

# biblioasia

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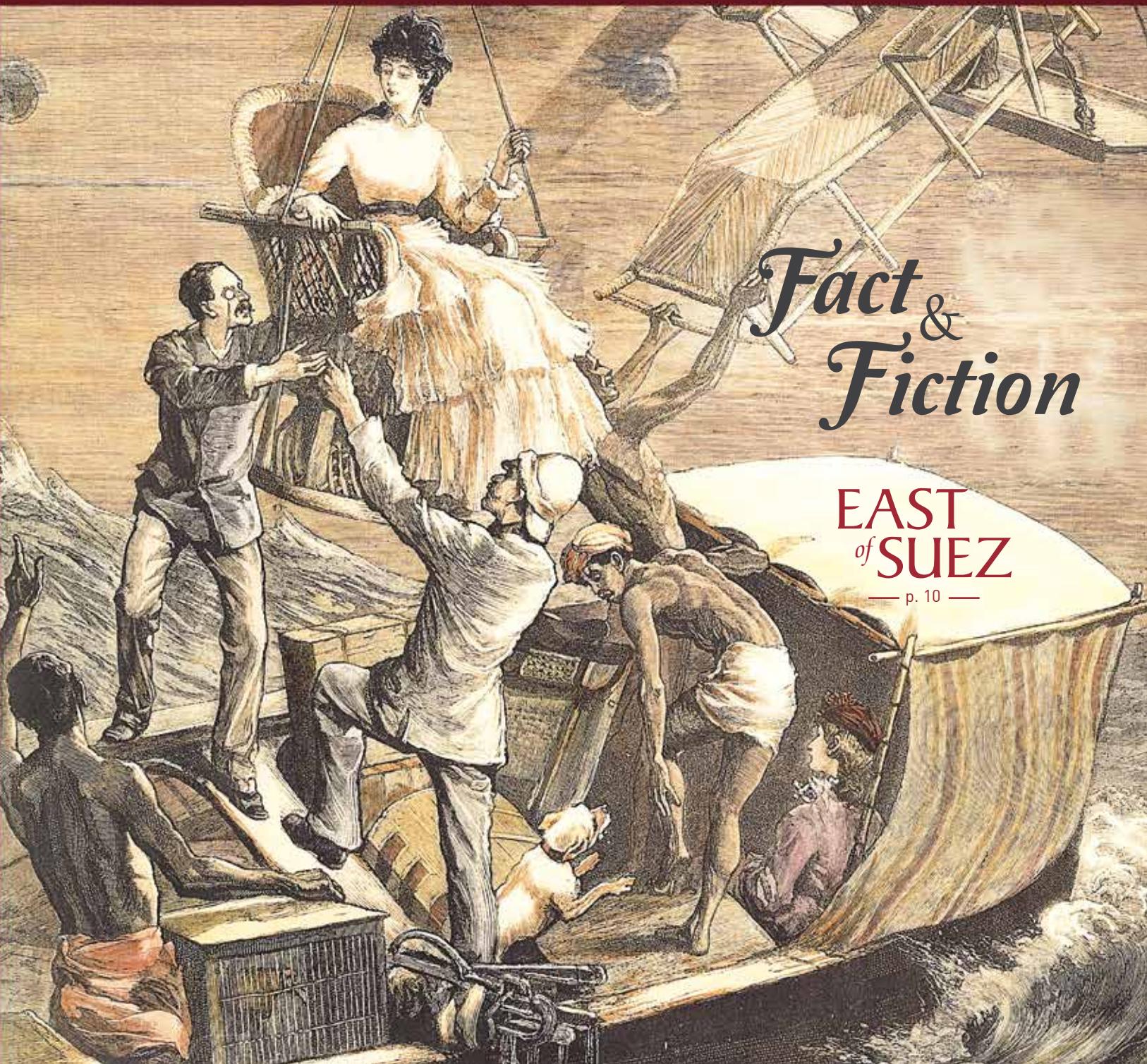
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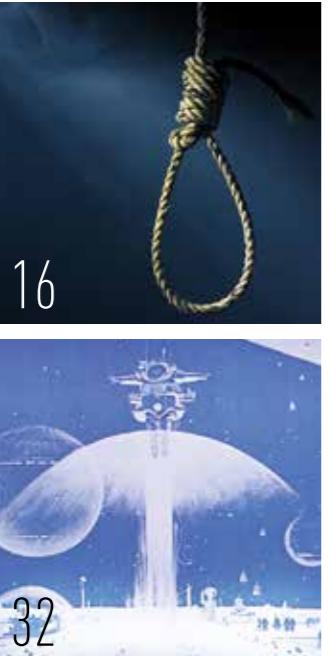
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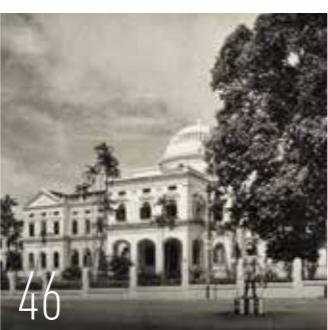
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BiblioAsia

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## Director's Note

We explore the parallel worlds of reality and make-believe – and the spaces in between – as we take a trip into our not-so-distant past in this issue of *BiblioAsia*. Ng Yi-Sheng mulls over the fine line between fact and fiction – the theme of this issue – in his essay on the culture of horror that has existed in Singapore since pre-colonial days. From spine-chilling tales of the *pontianak*, the female vampire from Malay folklore, to *The Black Isle*, Sandi Tan's 21st-century supernatural novel set in Singapore, the essay taps into our morbid fascination with all things creepy.

Likewise, the suspension of reality is what Nadia Arianna Bte Ismail explores in her essay on the rise of local sci-fi publications between the 1970s and 1990s. Besides the supernatural, it is violent and graphic murder cases (naturally) that seem to rivet the public's attention: Sharon Teng recounts four of the bloodiest murders in Singapore's crime history, some of which have spawned bestselling books in their wake.

Singapore was hailed as the "equatorial Hollywood" when Western filmmakers discovered this exotic Asian port city in the early 1900s. Fact and fiction blurred as fabricated scenes of Singapore were stitched together from stock footage and studio sets – never mind that these filmmakers never set foot in Singapore. One of the early exceptions was Clyde E. Elliott, the first Hollywood director who made three films here in the 1930s, as Chua Ai Lin reveals.

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, says Kennie Ting, changed the face of maritime history forever and led to the advent of leisure travel to distant lands. On their journeys east, perhaps some of these Western travellers were able to separate fact from fiction; to see the exotic lands "East of Suez" through their own eyes, instead of relying on apocryphal tales of the Orient.

With all the fake news circulating these days – presented in ways that seem so *real* – one never knows what is the truth anymore. While the volume and speed at which news is disseminated in the modern world is unprecedented, lying (or whatever euphemism one might use), according to Farish A. Noor, is as old as history.

On the subject of history – built history, specifically – Swan & Maclarens, the oldest architectural practice in Singapore celebrates its 125th anniversary this year. Started in 1892 by two Scotsmen, Swan & Maclarens was responsible for many of the city's heritage buildings. What is a fact for certain is that the architectural firm was among the first to pioneer the Modernist architectural movement in Singapore, as Julian Davison tells us.

More echoes of the past can be found in the following features: Bonny Tan traces the lives of little-known female librarians in pre-war Singapore; Juffri Bin Supa'at and Sundari Balasubramaniam take a look at the post-1965 Malay publishing scene and Tamil short story writers between 1936 and 1960, respectively; Makeswary Periasamy highlights the National Library's collection of early books and documents on Chinese secret societies; and Sharen Chua previews books on National Service from our Legal Deposit Collection – this being the year that marks 50 Years of National Service in Singapore.

Finally, don't miss our latest exhibition, "Tales of the Malay World: Manuscripts and Early Books", on level 10 of the National Library Building from 18 August 2017 to 25 February 2018. Curated by Tan Huism, the exhibition is a rare opportunity to see a selection of rare Malay manuscripts and printed books from the 18th to the early 20th centuries. On display are items from the National Library's Rare Materials Collection as well as The British Library and Netherlands' Leiden University Library, among other institutions.

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

### Mrs Wai Yin Pryke

Director  
National Library

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**On the cover:**  
A European lady, dressed in a neck-to-ankle blouse and skirt ensemble, being lowered from a luxury liner onto a small boat bound for shore. This lithograph titled "For the Shore" was first published in *The Graphic*, London, in 1883. All rights reserved, Liu, G. (2006). Raffles Hotel [p. 39]. Singapore: Editions Didier Millet. (Call no.: RSING 915.9570613 LIU-[TRA])

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Lying, as it appears, is as old as history.

**Farish A. Noor** explains.

**F**There has been much talk about "fake news" all over the Internet these days and how facts no longer seem to matter in the "post-factual" society we live in.

For sometime now, analysts and commentators have bemoaned the fact that many people no longer feel the need to verify what they read and watch online and on TV, and that populist politicians have been able to harness the emotional energy of angry and frustrated people to further agendas of their own, which include capturing state power and controlling governments.

While some of these concerns seem genuine enough, the phenomenon of people choosing to believe what they want to

believe is hardly new, as any historian would point out. Perhaps the most obvious, and at times spectacular, aspect of the current phenomenon of "fake news" is the volume of information (or misinformation) disseminated, and the speed with which such misinformation travels. This has less to do with declining intelligence in general, but more to do with the kind of communicative technologies we have created.

But if we look back at developments in our own part of the world (Southeast Asia) a hundred years ago, we would see that the present state of communications and information technology has merely evolved at its own pace; and what strikes some as novel or even potentially dan-

gerous is really the culmination of a long process of technological advancement.

In the 19th century, when Southeast Asia was carved up by the colonial powers of Western Europe, there was already a clear connection between communications technology and power. The British, Dutch, French, Spanish and Portuguese empires were held together not only by force and the constant threat of violence, but also by the latest innovations in communications.

Britain's empire was held together by data, as argued by Thomas Richards in *The Imperial Archive* (1993); while Bernard Cohn has shown in *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* (1996) how imperial rule in South and Southeast Asia was maintained through the building of vast systems of knowledge and information.

All this information and news was collected, collated and disseminated through



sights on Burma, the Kingdom of Burma was seen and cast in a decidedly negative light by colonial scholars and reporters. News reports emerged and were circulated across the empire, about the alleged wrongdoings of the Burmese towards their own people and their neighbours. The popular theme at the time was the idea that Burma was a "belligerent power", bent on becoming a dangerous "Asiatic empire". Burma was referred to as "the Burman Empire" in maps and news reports, though the fact was that the real empire was Britain, and it was Britain that posed an existential threat to Burma, as it spread its power across much of northern India.

Similar examples of colonial-era "fake news" can be found elsewhere: The invasion of Brunei was justified on the spurious grounds that Brunei was a "den of pirates" and that the pirates of Borneo were a threat to freedom of movement at sea.

Elsewhere across Asia – from China to Japan – Asian nations were portrayed as the enemies of free trade and economic liberalism, for the simple reason that they did not wish to open their ports to foreign commerce.

If one were to read news reports and popular fiction of the 19th century through the lens of a historian, one can see that the logic of "fake news" hasn't changed very much since the 19th century. Some of the vocabulary may have evolved since then, and terms like "Asiatic despot", "piratical kingdom" and "Oriental empire" have merely been replaced with contemporary equivalents such as "rogue state" and "militant threat" – but they remain instrumental fictions nonetheless.

But if misinformation and distortion remain the constants in the way we discuss and speak of the world, does this mean that nothing has really changed, and that there is no hope for a more informed and enlightened future?

Again, we need to turn to history to see how societies can and do cope with the manipulation of knowledge and data. One of the ironies of "empire" is that while it laid the foundations for a vast network of communications and power projection across the globe, it also planted the seeds of its eventual demise.

Like the Roman Empire, whose roads were used to project Roman power far beyond the walls of its capital, but which were later used by the very same enemies to invade it, 19th-century empires also provided the means for colonial subjects to resist and reject.

Nineteenth-century imperialism was couched in terms of a "civilising mission" to bring enlightenment and modernity to Africa and Asia, but what it delivered – in real terms – were roads, telegraph lines, printing presses and schools. In time, the very same colonial subjects would use the very same communicative technologies to fight back, and it is not a surprise that by the turn of the 20th century, native vernacular printing presses were emerging all over the colonies, from India to Southeast Asia. (Singapore was, in fact, one of the major centres of native vernacular printing by then, and local intellectuals and activists were at the forefront of the intellectual resistance to colonial rule.)

Powerful though the European empires were, there was a limit to their capacity to deliver "fake news" and misinformation: The point was reached when colonial subjects no longer believed what they read in the colonial press, and called for "alternative" (read: "Asia-centric") news instead.

At a glance, it would seem that we are back to that historical moment when "facts" are no longer seen as facts.

Those who lament the current phenomenon of "fake news" may be a tad too cynical for their own good, for they seem to assume the public believes whatever it sees and reads blindly. Since when was this the case? And since when was "fake news" news in the first place?

A century ago, millions of Asians came to the simple and mundane realisation that the colonial powers had no intention of doing them any good, and that all talk of a "civilising mission" was merely hollow propaganda. That awareness was the key that unlocked a host of other political and ideological alternatives, and paved the way for national liberation across Asia.

Today, we can all see that much of what is said, written or tweeted by some politicians and celebrities is equally nonsensical, and does not deserve serious attention.

This is equally liberating as it clears the deck of senseless distractions, and reminds us that there are more important things to do in life than wasting our time "liking" posts on Facebook or tweeting about what you had for breakfast this morning. ♦

**Farish A. Noor** is Associate Professor at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University. He is a regular contributor to *BiblioAsia*.

This article was first published in *The Straits Times* on 25 March 2017. © Farish A. Noor and Singapore Press Holdings. Reprinted with permission.

# A History of Singapore Horror

Singaporeans have always had a morbid fascination with the supernatural. **Ng Yi-Sheng** examines the culture of horror in our oral folklore, books and films.

In 2016, I was asked to speak at a Singapore Writers Festival panel discussion titled 'SG HORROR: Who's Afraid of the Dark'.

This surprised me, since I had never identified myself as a horror writer. Nor had my two co-panelists, Audrey Chin and Jon Gresham. The very purpose of the event was, apparently, to ponder "why there are so few horror writers in Singapore".

Frankly, this infuriated me. The panel's premise was absurd: not only does Singapore have a plethora of horror writers; we also have a rich and layered culture of horror that has been interpreted

by a diverse range of storytellers over the centuries. I cobbled together a hastily researched lecture on the subject. Additionally, I invited a real-life horror writer to join the discussion: Raymus Chang, author of the short story collection *Shadows from Here: Tales of Terror* (2016).

That lecture forms the basis of this essay: an exploration of Singapore's horror heritage over the ages. Certain gaps remain: I've been unable to gather much data on the history of horror in radio and non-English literature for instance. Nevertheless, it is possible to sketch a

**Ng Yi-Sheng** is a poet, fictionist, playwright and journalist. His books include his debut poetry collection *Last Boy*, which won the Singapore Literature Prize in 2008, the bestselling *SQ21: Singapore Queers in the 21st Century*, the movie novelisation *Eating Air* and the spoken word collection *Loud Poems for a Very Obliging Audience*. He tweets and Instagrams at @yishkabob.

timeline that helps us understand the roots of Singaporean horror; how it has evolved, and where it is headed in the future.

