup>12</sup> The building is presently leased to the Singapore Turf Club and is mostly used as a betting centre.<sup>13</sup>

### 以余东旋为名的街道

有关余东旋街得名有二说。最普遍的说法即是纪念余东旋对社会所作出的贡献。根据另一种较引人入胜的说法则是位于已不存在的哇央街的戏院班主得罪了其八夫人，愤怒之下把整条街的地产买下并以自己姓名为街道改名。其中被收购的地产包括新加坡最早期的地方戏院庆维新和庆升平。两座戏院都上演粤剧，但庆升平除了广东戏曲外，同时也上演福建与京剧。1928年，余东旋委托英殖民地建筑公司双麦嘉仁在同一条街上兴建另一所戏院，即“天演大舞台”。庆维新和庆升平随着时代的变迁而被拆除，但“天演大舞台”则依然屹立至今。战后1945年改名为“大华戏院”并在2003年被发展成购物商场，改名“The Majestic”。大厦如今由新加坡赛马公会租用，主要作为投注中心用途。



5. Dated 6 June 1934, this is a remittance note sent from the Eu Yan Sang branch in Ipoh to its counterpart in Singapore. Direct remittances between the two places were regularly carried out. The Singapore branch was divided into three units: remittance, wholesale Chinese herbs and pharmaceutical retail. Its remittance business was the most profitable.<sup>14</sup>

这是怡保余仁生于1934年6月6日转发给新加坡余仁生的汇款凭信单。当年两地可作直接汇款。从前新加坡的“余仁生”的店面划分为三个区，汇款部、生药材批发部和药品零售部。其中，汇款生意最为兴旺。

6. Eu Tong Sen was one of two Chinese representatives in Perak who sat in the powerful Federated Malay States (FMS) Chamber of Mines, which was controlled by the Kinta miners. This letter dated 31 October 1921 from the government of the FMS informed Eu that the legislation on “the subject of section 18 (ii) of the Mining Enactment no. xii of 1911” would be introduced in the next Federal Council meeting in November 1921.<sup>15</sup> 余东旋是四州府矿务局的两位华侨代表之一。矿务局拥有极大势力，由近打谷锡矿商操控着。由四州府政府发出的这封信函，日期为1921年10月31日，主要告知余东旋有关在1911年立法的锡矿开采业法律中的第18 (ii) 条文将会在11月份的议政局会议提出讨论。