## Folk Horror (1810s–1940s)

The very beginnings of modern Singaporean history are tinged with horror. In 1819, shortly after Singapore was established as a British trading post, Stamford Raffles called for an expedition to climb Fort Canning Hill, then called Bukit Larangan, which means "The Forbidden Hill" in Malay. When the Temenggong's men warned him that "none of us have the courage to go up that hill because there are many ghosts on it. Every day one can hear on it sounds as of hundreds of men. Sometimes one hears the sound of heavy drums and of people shouting," Raffles was reported

to have scoffed, saying, "I should like to see your ghosts."<sup>1</sup>

Other settlers who soon arrived on the island brought their supernatural traditions with them: tales of *yau gwee* (hungry ghosts in Hokkien) from China, *hantu* (ghost in Malay) from the Malay Archipelago, *mohini* (vengeful female spirits) from the Indian subcontinent, and *jinn* (spirits) from the Arab world. These immigrant beliefs soon took root in the local landscape. For instance, in 1843, it was reported that the Chinese living in the Tanglin area especially feared tiger attacks as they believed victims would become the ghostly slaves of these animals.<sup>2</sup> In 1856, it was rumoured that St Andrew's Cathedral had been overrun by evil spirits. Gossipmongers claimed that these vicious spirits could only be pacified with sacrifices of human heads, and that the British were ordering Indian convicts to harvest them from hapless passers-by.<sup>3</sup>

Colonialism brought with it a wave of British ethnographers, with Singapore featuring as a popular port-of-call in their surveys of the greater Malay world. Descriptions of *hantu* and *bomoh* (Malay shamans) abound in their writings, such as John Turnbull Thomson's *Glimpses into Life in Malayan Lands* (1864), Frank Swettenham's *Malay Sketches* (1895) and Walter Skeat's *Malay Magic* (1900). These works provide valuable insights into the early folk beliefs of the Malay community.

By the early 20th century, it was evident that horror was becoming the stuff of mass entertainment. In 1923, when New World amusement park opened in Jalan Besar, it featured a highly popular ghost train ride through a darkened enclosure filled with ghoulish images. Great World park in Kim Seng Road would follow suit in 1929 with a similar ride. Though both have since been demolished, old photographs suggest that the train rides featured images of ghosts and demons inspired by Chinese folklore.<sup>4</sup>

Thankfully, one splendid artefact of early Chinese horror still survives in Pasir Panjang: the Ten Courts of Hell in Haw Par Villa, built in 1937 and originally known as Tiger Balm Gardens. Visitors today can still wander among garishly painted dioramas of naked souls being tortured by demons in the afterlife.

## Malayan Horror (1950s–1970s)

At midnight on 27 April 1957, Cathay-Keris Productions premiered a film that would forever be etched into the Singaporean psyche. Titled *Pontianak*, it told the story of the eponymous *pontianak*, the infamous long-haired female vampire from Malay mythology. Traditionally, this creature is said to be the vengeful spirit of a woman who had died during childbirth. However, the film took liberties with the source ma-

terial, reimagining its heroine Chomel as an innocent wife who becomes a homicidal monster due to a powerful curse.

*Pontianak* was a massive success, screening in major cinemas for almost two months – an unusually long period for homegrown films of the era. Although *Pontianak* is remembered as a Malay film in the popular imagination, it was in fact a multiethnic collaboration directed by B.N. Rao, written by Abdul Razak and produced by Ho Ah Loke. The film was initially released in both Malay and Mandarin, and later dubbed into Cantonese and English for overseas audiences. As a result, the *pontianak* tale is fondly remembered by people of all races in Malaysia and Singapore.

The film marked the birth of Malay horror as a film genre. To capitalise on the film's success, Rao directed three sequels in quick succession: *Dendam Pontianak* (Revenge of the Pontianak) in 1957; *Sumpah Pontianak* (Curse of the Pontianak) in 1958; and *Pontianak Gua Musang* (The Vampire of the Civet Cat Cave) in 1964. Cathay-Keris' main rival, Shaw Brothers, responded with its own trilogy, directed by Ramon Estella from the Philippines: *Anak Pontianak* (Son of the Pontianak) in 1958; *Pontianak Kembali* (The Pontianak Returns) in 1963; and *Pusaka Pontianak* (The Pontianak Legacy) in 1965.

Other ghoulish monsters from Malay folklore also made their way to the silver

[Facing page] An illustration of *Hantu Puteri* (Ghost Princess) by A. F. Anthony. All rights reserved, McHugh, J. N. (1959). *Hantu Hantu: An Account of Ghost Belief in Modern Malaya* (2nd edition) (p.45). Singapore: Published by Donald Moore for Eastern Universities Press. (Call no.: RCLOS 398.3 MAC)

[Right] An *anchak* or sacrificial tray used by the Malay medicine man (or *bomoh*) for occult practices. The tray has a fringe around it called "centipedes' feet". The *ketupat* and *lepat* (rice receptacles made of plaited palm fronds) are hung from the "suspenders" attached to the tray. All rights reserved, Skeat, W. W. (1900). *Malay Magic: Being an Introduction to the Folklore and Popular Religion of the Malay Peninsula* (p. 414). London: Macmillan and Co. Collection of the National Library, Singapore, Accession nos.: B02930611K; B29267256F.

[Below] Diorama featuring hapless souls being tortured in the afterlife at Haw Par Villa's Ten Courts of Hell. Photo by David Shamma, 22 March 2014. Courtesy of Flickr.





Maria Menado as the *pontianak*, a female vampire from Malay mythology, in B.N. Rao's 1957 *Dendam Pontianak*. © Dendam Pontianak. Directed by B. Narayan Rao and produced by Cathay-Keris Films, 1957.

screen. K.M. Basker's *Hantu Jerangkung* (1957) dealt with a female "skeleton ghost". L. Krishan's *Orang Minyak*, *Serangan Orang Minyak* and *Sumpah Orang Minyak* (all released in 1958) featured a supernatural "oily man" who sexually assaults women – memorably played by a young P. Ramlee in *Sumpah Orang Minyak*. There was even a horror-themed comedy film: Mat Sentol's *Mat Toyol* (1969), featuring a *toyol*, a child-sized spirit used by a Malay shaman as a servant.

Interestingly, this deluge of horror began in 1957, the same year the Federation of Malaya Independence Act took effect. "Were people really so anxious about self-governance, or saw it as a kind of existential horror, that they suddenly thought of ghosts and demons?" asks Malaysian filmmaker Amir Muhammad. "I doubt if they were that morbid. I think the horror genre is a sign of confidence, because it's a bold step to take stories that had existed only orally and then use technology to bring them to life. It's an assertion of narrative (and cultural) independence."<sup>5</sup>

Amir is in fact mistaken in his assertion that Malay ghost stories existed only in oral form before *Pontianak* was produced. A brief flowering of horror fiction had taken place from 1952 to 1956, thanks to two men who would later become key politicians. These men were the future President of Singapore, Yusof bin Ishak, and the future Cabinet Minister, Othman Wok, then employed as a journalist at the

Malay newspaper *Utusan Melayu*. "Malays just love stories like these and Yusof Ishak asked me to write one every week for the Sunday edition called *Utusan Zaman*," Othman later recalled. "Sure enough, the circulation almost tripled."<sup>6</sup>

These tales, later published in English under the title *Malayan Horror*, display a remarkably contemporary view of the supernatural as characters from modern times are confronted not only by Malay spectres but also by those from other cultures. In "The Anklets", a mortuary doctor sees the disembodied feet of a murdered Indian woman; in "Visitor from the Coffin", a photographer snaps photographs of the ghost of a Chinese grocer; and in "The Guardian", an archaeologist's assistant is hunted down by a Dayak mummy.<sup>7</sup>

The Malayan horror craze may have influenced the English literary horror scene as well. J. N. McHugh's study of Malay spirits, *Hantu Hantu: An Account of Ghost Belief in Modern Malaya* (1959), is essentially an ethnographic work, yet its illustrations and accessible style have made it a cult favourite among non-academic readers in Singapore. Likewise, there is Malay supernatural imagery aplenty in Gregory Nalpon's work (regardless that he was an Indian Catholic), in short stories such as "The Spirit of the Moon" and "The Mango Tree", written between the 1950s and 70s, and later published in his posthumous collection *The Wayang at Eight Milestone*. Critics have suggested that such works may be

regarded as "examples of an early post-colonial Singapore gothic".<sup>8</sup>

Sadly, following Singapore's expulsion from Malaysia in 1965, local culture underwent a radical change. Singapore lost its position as the hub of the Malay film industry, and Shaw and Cathay-Keris moved their operations to Kuala Lumpur. With the lingua franca of Singapore shifting from Malay to English, Singapore was no longer the centre of Malay cultural production. The age of Malayan horror had come to an end.

### Singaporean Horror (1980s–early 2000s)

Today, Catherine Lim is widely known as the author of social-realist short stories and feminist novels. Yet I believe she has another, more obscure role in our literary history as the Mother of Singaporean Horror. In her early writings, Lim documents the influence of the Chinese spiritual world on the psyche of modern Singaporeans. This helped to lay the groundwork for the rebirth of our horror culture, and its transformation from a specifically Malay milieu to a multiethnic one.

Lim first referenced the uncanny in her short story collection *Or Else the Lightning God and Other Stories* (1980) with subtle mentions of hauntings in "Unseeing", "The Bondmaid" and "Or Else the Lightning God". She followed this with *They Do Return... But Gently Lead Them Back* (1983), possibly Singapore's first English-language collection of horror sto-

ries. These tales range from ethnographic descriptions of traditional lore to more contemporary yarns. For instance, "A Boy Named Ah Mooi" explains how sons may be protected from demons by disguising them as girls, while "Lee Geok Chan" describes how a dead student mysteriously returns to complete her A-Level exams.

Did Lim's books directly lead to a boom in local horror? It is hard to say as later horror writers do not cite her as an influence. Nevertheless, by the late 1980s, countless volumes of ghost stories were flying off the presses, including Nicky Moey's *Sing a Song of Suspense* (1988), Goh Sin Tub's *Ghosts of Singapore* (1990), Lim Thean Soo's *Eleven Bizarre Tales* (1990), Z. Y. Moo's *The Weird Diary of Walter Woo* (1990), K. K. Seet's *Death Rites* (1990), Lee Kok Liang's *Death is a Ceremony and Other Short Stories* (1992), Rahmad bin Badri's *Ghostly Tales from Singapore* (1993) and V. Mohan's *Spooky Tales from Singapore* (1994). There was even a horror comic series: *Souls* (1989–1995), edited by K. Ramesh and Ramesh Kula.

Undoubtedly, the biggest name of the era was Russell Lee. In 1989, he released *The Almost Complete Collection of True Singapore Ghost Stories*, a compilation of 50 supposedly real-life accounts of paranormal encounters gathered from ordinary Singaporeans. It was a major hit, selling an unprecedented 30,000 copies in just over two months.<sup>9</sup> Lee cashed in on his success by transforming the standalone book into a series. Today, *True Singapore Ghost Stories* (1989–present) comprises 25 volumes, with the author aiming to reach Book 50 within his lifetime.<sup>10</sup>

*True Singapore Ghost Stories* may be pulp literature, but it is also thoroughly representative of Singapore's diversity. Its spirits hail from a range of cultural backgrounds: readers are transported from a tale of a *pontianak* in a banana tree to one of demon possession in a church.<sup>11</sup>

Occasionally, hauntings even cross ethnic lines, such as when a Chinese boy is cursed by a Javanese bracelet.<sup>12</sup> From Book 4 onwards, these accounts are interspersed with chapters titled "Russell Lee Investigates", expounding on the afterlife in world religions, beliefs about vampires, cults, UFO sightings and other topics – arguably a form of transcultural education. Interestingly, Lee himself is an enigmatic and racially ambiguous figure: to protect his anonymity, he has routinely appeared at events in a black mask and gloves, obscuring even the colour of his skin.

Another prolific author is Pugalenthii, aka Pugalenthii Sr, founder of the publishing company VJ Times. While editing the horror anthology *Black Powers* (1991), he decided to write a few stories himself. This marked the beginning of a formidable literary career: he now has dozens of titles to his name, including *Evil Eyes* (1992), *Rakasa* (1995), and the *Nightmares* series (1996–2003), a collection of ghost stories exploring various haunted locales in Singapore, including schools, hospitals, army camps and offices. According to the author, this last series was so popular it was used in Malaysia as an English teaching resource.<sup>13</sup>

The most skilled Singaporean horror writer of the period, however, is probably the late Damien Sin. The four volumes of his *Classic Singapore Horror Stories* series (1992–2003) belong to the genre of horror, but display a firm command of plot and character as well as a deft hand in describing Singapore's sordid underbelly. What stays with the reader, however, is the bloodcurdling viscerality of his tales, such as "Sealed with a Kiss", in which the ghost of a sex worker literally rips out the heart of her pimp with her tongue.

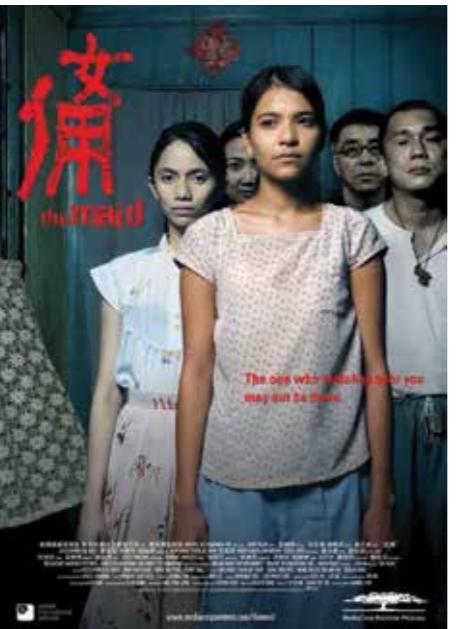
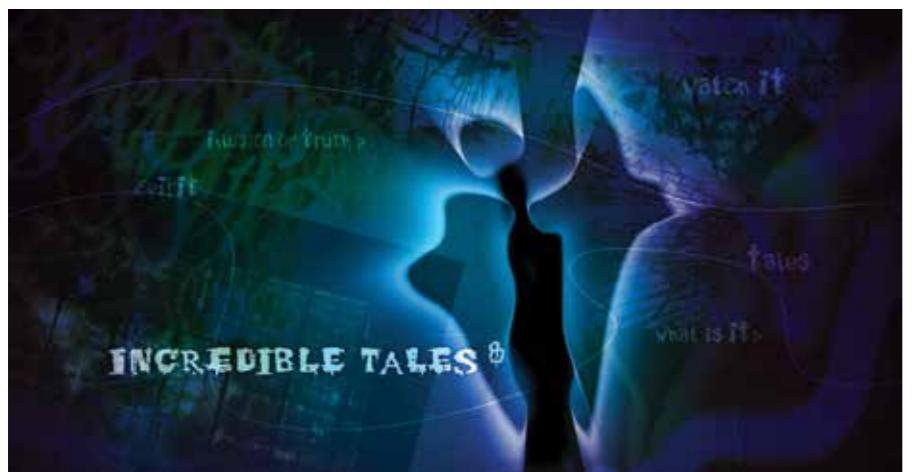
Amidst these spooky tales, the genre of crime horror also flourished. In 1981, Singapore was stunned by news reports revealing that a spirit medium named Adrian Lim and his two wives had murdered two children in a bizarre act of human sacrifice. This atrocity provoked writers to create a number of popular non-fiction works about local crime, such as N.G. Kutty's *Adrian Lim's Beastly Killings* (1989), Alan John's *Unholy Trinity* (1989) and Sumiko Tan's *True Crime* (1990).

These texts are important because they are linked to the rebirth of Singapore's

(Below) An illustration from the story "Suffer the Children" in Damien Sin's *Classic Singapore Horror Stories* (Book 1). All rights reserved, Sin, D. (1992). *Classic Singapore Horror Stories* (p. 74). Singapore: Flame of the Forest. (Call no.: RSING S823 SIN) (Bottom) Damien Sin has published four volumes of his *Classic Singapore Horror Stories* while Russell Lee's *True Singapore Ghost Stories* is already into its 25th volume. Both series are huge hits with horror fans in Singapore. All rights reserved, Angsana Books.



**(Below)** *Incredible Tales*, an anthology series based on local horror narratives, was screened on MediaCorp's Channel 5 from 2005 to 2013. Courtesy of Mediacorp.  
**(Bottom)** Film still and movie poster from Kelvin Tong's *The Maid* (女佣; 2006). The film is about a newly arrived Filipino domestic worker in Singapore who encounters supernatural forces during the Chinese seventh lunar month. Courtesy of Mediacorp.



horror cinema, which had been dormant since the 1960s. It would take almost 25 years before the first Singaporean full-length horror movie in English would be released locally. This was Arthur Smith's *Medium Rare* (1991), inspired by the Adrian Lim murders. Six years later, another cinematic version of the infamous murders appeared: Hugo Ng's *God or Dog* (1997). Around the same time, Eric Khoo's violent drama *Mee Pok Man* (1995) featured a script written by horror author Damien Sin: a very loose retelling of his short story "One Last Cold Kiss".

Supernatural horror found its way back into cinema soon after. Fittingly, the first work in this new wave of films was a tribute to the classic Malay horror movie: Djinn Ong's *Return to Pontianak* (2001), in which a team of trekkers encounters a

*pontianak* in an abandoned village. Kelvin Tong chose to explore Chinese horror in *The Maid* (女佣; 2006), depicting the ordeals of a Filipina domestic worker during the Hungry Ghost Festival. Even horror comedy made a comeback, with works like Tong's *Men in White* (鬼啊! 鬼啊!; 2007), and Jack Neo and Boris Boo's *Where Got Ghost?* (吓到笑; 2009).

Television likewise embraced horror elements in its programming, even as Mediacorp's early shows were inspired more by foreign horror traditions than our own. For instance, Channel 8 created *Immortal Love* (不老传说; 1997), a soap opera about 19th-century Singaporeans being transformed into *jiangshi* or Chinese vampires – creatures made famous by Hong Kong films rather than local folklore. At the same time, Channel

5 produced *Shiver* (1997), an anthology series patterned after the Western classic *The Twilight Zone*, featuring bizarre plots about time travel and werewolves.

Homegrown horror would eventually take over the small screen too with Channel 5's *Incredible Tales* (2005–2013), an anthology series based on local horror narratives. Mediacorp would also commission Esan Sivalingam's TV movie *Pulau Hantu* (2008), which tackled ghost stories in army camps.

Interestingly, Mediacorp writers of the 1990s had unwittingly foreseen a future trend in our horror scene. Singaporeans had a longing to be haunted, not only by their own ghosts, but also by the spectres of foreign lands.

### Cosmopolitan Horror (2000s–present)

In 2009, a new best-selling Singaporean horror series hit the shelves, marketed specifically at children. The *Mr Midnight* series (2009–present) is the work of James Lee, the pen name of Jim Aitchison – author of the raunchy *Sarong Party Girl* comic books (1994–96) as well as the lyrics of the National Day songs, "One People, One Nation, One Singapore" (1990) and "The Singapore Story" (1998).

Surprisingly, the 109 volumes of *Mr Midnight* display few hallmarks of local horror. The protagonists may be Singaporean children, but their paranormal foes are the stuff of Hollywood: Egyptian mummies, killer clowns, murderous robots, haunted pumpkins, monstrous Santa Clauses and the like.

One could claim this is due to Aitchison's Australian origins. Yet the truth is, a number of recent Singaporean storytellers too have embraced Hollywood horror in their creations. S.M. De Silva's *Blood on the Moon* (2010) describes a young Singaporean's voyage to a city full of vampires and werewolves. Nicholas Yong's *Land of the Meat Munchers* (2013) and Ryan Loh's *Dead Singapura* (2016) envision our city in the midst of a zombie apocalypse. Angie Child's *The Regenerator* (2015) deals with alien invaders in the future – the 23rd century no less.

Among filmmakers, even Kelvin Tong, once so obsessed with Chinese ghosts, has now turned his sights to the West. His latest movie, *The Faith of Anna Waters* (2016), deals with an American family in Singapore confronting a Christian-style demonic suicide cult. A more complicated set of cultural issues surrounds Gilbert Chan's *23:59* (2011) and *Ghost Child* (鬼仔; 2013). These two films draw on the classic local tropes of army camp ghost stories

and *toyol* hauntings respectively. Yet both films feature all-Chinese casts – an offensive act of erasure given the original ethnic roots of these tales.

So, are we in danger of losing our horror heritage? Probably not. There are still plenty of publications featuring local spooks, including Andrew Lim's *Tales from the Kopitiam* series (2008–09), Verena Tay's *Spectre* (2012) and the *Spooked in Singapore* series (2014–15), ostensibly written by "the team of exorcists from Ghostbuster Singapore".

The most ambitious of these books is probably Sandi Tan's *The Black Isle* (2012). The novel retells the story of Singapore through the eyes of the spirit medium Cassandra, who exerts her dark influence on the island throughout its history, from the time of British colonialism and the Japanese Occupation to the Communist Emergency, Konfrontasi and Independence.

Otto Fong's *Bitter Suites* (2013) is noteworthy for both its originality and its gore: it features a curse on social media, condemning its victims to suffer the tortures of Chinese hell as depicted in Haw Par Villa. Younger readers may prefer Zed Yeo's *Half Ghost* (2016), about a half-human, half-vampire boy named Nail who battles a *pontianak* in the underworld.

Universal Studios Singapore's Halloween Horror Nights is an annual festival of horror held since 2011. As might be expected of an American-owned entity, the event features actors playing creepy characters straight out of Hollywood: vampires, aliens, witches, serial killers and clowns. Interspersed with these are a few scares inspired by non-American cultures: Chinese fox fairies, Japan's Suicide Forest and the Mexican Day of the Dead. Courtesy of Dejiki.com.



### Notes

- 1 Abdullah Abdul Kadir. (2009). *The Hikayat Abdullah* [A.H. Hill, Trans.] (p. 146). Kuala Lumpur: The Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. (Call no.: RSEA 959.5 ABD). [Note: Abdullah claims that Colonel William Farquhar organised the expedition; later historians establish that it was almost certainly Raffles. See Hahn, E. (1968). *Raffles of Singapore* (pp. 463–464). London: Oxford University Press Kula Lumpur: University of Malaya Press. Call no.: RSING 959.570210924 RAF-H-[HIS].]
- 2 Tigers. (1843, October 26). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, p. 2. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 3 Buckley, C. B. (1984). *An anecdotal history of old times in Singapore, 1819–1867* (pp. 575–576). Singapore: Oxford University Press. (Call no.: RSING 959.57 BUS-[HIS])
- 4 Singapore Press Holdings. (1953, February 19). *Round-up of the three amusement parks – New World, Happy World, Great World: This 'monster' is one of the thrills of the Ghost Ride in the amusement park* [Photograph]. Retrieved from National Archives of Singapore website.
- 5 Amir Muhammad. (2010). *120 Malay movies* (p. 14). Petaling Jaya: Matahari Books. (Call no.: RSEA 791.430899923 AMI-[ART])
- 6 Chandy, G. (2000, April 23). Once an MP, now he's a 'JC'. *The New Paper*, p. 4. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 7 Othman Wok. (1991). *Malayan horror: Macabre tales of Singapore and Malaysia in the 50's*. Singapore: Heinemann Asia. (Call no.: RSING S899.2305 OTH)
- 8 Whitehead, A. (2013). Introduction to *The Wayang at Eight Milestone: Stories & essays* by Gregory Nalpon (p. xvii). Singapore: Epigram Books. (Not available in NLB holdings)
- 9 Arunaway bestseller. (1989, December 6). *The Straits Times*, p. 4. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 10 Sukmawati Umar. (2015, October 9). Inspiring chills at Halloween Horror Nights. *The New Paper*. Retrieved from The New Paper website.
- 11 Lee, R. (1992). *The almost complete collection of true Singapore ghost stories* (Book 2) (pp. 20–23). Singapore: Flame of the Forest. (Call no.: RSING LEE)
- 12 Lee, R. (1994). *The almost complete collection of true Singapore ghost stories* (Book 3) (pp. 19–22). Singapore: Angsana Books. (Call no.: RSING LEE)
- 13 Interview with Pugalenthi, 25 March 2017.
- 14 Alfian Sa'at. (2017, January 19). *Some thoughts which I shared at last night's forum on Singapore literature* (paraphrased and expanded). Retrieved from Facebook.

culture – the hungry ghost, the *toyol* and the *pontianak*.

Perhaps the last word on our horror heritage should go to Alfian Sa'at. As an author who once scorned works like *True Singapore Ghost Stories*, he now confesses a new-found respect for these writings as a form of national literature; the oral folklores of multiple races meshing as one, teaching us superstitions and taboos from each other's cultures and traditions.

"One does not need to be Malay to know what a *Pontianak* is. One does not have to believe in any religion to entertain the possibility of demonic possession. One does not have to be a Taoist to know that it is somewhat taboo to mess around with Hungry Ghost offerings... [T]his circulation and borrowing of beliefs was hardly self-conscious, and a demonstration of a kind of grassroots interculturalism... If multiculturalism is about respecting other people's beliefs, interculturalism goes further, to the point of adopting these beliefs. Even if this was about hedging bets against the spiritual world... *Hantulah Singapura*."<sup>14</sup> ♦

# EAST of SUEZ

## THE MYSTIQUE OF TRAVEL

Rudyard Kipling coined the phrase “East of Suez” to describe the exotic lands east of the Suez Canal. **Kennie Ting** goes back to a time when people were travellers, not tourists.

*“Ship me somewhere east of Suez, where the best is like the worst,  
Where there aren’t no Ten Commandments an’ a man can raise a thirst;  
For the temple-bells are callin’, an’ it’s there that I would be —  
By the old Moulmein Pagoda, looking lazy at the sea...”<sup>1</sup>*

— Rudyard Kipling, “Mandalay”

*i*  
Imagine, if you can, standing at the edge of the passenger platform, on the banks of the Suez Canal. It's been two weeks since you arrived in Egypt, one month since leaving Southampton. And now here you are in Port Said, waiting to board your next ship for the onward journey to British India, and beyond that, the Far East.

Your bags are packed. They sit innocuously at the rear. Your

manservant is counting the pieces, to make sure everything arrived safe and sound from the Hotel de l'Europe in Port Said. He has been at your side for the entire journey, making sure you feel at home away from home, everywhere you go.

You glance to your right, at the well-dressed lady who is similarly waiting to board the ship. She appears to be travelling alone too, and her maid servant stands by her,

sheltering her from the heat of the tropical sun with a sturdy parasol. Your eyes meet. You lift your hat slightly and nod. She acknowledges it with a slightly hesitant smile. Will you see her again on board the ship, you wonder...

The year is 1928. Our gentleman tourist has just embarked on his cruise to the Far East and is at present about to head “East of Suez” – what the European powers called their colonial dominions

lying to the east of the Suez Canal. The phrase itself had been made popular by the poem *Mandalay*, published in 1890 by Rudyard Kipling, the celebrated chronicler of the British Empire and doyen of all things Far Eastern.

### The Suez Canal and its Impact on Travel

The Suez Canal took nearly 15 years to build, from the time it was envisioned in 1854 by a Franco-Egyptian consortium to its actual completion in 1869, as the project was beset by political and financial disputes, engineering issues and chronic labour shortages. On 17 November 1869, in a lavish ceremony held at Port Said in Egypt, the 164-km-long and 54-metre-wide canal linking the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea through the Isthmus of Suez was declared open, changing the course of maritime history forever.

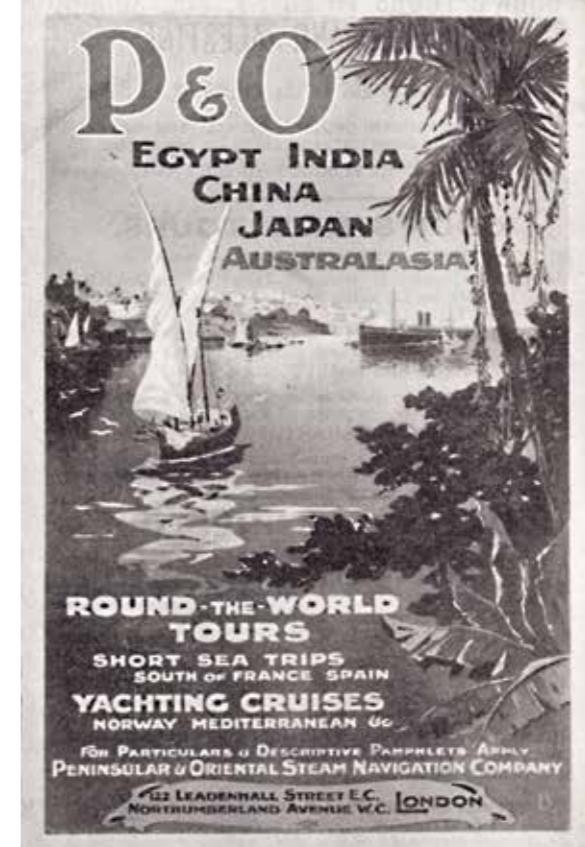
For the first time, ships heading East from Europe no longer had to traverse the Cape of Good Hope and the western coast of the African continent just to get to Arabia, less than 2,000 miles south of Greece. Months were shaved off the journey, and this proved pivotal to long-distance maritime trade and paved the way for the advent of leisure travel to faraway lands.

Prior to the opening of the Suez Canal, only colonial civil servants or merchants with interest in far-flung foreign dominions would elect to travel to the East. By and large, the leisure traveller was a rare sight: one had to be fairly intrepid – or foolhardy – to take such a long and arduous journey. However, by the 1880s, a small number of leisure travellers, taking advantage of the shortened journey via the Suez, would venture forth where no other in their time had been before – and return to recount their tales.