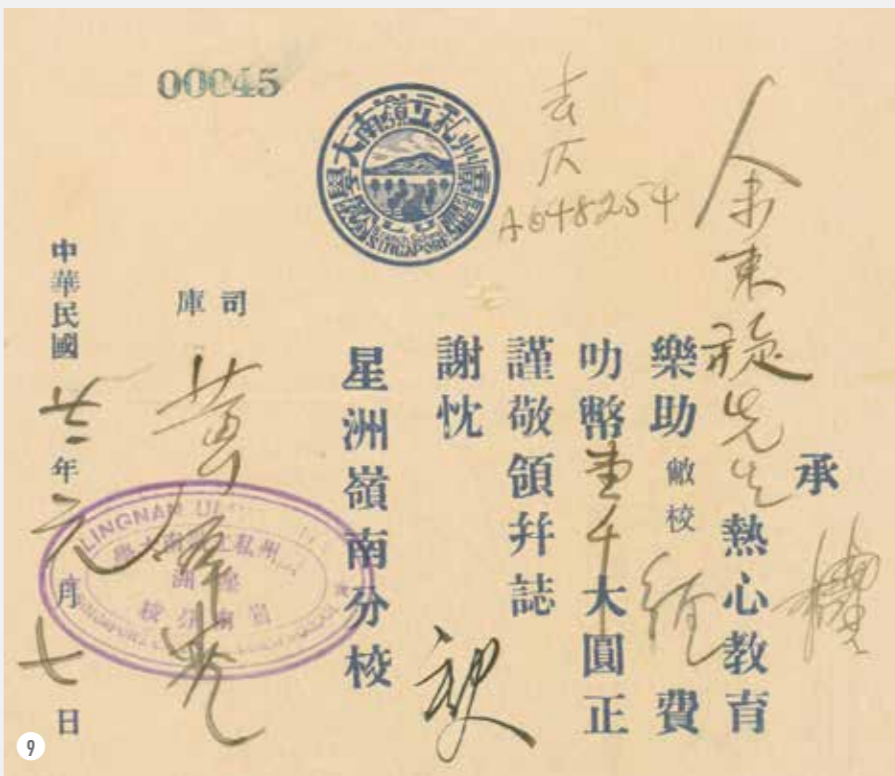
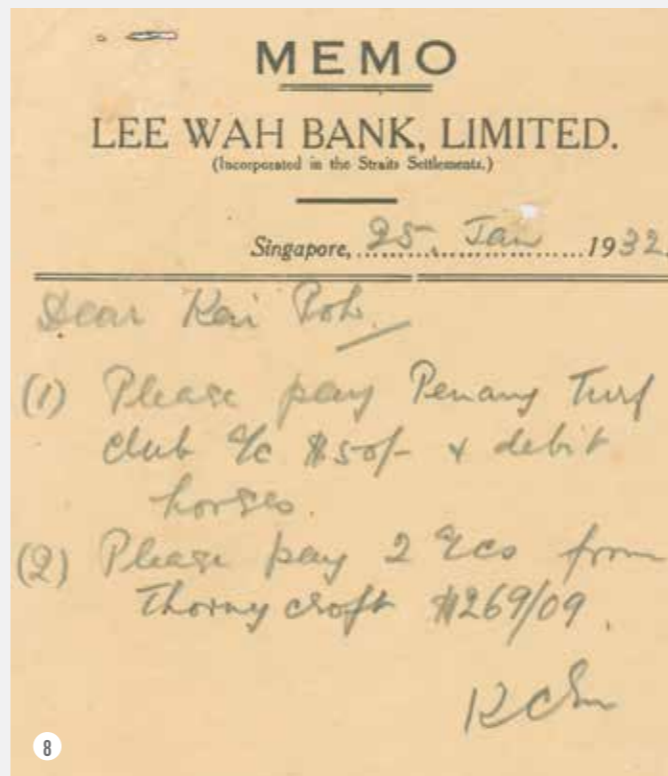
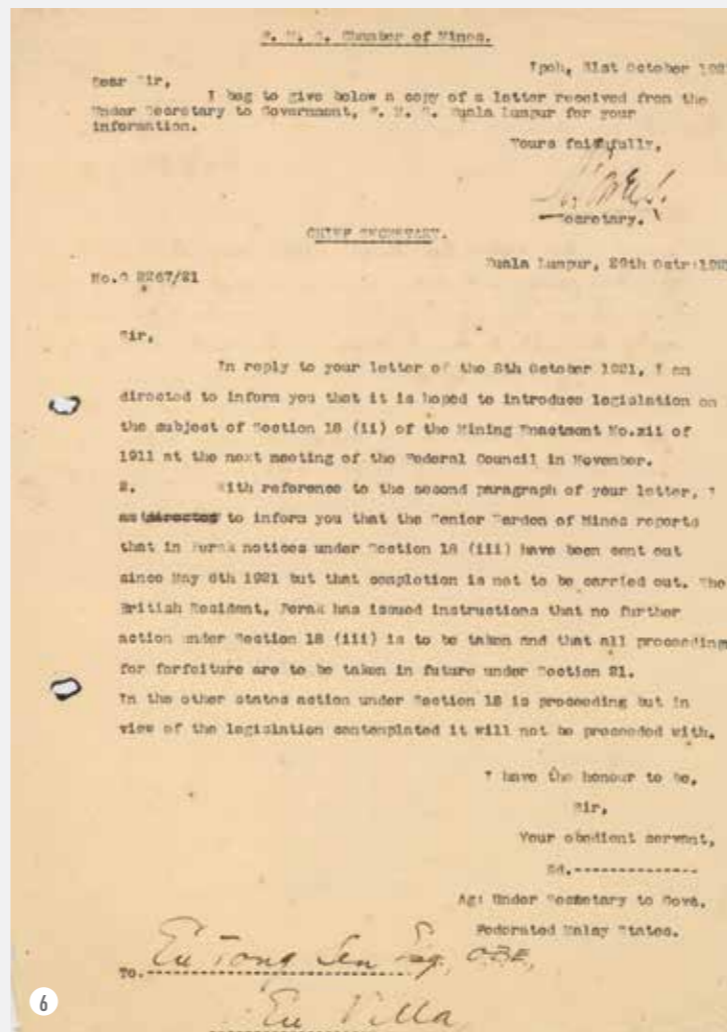
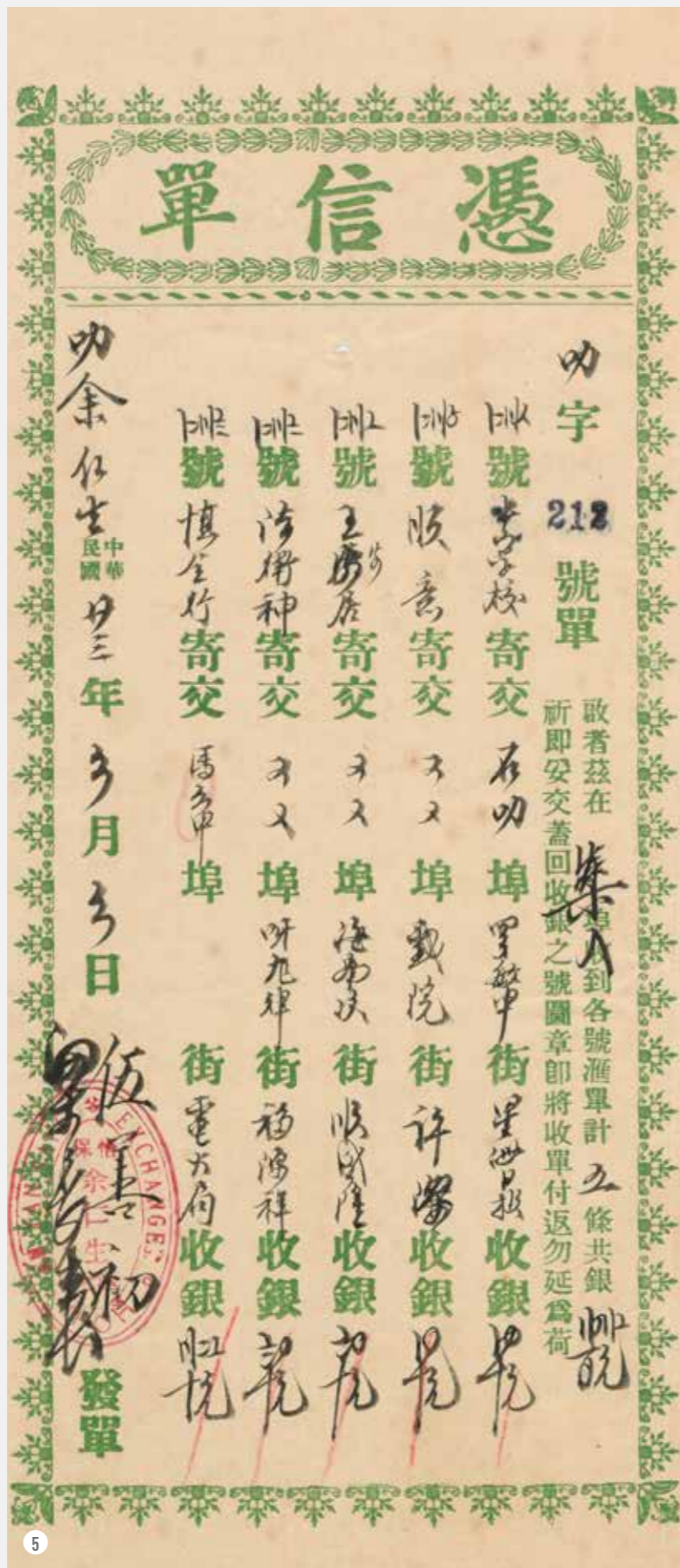
7. A 7 May 1933 invoice from the Great Southern Restaurant – which was located in Nam Tin or Great Southern Hotel on Eu Tong Sen Street – for the sale of Chinese pastries. Erected in 1927, the building was patronised by the wealthy and the literary class during its halcyon years before World War II.<sup>16</sup> The hotel on the second and third floors was the first Chinese lodgings equipped with an elevator.<sup>17</sup> After the war, the fifth floor was converted into a nightclub called Diamond Dragon Dance Palace.<sup>18</sup> 此单是位于余东旋街上，南天大酒店内的南天酒楼糕点账单，日期为1933年5月7日。南天大酒店始于1927年，在战前的鼎盛时期，这里可说是达官贵人、名人雅士的聚集之地。二楼及三楼的酒店设施，是第一间有电梯服务的华人酒店。战后，五楼改为龙宫大舞厅。