The first of these adventurous travellers were accommodated as passengers on board mail or cargo steamers, putting up with basic facilities that were meant for much hardier members of the crew. By the turn of the 19th century, however, “pleasure cruises” had become a viable industry. The Great War (1914–18)

— later known as World War I – did little to quell demand and, by the early 1920s, the cruise liner industry was at its peak. For Europeans and Americans in the 1920s, newly affluent and with an insatiable curiosity for seeing a world they had hitherto read about in journals and heard about in news broadcasts, the East presented a thrilling, albeit somewhat fantastical counterpoint to the West, with its social niceties, its modern conveniences and its increasingly hectic pace of life.

Brochures from the major shipping lines of the era, as well as independent



**[Facing page]** Steamers passing through the Suez Canal. The 164-km-long and 54-metre-wide canal – which opened on 17 November 1869 – linking the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea changed the course of maritime history forever as it paved the way for the advent of long-distance leisure travel. Ships heading East from Europe no longer had to traverse the Cape of Good Hope and the western coast of the African continent to get to Arabia. *Kennie Ting Collection*.

**[Left]** In response to an increased demand for travel, shipping lines and tour agencies began to offer round-the-world cruises as early as the 1910s. This is an advertisement from the Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Company promoting its round-the-world tours and cruises to the exotic Far East. *Kennie Ting Collection*.

**[Below]** A painting by the French shipping company, Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes, depicting life on board one of its cruise liners. If one travelled first class, travel by ship was as opulent and luxurious as any hotel establishment could offer. *Kennie Ting Collection*.



tour agencies such as Thomas Cook & Son, Raymond & Whitcomb Company and American Express' Travel Department, reinforced this impression of the East as an exotic and idyllic haven, often describing the passage East with words and phrases that invoked a return to innocence, or at least to a simpler and more spiritual existence.

Mind-boggling distances and unfamiliar cultures were rendered far more manageable and immediate through detailed descriptions and evocative photographs that brought the locale to life on paper to the would-be traveller. The

journey itself was promoted as one of discovery, both of uncharted territory and of the self. By undertaking these passages East, the average upper middle-class European or American could fancy him or herself as following in the illustrious footsteps of great explorers, adventurers and travel writers before them. To aspire was to explore.

### When Travel was Leisure

In response to a heightened demand for travel, shipping lines and tour agencies began to offer round-the-world cruises as early as the 1910s. These were trips that circumnavigated the globe, stopping off briefly at a string of major cities. Catering to a select group of wealthy persons of leisure, or famous celebrities and writers, these round-the-world journeys by steamships could take up to a whole year or more, with travellers stopping over for months at a time at major ports, absorbing the sights and experiencing the local histories and cultures at their leisure. Holidays in the pre-jet era, for those who could afford them, were extended, indulgent breaks for rest, recreation and on occasion, recuperation.

Of course, passengers on services out East did not just include vacationers. The bulk of these passengers continued to be businessmen and colonial officials; and significantly after World War I, new immigrants, seeking out a fresh start in the far-flung colonies of the home countries. They, too, would have been attracted to an image of the East as a land of opportunity, where fortunes could be made.

Unlike the historic Grand Tours of continental Europe, which began in the late 1700s and remained a popular rite of passage for wealthy elites in Britain and America well into the 1900s, the intent of undertaking a round-the-world Grand Tour that took one to the East wasn't so much to better or educate one's self, but to experience something new and exotic – leisure, rather than self-advancement. There was also an undeniable degree of colonial superiority involved in the Grand Tourists' gaze, which tended to objectify unfamiliar Eastern cultures and judge them as inferior to the West, rather than attempt to understand them on an equal footing.

### Go East, Young Man

The customary stops on Grand Tours of the East depended in large part on the Colonial Empire from which the traveller hailed. Generally, the tour took in a

handful of major port cities – Bombay, Colombo, Calcutta, Rangoon, Singapore, Batavia, Saigon, Hanoi, Manila, Hong Kong, Macao, Tientsin, Shanghai and others, before terminating in the treaty port cities of Kobe or Yokohama in Japan. Those with time and money to spare would use these port cities as a base, from which to take excursions to major historic sites and centres of culture – the palaces of Rajasthan, the ruins of Bagan, Angkor, Borobudur and Ayutthaya, and the imperial cities of Peking and Tokyo.

Southeast Asia – or the East Indies, as this part of the world was known then – was an important stopover between India and the Far East, not least because of its geographical location between the two areas. Rather, the East Indies was

Batavia and Shanghai were popular ports of call for tourists on the Grand Tour of the East. [Below] The Amsterdam Gate in Batavia, which existed from 1744 to the 1950s, formed the entrance to the Castle Square south of Batavia Castle. [Bottom] This is a view of the historic Bund, the waterfront area in Shanghai that runs alongside the Huangpu River. Both photos are from the Kennie Ting Collection.



P & O, established in 1837 in Southampton, England, to deliver mail on behalf of the British Empire to the Iberian Peninsula, and subsequently to the city of Alexandria. From Egypt, the company expanded its operations out East as far as China and Japan, acquiring and merging with other steamship companies to secure its position as the foremost shipping line in the world by the early 1900s.

The other colonial powers had P & O equivalents: the French Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes (literally "maritime packet company"), more commonly known as Messageries Maritimes, was established in 1851. Headquartered in the Mediterranean port city of Marseille in France, their "paquebots" (as the French called their steamships) were to be seen in all major port cities in the Middle East, and by the 1900s, with Saigon in Vietnam as its second headquarters, also in the Far East.

The Dutch established the Koninklijke Paketvaart-Maatschappij (Royal Packet Navigation Company), or KPM, in 1888, in its capital, Amsterdam. With Batavia in the Dutch East Indies as its Eastern headquarters, the KPM brought significant trade and passenger traffic to Java, cementing Batavia's position as a global entrepôt and a formidable competitor to Singapore in the region.

Modes of transportation on round-the-world tours were not limited to maritime steamships. Tour agencies were committed to making the most of existing sea, river, land and, from the late 1920s onwards, fledgling air travel networks in the region to take the Grand Tourist where he or she wanted to go. But the steamship and cruise liner would remain the most evocative, romantic and visible symbol of long-distance luxury travel for much of the first half of the 20th century.

### Life on the High Seas

Life on board the cruise liner, particularly, if one travelled first class, was as opulent and luxurious as any hotel establishment could offer, with shipping lines constantly competing with one another to put out the speediest, smoothest and most luxurious ships in the market. No cost and effort was spared in ensuring that the interiors of these ships afforded a sense of decadence and privilege. In fact, many of the dining halls, lounges and smoking rooms were often theatrical in outlook and design, reinforcing the impression that one was participating in a kind of sweeping epic drama on the high seas.

Everyday life on board the ship typically revolved around food and entertain-

[Below] Passengers dressed in their best on a cruise liner belonging to the German-owned Norddeutscher Lloyd company in 1912. Cruising was very much a formal affair then, with male passengers dressed in suits, and ladies in neck-to-ankle blouse and skirt ensembles and extravagant large hats. John Koh Collection. [Bottom] Dining Hall of a cruise ship belonging to the American President Lines c.1920s. Life on board the ship typically revolved around food and entertainment. Guests in the grand dining rooms would be treated to multi-course meals to the accompaniment of resident musical ensembles. John Koh Collection.



ment. The former was abundant – the gong would sound at appropriate intervals of the day for breakfast, lunch, tea, dinner and supper. Wine and beer would flow freely, and champagne would be popped for first-class passengers. Guests would be dressed to the nines outside of their private staterooms; particularly for dinner, where they would join other guests in the capacious dining rooms, to be treated to multi-course meals and regaled by resident musical ensembles.

In between meals, social activity centred on the common spaces: open-air promenade decks, the lounge halls and the smoking rooms, the latter restricted only to first-class male passengers, who would idle their time away on card games, drinks and conversation, all the while puffing away on a cigar or cigarette.

Between the 1900s and 1920s, social life on board ships became more varied as the ships became larger and social mores grew more relaxed. In the 1910s, male passengers would have been uncomfortably garbed in stiff suits, while ladies would be dressed in stifling corsets, and neck-to-ankle blouse and skirt ensembles with high boots and extravagant large hats. Interaction between the sexes would have been polite, guarded by modesty.

The Great War of 1914–18 swept away these inhibitions. Suddenly, men and women no longer dressed as conservatively, particularly the women, who started wearing the gauzy, flimsy flapper dresses that were all the rage in the 1920s. The Americans introduced larger cruise liners with more amenities – tennis courts, pool tables, even swimming pools on deck.

While social convention still held sway on land, once aboard these ships, no holds were barred. Affairs were commonplace; gossip, scandal and intrigue were the order of the day, and all these theatrics served to make the long journey more bearable and infinitely more memorable.

### Life in the Grand Hotels

When the ships docked, Grand Hotels would take centrestage, and each city on the Grand Tour of the East boasted its own *grande dame* of the hospitality scene. The hotels were glorious, opulent establishments that catered to the fastidious needs of the Grand Tourists, who, having to travel for weeks or months at a time, often recreated their pampered lifestyles on board, complete with dozens of trunks of luggage and their favourite maids or man servants.

Boasting "European style" amenities that included full suites with separate living/dining, sleeping and washing areas, and the latest technologies like electricity and water closets (what flush toilets were called in those days), these establishments were more like homes away from home, rather than the hotels or guest-houses travellers today are more accustomed to. Guests would reside for weeks or months at a time, reading books, writing letters, entertaining guests or trading gossip.

Each city on the Grand Tour of the East had its own *grande dame* of the hospitality scene. The hotels were glorious, opulent establishments that catered to the fastidious needs of the Grand Tourists who, having to travel for weeks or months at a time, often recreated their pampered lifestyles wherever they stayed. Pictured here is the majestic Taj Mahal Hotel in Bombay, India. *Kennie Ting Collection*.



Staying at one of these Grand Hotels became an integral part of the Grand Tour. Quite a few of the hotels became legendary destinations in their own right: the Taj Mahal Hotel in Bombay; Grand Hotel in Calcutta; Galle Face Hotel in Colombo; Strand Hotel in Rangoon; Raffles Hotel in Singapore; Hotel Des Indes in Batavia; Oriental Hotel in Bangkok; Hotel Continental in Saigon; Peninsula Hotel in Hong Kong; Cathay Hotel in Shanghai; Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, and the like.

All of these Grand Hotels became the centre of the colonial social circles of each city, catering to an almost exclusively European clientele – extremely wealthy Chinese and Southeast Asian nobility were also welcome – until World War II broke out. Every one of these hotels' guest-lists read like a veritable who's who of the time. Heads of state, royalty, taipans and business tycoons, socialites, celebrities and entertainers, even notorious gangsters and international criminals, featured in the histories that took place within these rarefied walls.

But it would fall to the writers and poets to immortalise the gilded lives that unfolded in these Far Eastern hotels at the turn of the century: Somerset Maugham, George Orwell, Noel Coward, Rudyard Kipling and Joseph Conrad (to name but a few) in the Anglophone tradition; André Malraux, Pierre Loti and

Marguerite Duras in the Francophone tradition; and Louis Couperus, E. du Perron and Robert Nieuwenhuys in the Dutch tradition.

Some of these writers had been born or lived significant parts of their lives in the Far East before returning to the West. Others undertook the Grand Tour of these countries and returned to recount the tale. Somerset Maugham, in particular, would famously establish a presence in many of the region's legendary hotels, having travelled through almost all of the major Asian cities en route to the Pacific Islands. He would later meticulously document his experiences in numerous travel books, novels and stories, in particular his signature travelogue, *The Gentleman in the Parlour: A Record of a Journey from Rangoon to Haiphong* (1970).

Notable personalities linked to the Grand Hotels were not limited to guests alone. The remarkable Sarkies Brothers would have their name associated with a good half-dozen legendary hotels in the East, all in Southeast Asian cities. Originating from New Julfa, an Armenian enclave in the Persian city of Isfahan, the Sarkies brothers had each, in their turn, made their way to Southeast Asia, by way of British India.

There were four brothers: Martin, the eldest, was the first to arrive in



[Above left] The Sarkies Brothers from New Julfa, an Armenian enclave in the Persian city of Isfahan, owned luxury hotels in the major Southeast Asian cities. These included the Raffles Hotel in Singapore, the Strand Hotel in Rangoon, and the E & O and Crag hotels in Penang. Staying at one of these Grand Hotels became an integral part of the Grand Tour, with these lodgings serving as homes away from home for the Grand Tourists. *Kennie Ting Collection*.

[Above right] A view of the Manila Hotel in Manila, the Philippines, from the river. The hotel still stands today and has been refurbished to its former glory. *Kennie Ting Collection*.

Malaya, but it was Tigran, the second brother with an entrepreneurial streak, who co-founded with Martin in 1885 the company Sarkies Brothers and established the Eastern & Oriental (E & O) Hotel in Penang that same year. This was followed by the Raffles Hotel in Singapore two years later. Aviet, the third brother, would establish the Strand Hotel in Rangoon in 1901, while the youngest brother, Arshak, would take over the reins of managing the E & O in Penang, becoming the brother who was most indelibly linked to that establishment.

By the early 1900s, the Sarkies Brothers were the leading hoteliers in the East, counting, among their properties, not just the Raffles, the E & O and the Strand, but also the Crag Hotel in Penang, and the Seaview Hotel and the Raffles Tiffin Room in Singapore. A cousin managed the Adelphi Hotel in Singapore – yet another grand hotel establishment. In the meantime, a Javanese branch of the Sarkies family was established, headed by Martin's son, Lucas Martin Sarkies, who would go on to helm the fabled Oranje Hotel (today's Hotel Majapahit) in the port city of Soerabaja – Java's great metropolis.

The Malayan branch of Sarkies Brothers would go bankrupt in 1931, in the thick of the Great Depression and following Arshak's tragic and untimely death of a heart attack at Penang's E & O Hotel. Management of all their hotels would pass out of the family's hands, with the exception of the Oranje, which continued to be managed by Lucas Martin Sarkies and his descendants until the 1960s.

Thankfully, these Grand Hotels established by the Messrs Sarkies and their relatives have miraculously withstood the test of time and continue to receive guests today in the cities of Penang, Yangon, Surabaya and Singapore. Restored to their former splendour, these edifices are a living testament to the glory days of travel to the East of Suez. ♦

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# MURDER MOST MALEVOLENT

Sunny Ang, Mimi Wong, Adrian Lim and John Martin Scripps are some of the most cold-blooded murderers in Singapore's crime history. **Sharon Teng** revisits their horrific acts.



There are few things more heinous than a premeditated act of taking a human life. Under Singapore's Penal Code Act (Cap. 224), culpable homicide is defined as murder when the person who causes death knowingly performs an act with the intention of causing death or with the intention of causing injury leading to death.<sup>1</sup> In Singapore, murder is one of the few crimes that warrants the mandatory death penalty, besides drug trafficking and firearms-related offences.<sup>2</sup>

Singapore may be one of the safest countries in the world, but in spite of the city-state's tough stance against law-breakers and its unequivocal position on capital punishment, every now and then one hears about a horrifically violent act of crime.

In 2015, the Singapore Police Force handled a total of 33,839 crime cases (or 607 cases per 100,000 people), compared with 9,225,197 cases (or 2,870.2 cases per 100,000 people) reported in the United States during the same year. "Crimes against persons" (i.e. crimes in which the victim suffers bodily harm) constituted 12 percent. In the same year, there were 15 cases of murder, the third lowest recorded in 20 years.<sup>3</sup>

## A Murderous Mind

Crimes and criminals are objects of fascination that have been fictionalised, romanticised, sensationalised, and given a larger-than-life presence in books, television and films based on whodunnit murder

mysteries, forensic crime fiction, legal and courtroom dramas, psychological thrillers and police detective stories. Breaking news headlines of violent crimes, particularly those involving murder, invariably attract much public attention and invoke coffee-shop speculation and gossip.

What triggers an otherwise law-abiding citizen to go into a murderous rage and kill someone? In order to understand why people are pushed over the edge, homicide investigators, forensic psychologists, criminologists and law enforcement professionals typically examine the different elements of a homicide: whether the murder was premeditated, the motivation of the killer, the context of the killing, the choice of the murder instrument used, details of the crime scene, and the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator.

Many psychological theories have been offered to explain criminal behaviour, such as temporary insanity, mental deficiency and defective personality traits. Perpetrators of



violence generally suffer from what is known as a pathological personality condition.

Criminal or offender profiling (also known as criminal investigative analysis) is sometimes used by the police to explain the behavioural makeup of the perpetrator and identify likely suspects. Careful study of the crime scene photos, the physical and non-physical evidence, the manner in which the victim was killed or the body disposed of, witnesses' statements, autopsy photos and forensic lab reports allow investigators to compile a profile of the murderer.

The level of risk taken by the offender and the degree of organisation (or disorganisation) of the crime scene can provide clues about the relationship between the perpetrator and victim, as well as the nature of their interactions prior to the crime. Inferences can also be drawn about the perpetrator's emotional state of mind by examining the injuries left on the victim's body. Extensive injuries or excessive ligature markings usually point to a high level of rage or aggression. A meticulously constructed profile can become a useful tool to help the police recreate the crime scene and narrow down the scope of their investigations.

Studies have shown that many murders arise from conflicts between people who know each other, such as friends, lovers, spouses or family members. Some may resort to violence as an attempt to establish power or assert control over the other person. Other murders may be precipitated by a psychological build-up of physical or emotional trauma over time as well as anger, financial greed, sexual crav-

ings, revenge, jealousy, fear, desperation or religious fanaticism.

Singapore has seen several prominent murder cases over the last 50 years, each unique in its own way. As there are too many cases to profile within the scope of this article, we have selected only four cases – Mimi Wong, John Martin Scripps, Sunny Ang and Adrian Lim – that span the decades from the 1960s to 1990s. The first two have been categorised as "crimes of impulse" (also called "crimes of passion", usually driven by jealousy or murderous rage), while the latter two involved careful planning and malicious aforethought (called "instrumental crimes", with the crime being the instrument to achieve a specific aim).

## Sunny Ang: Murder for Greed

**When:** 27 August 1963, 5 pm

**Crime scene:** Straits of Pulau Dua (Sisters' Islands)

**The accused:** Sunny Ang Soo Suan alias Anthony Ang, aged 28

**The victim:** Jenny Cheok Cheng Kid, aged 22

*"It seems there is a popular belief that there can be no murder unless a body is produced. Nothing can be more fallacious and more untrue. A person can be convicted of murder without the body being found."*

– Justice Murray Buttrose, the presiding High Court judge, 18 May 1965



Sunny Ang Soo Suan came from a middle-class family and obtained his Senior Cambridge Grade One school certificate in 1955. He received a Colombo Plan scholarship in 1957 to train as a commercial airline pilot, but was subsequently dropped from the programme due to his arrogant and irresponsible behaviour. Ang also had a history of theft, and was caught trying to steal from a radio shop on 12 July 1962, only to be successfully defended by the prominent criminal lawyer, David Marshall, and placed on probation.

Ang was also a former Grand Prix race car driver, and was ranked among the top 10 in the 1961 Singapore Grand Prix. He was also a reckless driver, killing a pedestrian shortly after the Grand Prix event, claiming that the man had suddenly appeared on the road. Ang became an undischarged bankrupt in October 1962; he owed debts of more than \$6,000 to three parties and remained a bankrupt up to his death in 1967.

Ang met Jenny Cheok Cheng Kid when she was employed as a waitress at the Odeon Bar and Restaurant. She was a divorcee with two children, a son and a daughter.

On 27 August 1963, Ang and Cheok hired a boat at Jardine Steps for a scuba-diving trip to Pulau Dua (Sisters' Islands). At Ang's instructions, the boatman Yusuf bin Ahmad dropped anchor in the middle of the straits. Cheok suited up in her diving gear and descended into the sea, only to surface less than 10 minutes later. She then did a second dive after Ang had exchanged her cylinder tank with another, claiming that the first tank contained insufficient air. In the meantime, Ang stayed on board, claiming to have problems fixing a leak on his own tank.

When Cheok did not emerge after her second dive, Ang and Yusuf searched in vain for air bubbles breaking on the water surface before heading to nearby St John's Island to call the Marine Police for help. Both men then picked up five Malay fisherman divers from another nearby island to help search for Cheok. Even though Ang was a good swimmer and an experienced diver, he never entered the water once to help search for Cheok.

Divers from the Royal Navy and RAF Changi Sub-Aqua Club conducted several searches for Cheok's body to no avail. Then, during a search operation

Sunny Ang, being led by police officers here, was charged with the murder of Jenny Cheok Cheng Kid at sea off Pulau Dua (Sisters' Islands) on 27 August 1963. This photo is dated 4 March 1965. Source: The Straits Times © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Permission required for reproduction.

(Below) The straits of Pulau Dua (Sisters' Islands) where Jenny Cheok Cheng Kid was murdered at around 5 pm on 27 August 1963. Photo taken by Ria Tan in August 2008. Courtesy of WildSingapore.  
 (Bottom) Sunny Ang and his mother Madam Yeo Bee Neo (who was sole executor of the deceased's will) tried to hasten the coroner's inquiry into concluding that Jenny Cheok had drowned so that an insurance claim could be filed. *The Straits Times*, 5 March 1965, p.11.



**BAR GIRL MURDER INQUIRY: Sixth day**  
 Reporter: T.F. HWANG

## Jenny: Move by Madam Yeo to presume her 'dead'

SINGAPORE, Thursday

MADAM Yeo Bee Neo, mother of Sunny Ang, 25, had declared herself as "the sole executrix in the will of Jenny Cheok Cheng Kid, who according to her was

his company and Ang believed his mother "referred the picture."

Mr. Goh, replying to a question, said: "Yes, Mr. Francis Seow agreed it was right to say that Ang is the sole executrix right up to the very last moment."

Cross-examined by Mr. Francis Seow, Mr. Goh said: "Ang had been making arrangements for a petition by Madam Yeo to Ang's attorney general."



on 3 September, a flipper was found on the ocean floor at a depth of 45 feet, near the spot where Cheok was last seen. The flipper's strap was found with clean cuts, which could only have been done with a razor blade, a knife or a pair of scissors. Laboratory tests later confirmed that the cuts were unlikely to have been caused by corals. The flipper was identified as one of a pair which Ang's younger brother, William, had borrowed from his classmate, David Benjamin Woodworth. The prosecution concluded that it was one of the flippers worn by Cheok during her fateful dive.

According to an expert witness, the sudden loss of a flipper would adversely affect a diver's stability and mobility underwater. Other witnesses called to the stand testified that the waters surrounding Sisters' Islands had a strong undertow,

and were considered challenging even for experienced divers; in fact the area was regarded as an unsuitable site for swimming, let alone scuba-diving. Cheok's half-sister, Irene Toh, and the boatman, Yusuf, both corroborated that Cheok was a poor swimmer and a novice scuba diver. At the time of her disappearance at 5 pm on 27 August 1963, there was a strong current running along the Pulau Dua straits. Ang had deliberately scheduled the dive trip on Tuesday – a workday afternoon when it was unlikely for people to be in the vicinity.

About a month before Cheok's disappearance, Ang had signed up his girlfriend for four accident insurance policies totaling \$350,000 from two insurance companies: Edward Lumley and Sons (M) Ltd, and American International Underwriters Ltd. On 14 August, Ang insured Cheok for a further \$100,000 accident coverage with

the Insurance Company of North America. And barely three hours before their dive trip on 27 August, Ang extended the policy for a \$150,000 protection to cover an additional five days starting from 11 am on that day.

Three days after Cheok's disappearance, Ang informed Edward Lumley and Sons that Cheok had been in a "tragic accident". On 14 October, Edward Lumley received a lawyer's letter informing them that Ang's mother, Madam Yeo Bee Neo, was the sole executor of Cheok's will. Ang also made efforts to hasten the coroner's inquiry into Cheok's disappearance and seemed to be in a great hurry to have her death confirmed for the purpose of claiming against her insurance policies.

Ang was arrested on 21 December 1964 and initially charged with Cheok's murder the following day, but was given a discharge not amounting to an acquittal on 30 December after his lawyer, Punch Coomaraswamy, argued that Ang should not be kept in remand while waiting for the prosecution to set a date for the preliminary hearing. About an hour after his discharge, however, Ang was again charged for the same offence and remanded in Outram Prison.

Ang was tried in High Court before Justice Murray Buttrose and a seven-man jury. The prosecution was led by Senior Crown Counsel Francis Seow and assisted by Syed Alwee bin Ahmad. On the second day of the trial on 27 April 1965, the court was informed that Cheok had made a will in the presence of Ang on 7 August 1963 and had appointed Ang's mother, Madam Yeo, as the sole beneficiary. This was bizarre as Cheok had never met Madam Yeo, according to Cheok's half-sister, Irene.

In the prosecution's summation of the case on 18 May 1965, Ang was alleged to have murdered Cheok by tampering with her diving equipment, causing her to drown. His motive was clear: to collect the huge payouts from insurance policies he had taken out on Cheok less than a month before her death.

After an intense 13-day trial, the seven-men jury deliberated for two hours and returned with a unanimous guilty verdict. Ang was sentenced to death on 18 May 1965 and hanged at 5.55 am on 7 February 1967.

The Sunny Ang murder case was the first tried in Singapore and Malaysia that was based entirely on circumstantial evidence, as the victim's body was never found and there were no witnesses to the crime. Ang was also one of the last murderers to be tried by jury in Singapore – before jury trials were abolished in 1969.

In 1979, Harvesters Film Distribution and Production Pte Ltd announced that the Sunny Ang murder was slated to be made into a Mandarin film estimated to cost \$700,000. The actual names of the key people involved in the case would be changed to avoid any legalities.

The case was also featured in an episode of the 13-part *True Files*, a docudrama produced by Mediacorp that re-enacted high profile crimes of the last five decades, and telecast on 6 June 2002.

### Mimi Wong: A Jealous Lover

**When:** 6 January 1970, 9.30 pm  
**Crime scene:** Bathroom of a Jalan Sea View semi-detached house  
**The accused:** Wong Weng Siu, alias Mimi Wong, aged 34, and her husband, Sim Woh Kum alias Sim Wor Kum, aged 40  
**The victim:** Ayako Watanabe, aged 33

By the time Mimi Wong was 14, she was already working as a packer at a factory in Neil Road. She met Sim Woh Kum, then 17 years old and a factory worker, at a picnic and they soon became a couple.

Wong and Sim got married in 1958 when she was only 19. Raised by her stepmother, Wong had been bullied and beaten as a young girl, but after her marriage, she became the aggressive party: she was reported to have physically abused her husband and her mother-in-law on several occasions.

After Sim lost his job, Wong became the sole breadwinner, supporting her husband and two sons. In 1967, she started a new job as a towel girl at a Pasir Panjang Road bar and became a waitress soon after. She later worked as a bargirl, supplementing her income as a hostess and social escort at night.

In 1966, Japanese mechanical engineer Hiroshi Watanabe was posted to Singapore for work. He met Wong in October that year when she was working as a bargirl at the Flamingo Nightclub at Kim Seng Road. They became intimate soon after and Wong became Hiroshi's mistress in mid-1969, by which time she had been separated from her husband. Wong and Hiroshi first stayed in a rented room in Alexandra Road before moving to a house in Everitt Road.

In September 1969, Hiroshi informed Wong that his wife, Ayako, and their three children would be joining him in Singapore. Wong was enraged by this and threatened to harm his family. Hiroshi's family arrived on 23 December 1969 and moved into a house in Jalan Sea View. The next day, Hiroshi told Ayako about his relationship with Wong. He even took his wife and children to meet Wong on Christmas Day. Wong became extremely agitated as she feared that Hiroshi would put an end to their relationship now that his family was here. Indeed, Hiroshi had told his wife that he was making efforts to distance himself from Wong but was forced to proceed with caution due to Wong's fiery temper.

Wong decided to hatch a plan with her estranged husband, asking him to help

in her plot to murder Ayako. Four days before the deed, Wong got together a tin of toilet cleaning liquid, a knife and a pair of black gloves. At 9.30 pm on the night of 6 January 1970, Wong and Sim went to the Jalan Sea View house. Sim pretended to be a workman who had come to repair a broken bathroom basin. When all three were standing near the bathroom on the second storey, Sim threw the cleaning liquid into Ayako's eyes, temporarily blinding her. Wong then stabbed Ayako repeatedly with the knife and fled the scene with Sim.

When Hiroshi returned home at 10.30 pm after his night shift, he discovered his slain wife lying in a pool of blood in the bathroom, with his three children crying outside. According to his nine-year-old daughter, Chieko, their mother was attacked by Wong and an unknown man. Chieko had witnessed Sim and Wong manhandling her mother while she was on the bathroom floor, with blood drenching her chest.

Ayako was found to have a total of nine wounds: one on the right side of her neck that had severed the jugular vein, and another in her stomach that had pierced her aorta. Ayako also suffered defensive wounds on her right hand, with finger cuts indicating that she had fought off her assailant.

Sim and Wong were arrested on 7 and 8 January 1970 respectively after they were singled out by Chieko at an identification parade. Their joint trial, which began on 2 November the same year, was presided by Justice Tan Ah Tah and Justice Choor Singh. N. C. Goho and John Tan Chor-Yong were assigned by the Supreme Court as Wong's and Sim's defence lawyers respectively. Then Solicitor-General Francis Seow was the lead prosecutor.

During the trial, Wong pushed the blame entirely on Sim for Ayako's murder, confessing only to slapping and shoving the victim but not stabbing her. Sim was vehement in his protest that it was Wong who had masterminded the entire heinous plot and stabbed the victim repeatedly.

After a marathon 26-day trial, both Wong and Sim were convicted of killing Ayako, and sentenced to death on 7 December 1970.

The pair made three rounds of appeals between 1972 and 1973 to have their death sentences commuted to life imprisonment, but were unsuccessful. The couple was hanged at dawn on 27 July

### Murder conviction for first couple in Singapore

# Death for Mimi and husband

**The star witness**  
 By T.F. HWANG: Singapore, Monday

**D**ANCE hostess Mimi Wong Siu, 31, and her estranged husband Sim Woh Kum, 38, a Housing Board sweeper and school canteen hawkerman, are the first couple in Singapore to be jointly tried and convicted.

**Police face problem in finding 'invisible' tycoon**



Mimi Wong and her husband Sim Woh Kum were sentenced to death on 7 December 1970 for the murder of Ayako Watanabe. Wong was the mistress of the Japanese woman's husband. *The Straits Times*, 8 December 1970, p.1.