8. An account memo with two payment instructions, one of which was to the Penang Turf Club, issued by Eu Keng Chee (or K. C. Eu), Eu Tong Sen’s eldest son, on 25 January 1932 in his capacity as Managing Director of Lee Wah Bank. Founded in 1920 by a group of businessmen led by Eu Tong Sen, who became its first Chairman, the bank specifically served the Cantonese community (all staff members were required to converse in Cantonese). The bank managed to weather the Great Depression years and World War II, but a series of setbacks in the late 1960s resulted in its acquisition by United Overseas Bank in 1973.<sup>19</sup>

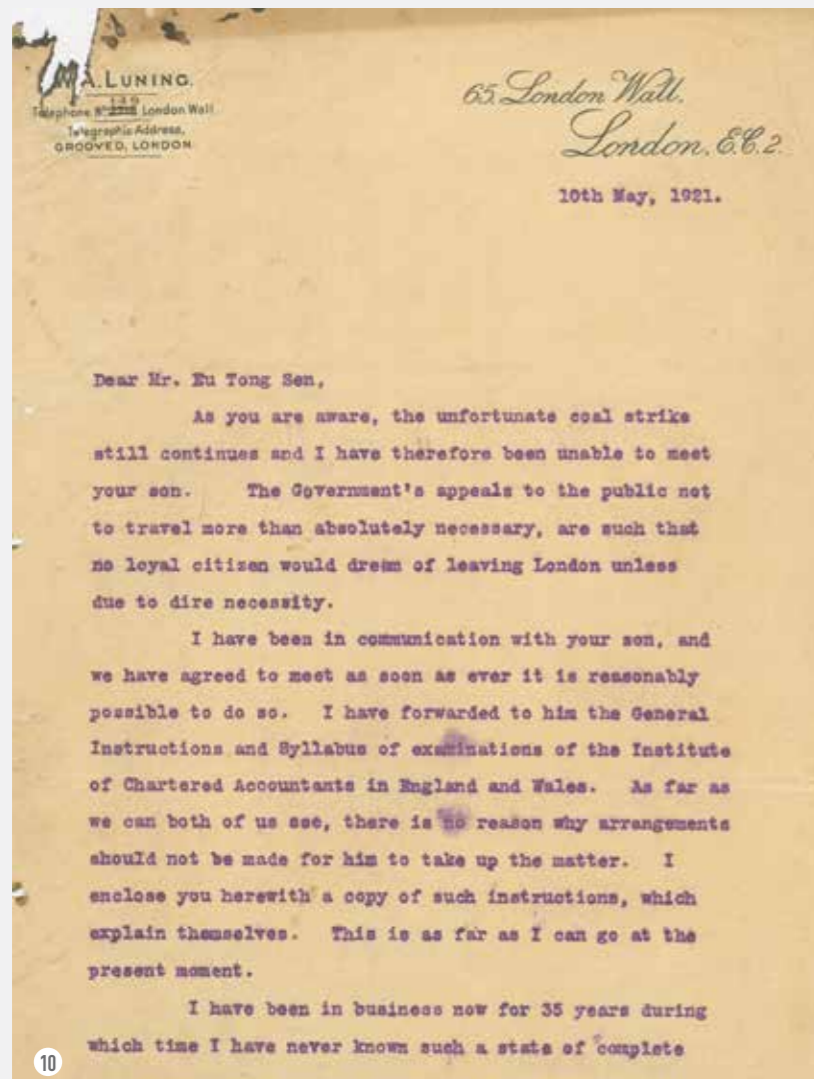
这是一张余东旋长子余经铸在出任利华银行董事经理时，有关两项支付账目的指示便笺。日期是1932年1月25日，其中一项是檳城赛马会的款项。由粤商集资，余东旋带领，创立于1920年的利华银行，专门接待粤籍顾客（员工必须能够说粤语）。银行虽然在世界大萧条和二战的艰难时期仍然能度过，但60年代末的几次严重挫折最终使得银行于1973年被大华银行收购。

9. Eu Tong Sen was widely known for his acts of philanthropy. This acknowledgement receipt issued on 7 January 1933 was for his donation of 1,000 Straits dollars to Lingnan School, which was affiliated to Lingnan University in Guangdong, China. Eu was one of the founders of the school that was established in 1931 to provide Chinese education to the Chinese communities in Southeast Asia.<sup>20</sup>

众所周知，余东旋也是名慈善家，对慈善事业一向不遗余力。这是他于1933年1月7日惠捐一千叻币给星洲岭南分校的收条。学校是广东岭南大学的新加坡分校，余东旋是发起人之一，宗旨是为东南亚的华侨提供华文教育。







10. This letter in English, which shows the first of three pages and dated 10 May 1921, was written by William Antrobus Luning (the former Chairman of Kinta Tin Mines Ltd) in London. It was addressed to Eu Tong Sen in Singapore. Eu had entrusted Luning as the guardian of his eldest son, Eu Keng Chee (K. C. Eu), during his studies in the UK. Luning wrote that he had given the young man information about the accountancy course at Cambridge University. Upon graduation in 1925, K. C. Eu returned to Malaya and became the first certified public accountant in Singapore. After Eu passed on, K.C. Eu and his brothers inherited the family business.<sup>21</sup>

这是William Antrobus Luning (前打锡业有限公司主席)从英国邮寄至新加坡,给余东旋的一封英文信函中的第一页。余东旋曾托付他为监护人,以代为照顾在英国留学的长子余经铸。信中Luning提及他已把相关报读英国剑桥大学会计课程的资料交给余经铸。余经铸1925年学成归来马来亚,成为新加坡第一位注册会计师。余东旋过世后,他与兄弟继承遗产,成为家族生意的掌舵人。

All items are from the Koh Seow Chuan Collection. All rights reserved, National Library Board, Singapore, 2016.

所有文献来自许少全特藏。2016年新加坡国家图书馆管理局版权所有。

# Something About Numbers

The Anatomy of a Book

By the time you see a book on a shelf, it has already undergone various stages of conceptualisation, research, writing, editing and design. But this is not the end of the publishing process – there remains the book's identity number, called the International Standard Book Number (ISBN). Comprising a unique set of 13 numbers (before January 2007, the ISBN was made up of 10 numbers), the ISBN provides a globally recognised means of identifying a book.

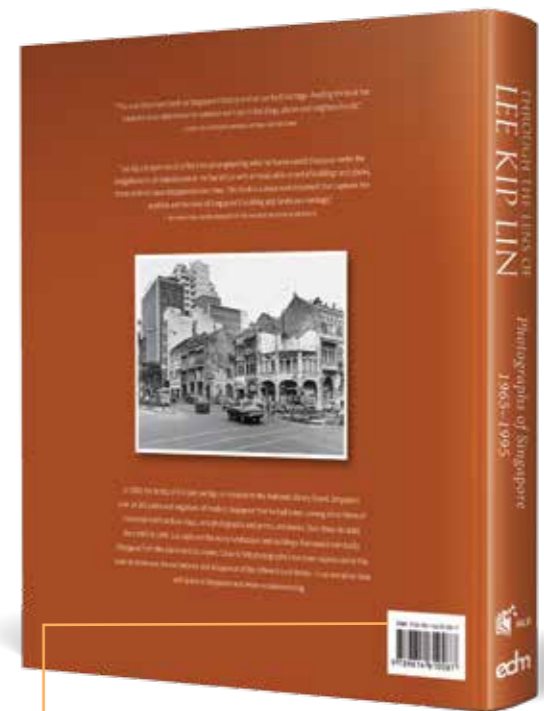
The standardised 13-digit international number is divided into five elements of different lengths, each separated by a hyphen or space. These elements indicate a book's country and geographic location, its publisher as well as its particular edition and format.