# Martin hanged, leaving behind mystery over another 'victim'

By Tan Ooi Boon



(Above left) The British national John Martin Scripps was hanged at Changi Prison on 19 April 1996, 408 days after killing Gerard Michael Lowe, a South African tourist whom he met in Singapore. *The Straits Times*, 20 April 1996, p.25.

(Above right) The John Martin Scripps murder case was documented in a book by crime reporter Tan Ooi Boon. All rights reserved, Tan, O. B. (1996). *Body Parts: A British Serial Killer in Singapore*. Singapore: Times Books International. [Call no.: RSING 364.1523095957 TAN]

identified by Lowe's wife and DNA tests confirmed his identity.

Police were aided in their investigations by a missing person report from South Africa. Once Lowe's identity was ascertained, the police were able to trace Scripps' activities between 8 and 11 March, using hotel and credit card transaction records. Traces of blood were also found on the wall tiles, the door and on the underside of the toilet bowl in the bathroom of the room where the murder took place.

Meanwhile, between 19 and 24 March, the dismembered body parts of Canadian tourists, school teacher Sheila Damud and her son Darin, were discovered in Phuket. They had checked in at the same hotel in Phuket as Scripps did on 15 March. Scripps was arrested at Changi Airport on 19 March when he returned to Singapore. On 24 March he was charged with the murder of Gerard George Lowe.

During Scripps' arrest, knives, a hammer, an electrical stun device, handcuffs and six passports were found in his possession – Lowe's, one with the name "John Martin", two bearing the name "Simon James Davis" and the two belonging to the Canadian tourists in Phuket. The two flick knives with jagged edges, according to senior forensic pathologist, Chao Tzee Cheng, and experienced prison butcher, James Quigley, were "sufficient to dismember Mr Lowe's body".<sup>7</sup> The personal belongings of the Canadians and Lowe were also recovered.

During the court trial, it was revealed that Scripps had learned butchering skills while serving out a six-year prison sentence for drug trafficking, and was put in

charge of the prison butchery until he was transferred to another prison.

In his defence, Scripps confessed that he had unintentionally killed Lowe by bludgeoning his head with a hammer during a heated argument, but maintained his claim to the end that a British friend had disposed of Lowe's body.

At the end of the 17-day trial on 10 November 1995, Scripps was pronounced guilty of murdering and dismembering Lowe, and sentenced to death.

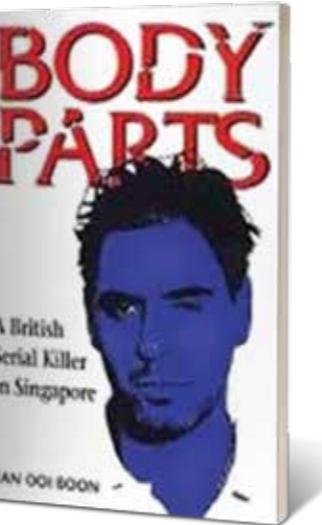
He filed an appeal against his conviction on 13 November but gave up his right to appeal on 8 January 1996. He also declined to file a clemency plea with then President Ong Teng Cheong. On 15 April 1996, Scripps' date of execution was announced by the British Foreign Office – he was the first Briton to be convicted of murder and sentenced to death in Singapore – and he was hanged at Changi Prison at 6 am on 19 April 1996.

The police took just 11 days to solve the case from the date of Lowe's murder.

The murder case was documented in the book *Body Parts: A British Serial Killer in Singapore* (1996). Written by Tan Ooi Boon, the crime reporter with *The Straits Times* who first uncovered Scripps' shocking murders in March 1995, the book delves into the psyche of the monster who had cold-bloodedly killed and dismembered his victims.

## Other Notable Murder Cases

Many more murders exist in Singapore's crime annals beyond the four murderers highlighted in this article. Some of these include:



maid Guen Garlejo Aguilar killed and dismembered her best friend, 26-year-old Jane Parangan La Puebla, over a money dispute. The dismembered body parts were subsequently dumped near the Orchard MRT station and at a bus stop along Lornie Road.

- The killing of two-year-old Nonoi in 2006 by her stepfather, Mohammed Ali Johari, who had repeatedly dunked her in a pail of water to stop her from crying.
- The Yishun triple murder by a Chinese national, who had savagely stabbed his lover, her daughter and their flatmate multiple times over money woes in 2008.

To read up on these cases and others, please refer to the books listed below at the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library at the National Library Building and branches of public libraries. ♦

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# swan & maclaren

## PIONEERS OF MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE

Singapore's oldest architectural firm may be better known for designing the Raffles Hotel but it's their 1930s Modernist buildings that are truly revolutionary. Julian Davison has the details.



Anthropologist, architectural historian and former Lee Kong Chian Research Fellow, Dr Julian Davison is currently writing a history of Singapore's oldest architectural practice, Swan & Maclaren, whose origins go back to the late 1880s. The book is scheduled to be published in the last quarter of 2017.

**S**wan & Maclaren, the oldest architectural practice in Singapore, is a name that is synonymous with many of the city's heritage buildings. Raffles Hotel, Goodwood Park, the Victoria Memorial Hall and Theatre, Chased-El Synagogue and Tanjong Pagar Railway Station are just some of the instantly recognisable architectural landmarks designed by the firm whose origins date back more than a century.

It was in 1887 when Archibald Swan and Alfred Lermit started Swan & Lermit, a civil engineering company, in the British colony. Lermit left in 1890, and Swan continued on his own for a while before forming a new partnership with fellow Scotsman J.W.B. Maclaren in 1892 under the name Swan & Maclaren. Successful from the outset, it became the island's pre-eminent architectural practice when Regent Alfred John Bidwell, a professionally trained architect, joined the firm three years later, winning several prestigious commissions in rapid succession.

But it wasn't always porticos, pediments and Corinthian columns with Swan & Maclaren, at least not in the years leading up to World War II and in the immediate post-war period. Moving away from the Classical Renaissance style favoured by Bidwell (who had left the firm in 1911), Swan & Maclaren became agents of change, radical revolutionaries who embraced the Modernist movement with passion. Working with reinforced concrete, the newest breakthrough in building material, the firm introduced a new style of architecture in 1920s Singapore.

### A New Chapter in Local Architecture

As we pause to reflect on the past architectural glories of Swan & Maclaren in 2017 – as the firm commemorates its 125th year of its founding in Singapore – it is also timely to look at the less celebrated, less well known aspect of the Swan & Maclaren story: its place in Singapore's history as

The Sime Darby godown photographed in 1974. With its curved end elevation, C.J. Stephen's godown was a distant echo of Harry Robinson's St Andrew's Mission Hospital in 1922. *Photograph by Marjorie Doggett, Characters of Light, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

pioneers of the Modernist architectural movement (see text box below).

Modernism, as an architectural movement, was a long time coming to Britain and did not properly take off in the country until around 1930. This was a very different situation compared with Continental Europe where World War I acted as a positive stimulus to the advance of Modernism.

In Amsterdam, for example, we see the manifestation of Modernism in the founding of the Dutch artistic movement De Stijl in 1917, followed by the Bauhaus school of art in Weimar Germany in 1919. In France, witnessing the devastation of Flanders in 1914 would lead Le Corbusier, who would become one of the leading proponents of Modernist architecture, to come up with

his concept of the Maison Dom-ino (see photo below). This was an open-plan design comprising precast concrete floor slabs supported by thin concrete columns with a stairway located at one end to provide access from one floor to another. Initially intended as a quick-fix solution to provide mass housing for people displaced by the war, the Dom-ino concept became one of the essential building blocks of Modernist architecture.

In England, however, the post-World War I mood was more conservative, with most public architecture in the years immediately following the war reverting to some form of prewar Classicism – either an update of Edwardian Baroque or else neo-Georgian revivalism. Art Deco didn't

### MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE

Modern architecture as a *school* of architecture (as opposed to a building that is merely *contemporary*), describes a new architectural style that emerged in many Western countries in the decade following World War I.

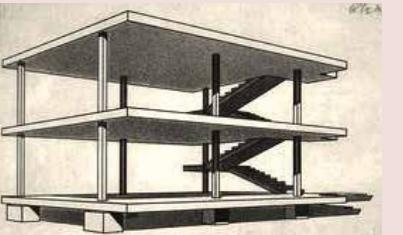
Modernist architecture was based on use of the latest construction technology and building materials – reinforced concrete, and steel and glass – applied according to the principles of a rational or functionalist theory of design, enshrined in the maxim "form follows function". Central to the Modernist ethos was the rejection of historical precedent and an abhorrence of ornamentation – a "crime" according to Adolf Loos, an influential Czech architect from the late 19th century and a proponent of the Modernist architectural movement.<sup>1</sup>

Rigorously applied, these functionalist principles tended to result in a style of architecture that was typically rectangular in plan, sheer-sided, with sharp corners and a flat roof. In other words, it was rather box-like, which led to it sometimes being described as "Cubist" architecture, playing on a perceived resemblance to paintings by contemporary artists like Pablo Picasso and George Braques, who led the avant-garde art movement of the same name.

This new architectural approach was also known as the International Style,<sup>2</sup> not least because wherever one encountered Modernist architecture, whether it was in Europe, the Americas, Italian East Africa or Tel Aviv in Israel, it all looked remarkably the same.

Supposedly freed from the spurious distractions of stylistic convention, Modernism was a new architecture for a new age. To what extent it fulfilled its lofty ambitions, academics will argue, is a moot point, but whichever way one sees it, there is no doubt that Modernism as an architectural practice was just about as far removed from the archetypal image of colonial architecture, with its Doric columns and pedimented porticos, as one can get.

A drawing showing the structural skeleton of the Maison Dom-ino by Le Corbusier (1886-1965), France's leading proponent of Modernist architecture. This open-plan design of precast concrete floor slabs supported by concrete columns with a stairway located at one end to provide access from one floor to another became one of the essential building blocks of Modernist architecture. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.



### Notes

- 1 The phrase came from Adolf Loos' essay, "Ornament and Crime", written in 1908.
- 2 The term International Style is derived from the title of a book by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, which was written to accompany the International Exhibition of Modern Architecture held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 1932. The book identifies the various characteristic elements common to Modernist architecture around the world. See Hitchcock, H., & Johnson, P. (1932). *The international style*. New York: W.W. Norton. (Call no.: RART 724.6 HIT). The term had previously been used by Walter Gropius, and in a similar context, in his 1925 publication *Internationale Architektur*.

really catch on in the country until the late 1920s and only then in a relatively minor and circumspect way, being employed mainly for cinemas, hotels and ritzy department stores, while Modernism didn't get a look-in at all. If Continental Europe's reaction to the carnage of World War I was to start anew, a kind of *tabula rasa* mentality or "starting from zero" as Walter Gropius famously put it,<sup>1</sup> in Britain it was the exact opposite, a desire to embrace the certainties and comforts of an idealised, romanticised past.

Here in Singapore, much the same situation prevailed. The architecture of the post-World War I era witnessed a major rebuilding of downtown Singapore, with the erection of a dozen or more brand new office blocks, corporate headquarters and bank buildings in and around Raffles Place and along Collyer Quay. At the same time, the government invested heavily in the construction of new public buildings: the Singapore General Hospital and College of Medicine Building in 1926; the Fullerton Building (which housed the General Post Office, today the Fullerton Hotel) in 1928; the Municipal Building (later renamed City Hall and now repurposed as the National Gallery) in 1929; and a new home for the office of the Chinese Protectorate (today's Family Justice Courts) in 1931.

In the 10 years following the end of World War I in Europe, the urban landscape of Singapore was radically transformed, forging an architectural identity for the city that was in step with other major global financial centres of the time – these were buildings that would not have looked out of place in London, Manhattan or Shanghai. The point to make here, however, is that each and every one of these new constructions came with a Classical pedigree. Anyone looking at these new, post-World War I edifices would have been immediately aware that they were contemporary buildings by virtue of their size, scale and relative proportions. This was clearly not a case of Victorian revivalism in which architects tried to recreate the architecture of the past, but rather a new kind of Classicism for the 20th century.

These were monumental buildings whose proportions owed nothing to Vitruvius<sup>2</sup> and everything to modern building materials and construction techniques – reinforced concrete, steel frames, plate glass and artificial stone. They were characterised by a massive base and gigantic colonnades, whose columns rose through two or more storeys, with an equally outsized cornice and parapet to match. The Municipal Building, for example, has all of these qualities in spades and at the time of

St Andrew's Mission Hospital at Erskine Hill, photographed in 1938. Designed in 1922 by Harry Robinson of Swan & Maclarens, the three-storey concrete frame building provided accommodation for 50 in-patients with additional quarters for the European and Asian staff on the top floor. The flat roof afforded recreational space for both staff and patients. Courtesy of St Andrew's Mission Hospital.



its completion in 1929, was precisely what people thought a modern civic building should look like.

This preference for Classically influenced buildings was largely because the general public was not very receptive to the "new architecture" of the early Modernists – it was just too different to the untrained eye. "Modern German dwelling houses look like the products of a cubist or futurist nightmare", declared the editor of *The Straits Times* in June 1929.<sup>3</sup> "Although they are obviously designed to act as sun-traps, there is no architectural merit in the utilitarian purpose. They are odd, uncouth, apparently unfinished. The average child can construct something aesthetically more pleasing with a Mecano set."<sup>4</sup>

#### An Early Brush with Modernism

All this makes Singapore's first Modernist building all the more surprising – a hospital for the St Andrew's Medical Mission at Erskine Hill, which dates from 1922, no less. Even more extraordinary, perhaps, is the fact that it was designed by Swan & Maclarens' Harry Robinson, a surveyor by training and someone who was better known as Singapore's leading land assessor than for his avant-garde architecture.

St Andrew's Medical Mission was founded in Singapore in 1913 with the opening of a dispensary on Bencoolen Street by Dr Charlotte E. Ferguson Davie, wife of the Right Reverend Charles Ferguson Davie,

essay in Modern architecture that answered perfectly to Le Corbusier's Purist ethic. Perhaps it was simply a case of economics – there just wasn't the money to spend on superfluous adornment – but even by the European standards of the day, Robinson's hospital looked pretty cutting edge.

The hospital was well received in the press, though one suspects that the severity of the architecture startled some. The correspondent of the *Singapore Free Press*, for instance, thought the building "gaunt", but recognised that:

"The completed structure has for its hallmark the severity of the science of healing. It might not, perhaps, be called from an architectural point of view a thing of beauty, but if we accept Ruskin's view that beauty and usefulness should always be combined, then we can say that the building which stands boldly out in... unbeautiful surroundings, will make a record on its own merits."<sup>6</sup>

St Andrew's Mission Hospital was a landmark building for both Swan & Maclarens and the history of Singapore architecture – arguably the first Modernist building on record. That said, it would take almost 10 years before Robinson's successors at Swan & Maclarens would return to a full-fledged Modernist agenda.

#### A Brief Diversion... then Modernism Takes Off

In the intervening years, Swan & Maclarens' architects experimented with a range of styles. There were more buildings in the Modern Classical vein, notably the Chinese High School on Bukit Timah Road (1923); a bit of Neo-Georgian – Meyer Chambers in Raffles Place (1929); and even some forays into Art Deco, most famously Tanjong Pagar Railway Station (1929), and also the Malayan Motors showroom on Orchard Road (1925), with its starburst façade reminiscent of Eliel Saarinen's Helsinki railway station, and the Majestic Theatre on Eu Tong Sen Street (1926).