Did you know that the ISBN of an e-book is different from its print version of the same title? Even the paperback, hardcover and different language editions of the same title have their own ISBNs. Hence, each ISBN is so unique that it cannot be transferred, reused or resold.

ISBNs are assigned by ISBN agencies located worldwide. Each country or geographic location will have an exclusive ISBN agency responsible for assigning ISBNs to publishers based there. In Singapore, the National Library serves as the national agency for assigning ISBNs to materials published by Singapore or Singapore-based publishers. The ISBN is printed on the lower right-hand corner of the back cover of a book above the barcode as well as on the copyright page.

Periodicals and music scores have their own number formats, which are respectively called the International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) and the International Standard Music Number (ISMN).

Text by: Chen Jieyun and Joey Chin



International Standard Book Number (ISBN)

ISBN 978-981-4610-08-7



## Notes

- 1 Eu Yan Sang. [2015]. *Our businesses*. Retrieved from Eu Yan Sang website.
- 2 Sharp, I. [2009]. *Path of the righteous crane: The life and legacy of Eu Tong Sen* (pp.3, 9-10). Singapore: Landmark Books Pte Ltd. Call no.: RSING 338.7616151092 SHA
- 3 Sharp, 2009, p. 11; Eu Yan Sang. [2015]. *Our history*. Retrieved from Eu Yan Sang website
- 4 Sharp, 2009, pp. 14, 23, 52.
- 5 Sharp, 2009, pp. 28, 53-57, 76.
- 6 吴彦鸿 [Wu Y. H.]. [1997]. 新加坡风土志 [Xinjiapo feng tu zhi] (p.18). Singapore: 新加坡潮州八邑会馆文教委员会出版组 [Xinjiapo: xinjiapo chaozhou ba yi hui guan wen jiao wei yuan hui chu ban zu]. Call no.: Chinese RSING 959.57 WYH-[HIS]
- 7 区如柏 [Qu, R. B.]. [1994, July 3]. 战前最堂皇的建筑物 南天大厦67年史 [Zhan qian zui tang huang de jian zhu wu nan tian da sha nian shi]. 联合早报 [Lianhe Zaobao], p. 46.
- 8 Chung, S. P.-Y. [2002, July]. Surviving economic crises in Southeast Asia and Southern China: The history of the Eu Yan Sang business conglomerates in Penang, Singapore and Hong Kong. *Modern Asian Studies*, 36(3), 604. Retrieved from Proquest. Sharp, 2009, p. 180.
- 9 Sharp, 2009, p. 98.
- 10 Sharp, 2009, pp. 160-161; Mr. Eu Tong Sen's million dollar villa. [1934, September 9]. *The Straits Times*, p. 4; Lee, Y. M. [1981, June 20]. Eu Villa gives way... *The New Nation*, p. 12; Koh, B. [2008, February 24]. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 11 Sharp, 2009, p. 180.

- 12 吴宏视 [Wu, H. Y.]. [1987, February 8]. 庆维新、庆升平、怡园、哲园... 早期地方戏院今何在? [Qingweixin, qingshengping, yiyuan, zhe yuan... zao qi di fang xi xi yuan jin he zai]. 联合早报 [Lianhe Zaobao], p. 26. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 13 Yen, F. [2011, November 6]. Majestic theatre back in the spotlight. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from Factiva.
- 14 区如柏 [Qu, R. B.]. [2013]. 新加坡的广帮汇兑业 [Xinjiapo de guang bang hui dui ye]. 源 [Yuan], 5(105), 10. 新加坡: 新加坡宗乡会馆联合总会 [Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations]. Retrieved from Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations website.
- 15 Khoo, S. N., & Lubis, A. -R. [2005]. *Kinta Valley: Pioneering Malaysia's modern development* (p. 107). Ipoh: Perak Academy. Call no. RSING q959.51 KHO
- 16 区如柏 [Qu R. B.]. [1990, September 9]. 昔日的香格里拉南天走过63年 [Xi ri de xianggelila nantian zou guo 63 nian]. 联合早报 [Lianhe Zaobao], p. 42. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 17 吴彦鸿 [Wu Y. H.]. 1997, p.17
- 18 莫美颜 [Mo, M.Y.]. [1990, September 9]. 南天的夜总会 [Nan tian de ye zong hui]. 联合早报 [Lianhe Zaobao], p. 42. Retrieved from NewspaperSG
- 19 大业华年 [Da ye hua nian] (pp.69-77). [1985]. 新加坡: 大华银行集团 [Xinjiapo: Da hua yin hang ji tuan] Call no.: Chinese RSING 332.12095957 GRO
- 20 筹办星洲岭南分校缘起及其他 [Chou ban xing zhou lingnan fen xiao yuan qi ji qi ta]. [1931, June 2]. 南洋商报 [Nanyang Siang Pau], p. 8. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 21 Sharp, 2009, pp. 77, 102.