Swan & Maclarens partners, Denis Santry and Frank Brewer, also experimented with the so-called Chinese Renaissance style – the Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church (1924) and new premises for Anglo Chinese School (1924) in Cairnhill respectively, while Frank Lundon, the other senior partner at the firm, dabbled in a bit of this and that. Modernism, however, did not surface on the Swan & Maclarens agenda again until 1932, a full 10 years after Harry Robinson's groundbreaking St Andrew's Mission Hospital.

The building that truly kicked off Swan & Maclarens's return to Modernism were the new premises for the Straits Times Press on Cecil Street in 1932, the plans drawn up by Doucham Slobodov Petrovitch, best known for designing the Tanjong Pagar Railway Station. Here he abandoned his Nordic Deco style for an out-and-out Modernist building in the Bauhaus tradition. This meant austere, unadorned façades with a lot of metal-framed windows arranged in horizontal bands – very much the new aesthetic of the Modern movement.

A complete and detailed description of the building was provided in *The Straits Times* of 10 October 1933, the newspaper evidently very proud of its new premises:

*The Straits Times* announcing the completion of its new building on Cecil Street in 1933. Designed by Doucham Petrovitch, it marked Swan & Maclarens's return to Modernism after its first foray with the St Andrew's Mission Hospital a decade earlier. *The Straits Times*, 10 October 1933, p. 17.

Within this house of steel, the floors... are of reinforced concrete, resting above the steel beams, and each slab is designed to carry machinery at any point. They are finished in hard white cement-granolithic giving a permanent and hard-wearing surface. Wide staircases are also in reinforced concrete, similarly finished.<sup>7</sup>

The building also took into consideration the tropical climate and was designed to be naturally cool, "since Crittall's steel windows provide the maximum amount of light and air." More generally it had "an air of severe efficiency". "All ornament and mouldings were omitted", *The Straits Times* informed its readers, adding that

"it is after all, a building specially adapted for pounding printing presses where utility and strength are the two main essentials".

Gleaming white throughout its interiors, the building had a viridian hue on the outside due to the use of green Albertone cement, a kind of granolithic "Shanghai" plaster. Pleasing in every respect and Singapore's most modern building to date, the Straits Times Press premises were "a monument to the stability of the Press of which British Malaya may be proud", the newspaper reported.

Petrovitch followed up the Straits Times building with two more Modernist office blocks in the Central Business District in 1935. They were the Nunes Building at Malacca Street, and the Medeiros Building at Cecil Street. Both were commissioned by Swan & Maclarens long-time client, the Portuguese Mission who, in its early days, had wisely bought up much valuable real estate near the town centre. Completed in 1937, both buildings received considerable attention in the press, with *The Straits Times* devoting a four-page supplement to them in October that year: "Modern Continental cubist design... seen at its best," praised the writer.<sup>8</sup>

For the Nunes Building, *The Straits Times* noted that:

"Reinforced concrete is the material used – very little wood has been employed in the construction, reducing to the minimum the risk of fire and ensuring cleanliness with the minimum of labour. The office accommodation is large and airy,

admitting the maximum light, but through the use of special glass the dangerous rays and heat of the sun are effectively held at bay."<sup>9</sup>

The facades of both buildings were characterised by a strong horizontal element, achieved by bands of metal-framed windows shaded by a continuous reinforced concrete canopy – this was what every Modernist architect aspired to – but in this instance, the severity of the facade was relieved somewhat by a series of decorative panels beneath the windows over the main entrance to each building. Designed by Cavalieri Rudolfo Nolli, Singapore's resident Italian sculptor, the ornate panels symbolised various aspects of the modern Singaporean economy: commerce, agriculture, shipping, construction and the other industries.

Nolli was also responsible for the external finishes to the buildings, which were finished with "bush hammered granolithic facing and white cement from the yard of Cav. R. Nolli". "The increasing popularity of bush hammered granolithic facings for buildings in Singapore", *The Straits Times* noted, "is an indication of the extreme durability of this material under tropical conditions", adding that "the material has the advantage of not discolouring as it is composed of natural colours – local granite and white cement".<sup>10</sup>

The Nunes and Medeiros buildings were followed by another office block at Malacca Street, this time for the prominent Jewish businessman, cinema owner and newspaper proprietor, Joe Elias. This

was next door to the Nunes Building, the two office blocks going up on site at the same time, even though the Elias Building was commissioned a year later. The style was very similar to that of the Nunes and Medeiros buildings, with a more or less sheer façade relieved by a cantilevered canopy roof over the entrance. The external finishes were rendered in white granolithic, again courtesy of Studio Nolli, with horizontal bands of the metal-framed windows. This was to be Swan & Maclarens default corporate house style for the remainder of the 1930s.

At the same time Petrovitch was designing the J.A. Elias Building – nicknamed the Amber Building because of the amber-coloured marble used on the floor and walls of the entrance lobby – he was also working on one of his most significant commissions in Singapore, the studio complex for the newly constituted British Malaya Broadcasting Corporation on Caldecott Hill. This was his most austere work to date – a long, low building, just a single storey in elevation save for a central stair tower, which stuck up at the rear, providing access to an extensive roof terrace.

The central core of the building housed offices, reception rooms and a records library, to which was attached a windowless, bunker-like wing at either end. One wing was dedicated to the mechanics of broadcasting – transmitter room, machine room, air-conditioning plant and workshop – while the other was devoted entirely to studio space. This was a fairly uncompromising expression of the Modernist edict that form should follow



**(Far left & left)** The Nunes Building (left) and the Medeiros Building (right), photographed by the late Lee Kip Lin in 1982 and 1984 respectively. From the Lee Kip Lin Collection. Lee Kip Lin and National Library Board, Singapore, 2009.

**(Below)** Surviving decorative panel by Cavalieri Rudolfo Nolli from the Nunes Building. Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.



function, a Brutalist composition *avant la lettre*, the most attractive feature being the roof-top terrace, which given the hilltop location offered panoramic vistas across the surrounding countryside, including "one of the most beautiful views on the island of Singapore, overlooking the wood-fringed [MacRitchie] reservoir."<sup>11</sup>

But it wasn't all corporate and commercial stuff. Petrovitch was equally adept at turning out *bijou* Modernist villas when required, like the house he designed for the French construction company and property developer, Credit Foncier D'Extreme Orient, at Holland Park in 1934. With its flat roofs, cantilevered canopies, ship's railings and horizontal bands of steel-framed fenestration, this was just about as radical a departure from the typical 1930s Singaporean bungalow as one could imagine. It might not have looked very pretty, but there was no doubting its Modernist credentials.

### The Work of Frank Lunden

Nor was Petrovitch the only Swan & Maclarens architect to turn to Modernism in the 1930s. Even before Petrovitch had started working on his two office blocks for the Portuguese Mission, senior partner Frank Lunden was on a very similar trajectory when he was asked to design new office premises for the Asia Insurance Company at Robinson Road. Lunden's Asia House was completed in September 1936.

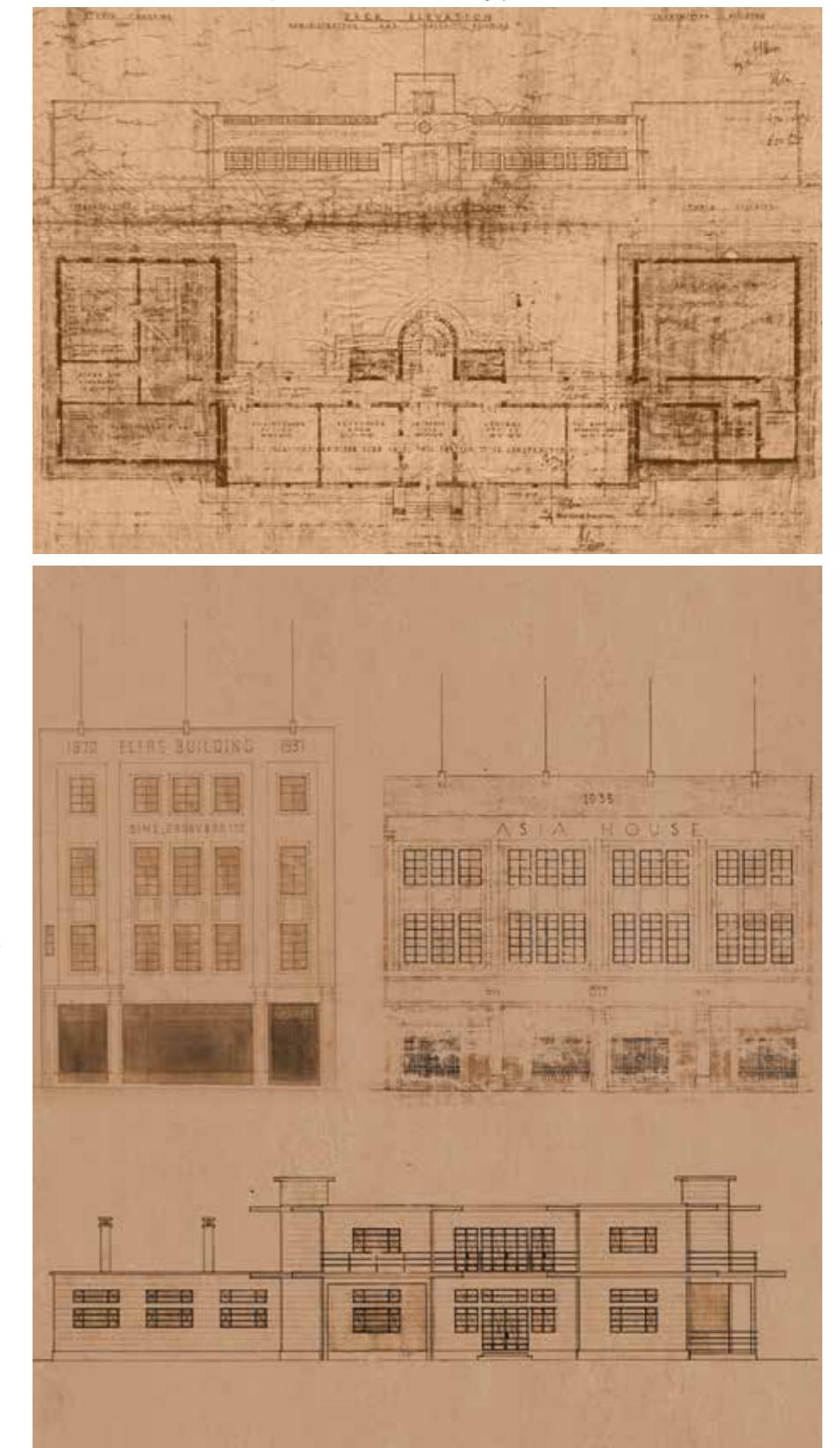
Lunden was also responsible for a number Modernist bungalows and villas of the concrete box variety. It seems he was inspired by an extended tour he made of Britain, Germany and Holland while on leave in 1936, undertaken with the express intent of studying "the latest architectural developments" on the Continent. In an interview with *The Straits Times* on his return, Lunden said he "was most impressed by the quality of modern architectural design in Holland, particularly of houses and flats".<sup>12</sup> Clearly, Lunden was looking at the work of artists and architects closely associated with the De Stijl movement, such as J.J.P. Oud, Theo van Doesburg and Gerrit Rietveld, if the house he designed for Messrs Fogden Brisbane & Co. at Kheam Hock Road in 1936 is anything to go by.

### The Work of C.J. Stephen and C.Y. Koh

And then there was C.J. Stephen, a somewhat shadowy figure since very little is known about his personal life and professional background compared with his Swan & Maclarens contemporaries,

**(Below)** Doucham Petrovitch's architectural plan of the broadcasting station for the British Malaya Broadcasting Corporation on Caldecott Hill, 1936. *Swan & Maclarens Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore*.

**(Bottom)** A composite image of architectural drawings from Swan & Maclarens showing the front elevations of (from clockwise): the J. A. Elias Building (1936) on Malacca Street by Doucham Petrovitch; Asia House (1935), the new premises for the Asia Insurance Company on Robinson Road, by Frank Lunden; and a private house in Holland Park (1934) for Messrs Credit Foncier D'Extreme Orient, by Doucham Petrovitch. The year indicated here refers to the time when all these buildings were commissioned. *Swan & Maclarens Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore*.



Lundon and Petrovitch. A partner since 1935, Stephen's best known work prior to his Modernist phase was the Cold Storage flagship supermarket on Orchard Road, which evoked a kind of pared down Classicism that was only one step removed from ditching the whole Classical school of design altogether.

Three years later, Stephen came up with a new godown for Messrs Sime, Darby & Co. along Robertson Quay, which was about as Modern in sensibility as one could get. Likewise, a second godown for Messrs Guthrie and Co. was constructed the following year at North Boat Quay, on the site now occupied by Parliament House.

The last building on record for Stephen before the outbreak of World War II was a soft drinks manufactory and bottling plant at Mount Palmer for the Phoenix Aerated Water Works in 1939. The company

was owned by the prominent Parsi businessman and philanthropist, Navroji Mistri (1885–1935) who had made his fortune in the fizzy drinks business – “There’s Joy in Every Glass” was the company slogan.

This was another austere building in the Bauhaus tradition with more bands of metal-framed windows emphasising the horizontal aesthetic that was central to the Modernist movement. In this instance, the severity of the elevation was relieved by a tower reminiscent of contemporary industrial buildings on the Great West Road leading out of London – the so-called “Golden Mile” – famous for its eclectic mix of Art Deco and early Modernist architecture.

Last but not least is Koh Cheng Yam, better known as C.Y. Koh, Swan & Maclarens first local architectural assistant who later led the firm in the post-World War II

era. Like Petrovitch, Koh had studied at the Architectural Association in London and was an Associate member (later Fellow) of the prestigious Royal Institute of British Architects.

On his return to Singapore in 1938, Koh joined Swan & Maclarens and in the final months before the outbreak of World War II in December 1941, he designed what is without doubt one of the finest pre-war buildings still extant in Singapore – a beautiful Modernist gem, greatly admired to this day – the Water Boat Office on Fullerton Road for Messrs. W. Hammer & Co. (Although the building wasn’t erected until after the war, it can be considered prewar on account of the fact that it had been designed before the war – the building went out to tender in June 1941.)