Highlights of the National Library

# FROM THE STACKS EXHIBITION

## GALLERY, LEVEL 10 / NATIONAL LIBRARY BUILDING

**FREE ADMISSION**  
TILL 28 AUG 2016

Curator's Tour (In English)

19 Aug 2016  
(7.30pm - 8.30pm)

Please register at  
[www.nlb.gov.sg/goldlibrary/programme/Tours.aspx](http://www.nlb.gov.sg/goldlibrary/programme/Tours.aspx)

Weekend Tours

18 Jun - 28 Aug 2016  
Sat & Sun, 1pm - 2pm  
(in English)  
Sat, 1.30pm - 2.30pm  
(in Chinese)



Catch a glimpse of Singapore's history captured vividly through 100 items dating back to the 18th century. These include gems like handwritten letters by Sir Stamford Raffles and his wife, Lady Sophia and one of the earliest Qurans printed in Kampong Glam. Check out the fascinating stories of Singapore as you journey through history. Don't miss it!

- 1 THE BEGINNING OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY**  
National Library had its origins as a school library and was officially opened to the public as Singapore Library in 1845.
- 2 THE SINGAPORE CHRONICLE**  
Singapore's first newspaper – the only English newsprint during the British 'Gagging Act'.
- 3 RAFFLES' PRIVATE LETTERS**  
Listen to the audio version of the letters beautifully penned by Sir Stamford Raffles and his wife, Lady Sophia.
- 4 MAPPING THE TOWN**  
Find out what new roads and future railway tracks were being planned for by the colonial engineers of 1929.
- 5 BIRDS OF THE MALAY PENINSULA**  
Scientific documentation of the extensive bird species in the Malay Peninsula, Singapore, and adjacent islands over a span of almost 50 years.

- 6 WONDERS OF DICTIONARIES**  
Check out a Malay dictionary that needs to be read in Hokkien or Teochew.
- 7 19TH CENTURY DIRECTORY**  
Dated 1846, the Singapore Directory contains listing of businesses, government agencies and prominent residents during the 19th century.
- 8 TOURIST GUIDE IN THE 1890s**  
This handbook offered itineraries for tourists visiting Singapore at the turn of the 20th century.
- 9 SNAPSHOTS OF THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION**  
Newspapers, photos, videos, diaries and *Chop Suey* comic book offer a glimpse into life during the Japanese Occupation and the subsequent War Crime Trials.
- 10 QURAN PRINTED IN SINGAPORE IN 1869**  
One of the earliest copies printed in Kampong Glam.

- 11 HAJI'S NURSERY RHYMES**  
Listen to popular nursery rhymes like *'Baa Baa Black Sheep'* and *'Jack and Jill'* in Malay.
- 12 WILL OF TAN KIM SENG**  
A beautifully handwritten will of Tan Kim Seng, a prominent merchant and philanthropist, offers insight into his relationship with his family.
- 13 ADDRESS TO PRINCE ALFRED**  
A pledge of loyalty (on coloured silk) to Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, signed by a group of 80 Chinese merchants in Singapore, in honour of his visit to Singapore in 1869.
- 14 FIRST SINGAPORE COOKBOOK**  
Written by Ellice Handy, this book was dubbed 'the bible of Singapore cooking'.

For more information on the exhibition and programmes, please visit [www.nlb.gov.sg/exhibitions/](http://www.nlb.gov.sg/exhibitions/)