Hammer & Co. had been around since the turn of the 20th century, supplying

**(Below)** A composite image of architectural drawings from the Swan & Maclarens architect C.J. Stephen showing (from left): the front elevations of the godown for Messrs Sime, Darby & Co. (1937) at Robertson Quay; and the Phoenix Aerated Water Works (1939) for N.R. Mistri Esq. at Mount Palmer. The owner of the latter, Navroji Mistri was as generous as he was wealthy; the Mistri Wing of the General Hospital and Mistri Road were named after him. *Swan & Maclarens Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

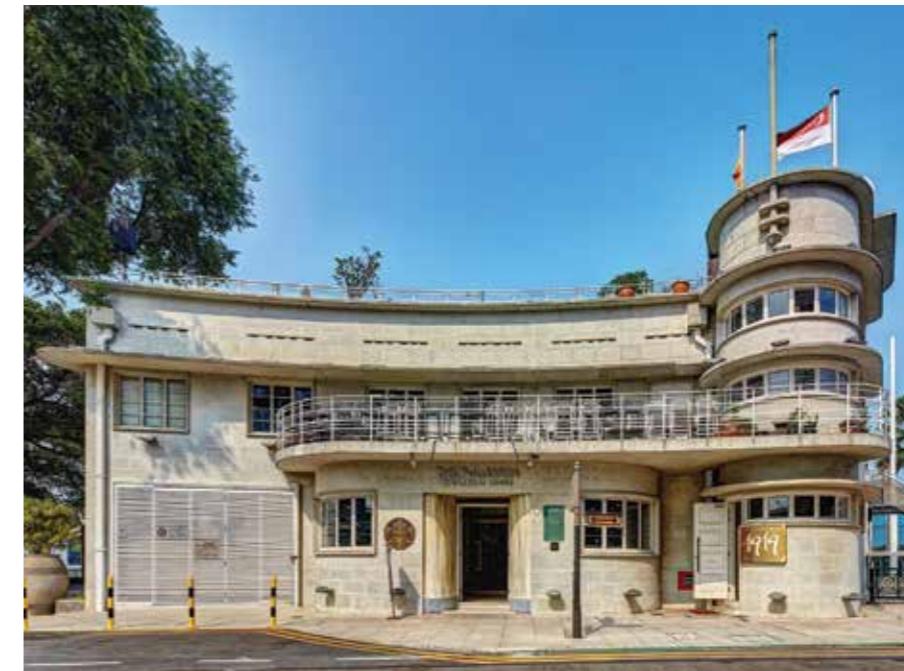
**(Facing page)** The Water Boat Office photographed in 1952. Although designed by C.Y. Koh in mid-1941, the war intervened and the Water Boat Office was not completed until 1948. *Courtesy of National Heritage Board.*



#### THE MODERNIST BUILDINGS AND THEIR ARCHITECTS

| Building  | ST ANDREW'S MISSION HOSPITAL | STRAITS TIMES PRESS BUILDING | HOUSE FOR MESSRS CREDIT FONCIER D'EXTREME ORIENT | ASIA HOUSE FOR THE ASIA INSURANCE COMPANY | NUNES BUILDING FOR THE PORTUGUESE MISSION | MEDEIROS BUILDING FOR THE PORTUGUESE MISSION | J.A. ELIAS (AMBER) BUILDING | BRITISH MALAYA BROADCASTING CORPORATION STUDIO | HOUSE FOR MESSRS FOGDEN, BRISBANE & CO. | GODOWN FOR MESSRS SIME, DARBY & CO. | GODOWN FOR MESSRS GUTHRIE & CO. | PHOENIX AERATED WATER WORKS FOR NAVROJI MISTRALI | WATER BOAT OFFICE FOR MESSRS W. HAMMER & CO. |
|-----------|------------------------------|------------------------------|--|---|---|--|-----------------------------|--|---|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Year*     | 1922                         | 1932                         | 1934   | 1935                                      | 1935                                      | 1935   | 1936                        | 1936   | 1936                                    | 1937                                | 1938                            | 1939   | 1941   |
| Address   | Erskine Hill                 | Cecil Street                 | Holland Park                                     | Robinson Road                             | Malacca Street                            | Cecil Street                                 | Malacca Street              | Caldecott Hill                                 | Kheam Hock Road                         | Robertson Quay                      | North Boat Quay                 | Mount Palmer                                     | Fullerton Road                               |
| Architect | Harry Robinson               | Doucham Petrovitch           | Doucham Petrovitch                               | Frank Lundon                              | Doucham Petrovitch                        | Doucham Petrovitch                           | Doucham Petrovitch          | Doucham Petrovitch                             | Frank Lundon                            | C.J. Stephen                        | C.J. Stephen                    | C.J. Stephen                                     | C.Y. Koh                                     |
| Status    | Extant                       | Demolished                   | Demolished                                       | Demolished                                | Demolished                                | Demolished                                   | Demolished                  | Demolished                                     | Demolished                              | Demolished                          | Demolished                      | Demolished                                       | Extant                                       |

\* The date refers to the year that the building was commissioned.



were style leaders, clearly at the forefront of the Modernist movement of architecture in Singapore and instrumental in preparing the way for the shape of things to come. ♦

#### Notes

- 1 Wolfe, T. (1983). *From Bauhaus to our House*. London: Abacus. (Call no.: RART 720.973 WOL)
- 2 Marcus Vitruvius Pollio is the first century BC Roman architect, engineer and author whose multi-volume architectural treatise, *De architectura*, is the only contemporary work on Roman architecture that has survived from ancient times.
- 3 The new architecture. (1929, June 10). *The Straits Times*, p. 10. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 4 Meccano is the brand name of a model construction kit, comprising re-usable metal strips, plates, angle-girders, axels, wheels, gears and so forth, which can be connected together using washers, nuts and bolts. Invented in 1901, Meccano is still manufactured today in France and China, but probably reached the height of its popularity between the two world wars, when it provided an invaluable introduction to the principles of mechanics and engineering for boys.
- 5 St. Andrew's Hospital. (1923, May 21). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, p. 6. Retrieved from NewspaperSG. Mrs Lee was the wife of business tycoon and prominent Straits Chinese leader, Lee Choon Guan (1868–1924).
- 6 St. Andrew's Hospital. (1923, May 21). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, p. 6. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 7 The Straits Times new press building. (1933, October 10). *The Straits Times*, p. 17. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 8 Portuguese Mission's investment in new buildings. (1937, October 5). *The Straits Times supplement*, p. 4. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 9 Modern continental design of new offices. (1937, October 5). *The Straits Times supplement*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 10 Materials used in constructing Nunes and Medeiros. (1937, October 5). *The Straits Times supplement*, p. 2. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 11 Malayan B.B.C.'s building on hill off Thomson Road. (1936, May 31). *The Straits Times*, p. 16. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 12 Bought autogiro. (1936, October 3). *The Straits Times*, p. 13. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.



The sci-fi frenzy took off in Singapore in 1978 when *Star Wars* was screened at cinemas here. Nadia Arianna Bte Ramli looks at sci-fi works produced between 1970s and 1990s.

**t**

The popularity of contemporary science fiction publications, such as *LONTAR: The Journal of Southeast Asian Speculative Fiction* (2013–), *The Ayam Curtain* (2012) and *The Steampowered Globe* (2012),<sup>1</sup> point towards a sizable and growing base of readers who are fans of this genre of literature.

*LONTAR*, which published its eighth issue in April 2017, is a biannual literary journal featuring science fiction as well as fantasy, alternative histories and tales of the supernatural. *The Ayam Curtain* is similarly an anthology of speculative fiction envisioning what Singapore could be or might have been, while *The Steampowered Globe* by the Happy Smiley Writers Group is a collection of seven “steampunk” stories, a relatively new subgenre of science fiction

that focuses on technology, specifically the industrial steam-powered machinery of the 19th century.

But when exactly did science fiction take off in Singapore? The genre is certainly no stranger to the Malayan literary scene; one of the earliest sci-fi publications on record dates back to 1953, when a Malay comic series released a sci-fi issue titled *Tungga dan Piring Terbang* (*Tungga and the Flying Saucer*). Published by the Malayan Indonesian Book and Magazine Store (MIBS) in Singapore, it was created by Indonesian comic artist Naz Achnas.<sup>2</sup>

Other local sci-fi comics followed in subsequent decades, such as *The Valiant Pluto-Man* (1982), *The Amazing Adventures of Captain V* (1988) and *The Sunday Times*

comics: “The Huntsman” (1992) and “Speed-sword and the Doomsday Pearl” (1991).<sup>3</sup>

#### Sci-fi Takes Off

Sci-fi picked up pace from the late 1970s onwards when Hollywood films such as George Lucas’s *Star Wars* and Steven Spielberg’s *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* made their way to Singapore cinemas in 1978.<sup>4</sup> In turn, sales of sci-fi titles based on these blockbuster films and hit television series, such as *Space 1999* and the cult favourite *Star Trek*, enjoyed a sharp spike in sales at local bookshops. In 1978, MPH Bookstores reported that sales of its other sci-fi titles – including books by noted authors of the genre such as Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke – shot up by at least 50 percent that year.<sup>5</sup>

This growing readership continued well into the 1980s, with Times bookshop

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at Centrepoint quadrupling its shelf space for sci-fi and fantasy titles between 1984 and 1988. Sci-fi maintained its presence in Singapore with the release of two sequels to *Star Wars* in 1980 and 1983 respectively and other box-office successes like *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Star Trek IV* (1986). In 1988, MPH reported that “more than 20,000 books based on the three *Star Wars* movies” were sold in the past 10 years, making these books its “all-time science fiction bestsellers”.<sup>6</sup>

With sci-fi becoming a major part of the Singaporean literary diet, the Singapore Science Centre organised an English-language sci-fi short story competition in 1979. It hoped to develop “the writing skills of Singaporeans and at the same time promote the idea of science as part of culture”.<sup>7</sup> The competition was co-organised with the Society of Singapore Writers and the Rotary Club of Jurong, and attracted 108 entries.<sup>8</sup> During the prize presentation ceremony, then Minister of State for Education Tony Tan said that “science fiction is concerned with the future society and its problems, and can be regarded as a ‘history of the future’”.<sup>9</sup>

The Singapore Youth Science Fortnight, first organised in 1978, also sought to encourage the study of science through events such as a Science Fiction Writing Competition, a Science Olympiad and a

Science Fiction Film festival.<sup>10</sup> In the same year, Brian Aldiss, the acclaimed British sci-fi writer was invited to give a public lecture on “The Future of the Book” and met local writers during a public forum on “The Writer and His Times”.<sup>11</sup> He also wrote the foreword to *Singapore Science Fiction*, an anthology of the winning entries from the 1979 sci-fi short story competition.<sup>12</sup>

The winning entries included dystopian futures, issues of morality and philosophical musings on what constitute humanity. “Grape Shot”, for instance, is about a computer technician who finds out that his computer is surreptitiously storing and hiding the names of military people.<sup>13</sup> The winning entry by Irene Pates titled “Who” tells the unlikely tale of a political leader whose head is transplanted onto the body of a garbage collector and the personality conflict that ensues. Coincidentally, in the same year, Pates’ work of fiction almost turned into a reality with newspaper headlines of heart transplant pioneer, Dr Christian Barnard, rejecting an alleged offer for a head transplant.<sup>14</sup>

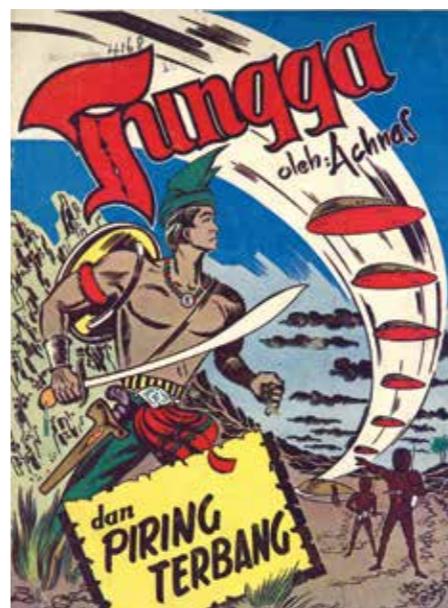
Noted Singaporean poet and literary critic Kirpal Singh was a vocal champion for increased academic interest in the genre. His publication, *Wonder and Awe: The World of Science Fiction*, made inroads into local critical writing on sci-fi when it was published in 1980. He argued that

“science fiction ought to be received and read as literature” by literary critics.<sup>15</sup> In 1982, he urged the authorities to introduce science fiction into the school curriculum, because “through the reading of science fiction, people can have an imaginative and emotional grasp of the kind of things that the world of tomorrow will usher in.”<sup>16</sup>

#### Singaporean Sci-Fi Works

##### Short Stories

Aside from writing competitions, there were also local writers who published sci-fi works, often in the form of short story anthologies. One such writer was Gopal Baratham, known for his novels *Sayang* (1991) and *A Candle Or The Sun* (1991).<sup>17</sup> His keen insights into human nature, a hallmark of his novels, also feature in his sci-fi short stories, “The Experiment” and “Ultimate Commodity”. The former, published in *Figments of Experience* (1981), reexamines the sci-fi trope of “man as the outcome of an experiment by superior beings”.<sup>18</sup> “Ultimate Commodity” is a conspiratorial tale of a foreign substance that is released into the city’s water supply without public knowledge. As a result, everyone’s organs are revitalised to a “uniformly high standard”, becoming the ultimate commodity for organ transplants.<sup>19</sup>



[Facing page] Part of the publicity poster for the 1979 Science Fiction Short Story Competition organised by the Rotary Club of Jurong, Singapore Science Centre and Society of Singapore Writers. Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

[Above left] Published in 1953, *Tungga dan Piring Terbang* (*Tungga and the Flying Saucer*) is one of the earliest sci-fi publications on record in Singapore. The Malay comic series was created by Indonesian comic artist Naz Achnas. All rights reserved, Naz Achnas. [1953]. *Tungga dan Piring Terbang*. Singapore: MIBS. Available via PublicationSG.

[Above right] Science fiction in Singapore picked up pace from the late 1970s when Hollywood films, such as *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, made their way to local cinemas in 1978. *The Straits Times*, 15 January 1978, p. 12.

ROGER YUE BRINGS YOU A PREVIEW OF THE BEST IN 1978

## Year of the great sci-fi film revival



WHAT is in store for Singapore in 1978? Above left, the latest sci-fi craze, the space car, gets set to take off in "Star Wars". The climactic scene in "Close Encounters of the Third Kind". LEADING THE PACT IS "STAR WAR"—THE SPECTACULAR THAT WILL SWALLOW MORE MONEY THAN "JAWS" DID

Described as a "tireless spinner of tales", Lim Thean Soo, author of five novels and over 100 short stories, explored human conflict and adversity in his sci-fi short stories "The Day of a Thousand Hours" (1981), "A Question of Identity" (1990), "Programmed Requital" (1990) and "Reversion" (1990).<sup>20</sup> In "The Day of a Thousand Hours", Lim creates a near-apocalyptic vision of the world and the rebuilding of civilisation, where it might have been fate for the "human beings to have face the unknown, struggle for survival with unshattered faith in their own continuance".<sup>21</sup> In *Eleven Bizarre Tales* published in 1990, Lim questions the transformative effects of human cloning, robotics and genetic engineering.

Terence Chua, a charter member of the Science Fiction Association (Singapore), published a collection of short stories in his anthology *The Nightmare Factory* (1991).<sup>22</sup> The cover was conceptualised by Chua, who was aiming for a "dirty and grimy yet futuristic" look, one that "echoes a scene in one of the stories" in "which a cyborg commits suicide and his inner components scatter all over the floor".<sup>23</sup>

## Novels

First published in 1985, *Star Sapphire* is arguably the first Singaporean sci-fi novel. Written by Joan Hon, under the pen name Han May, the book was highly commended in the "Fiction in English" category of the National Book Development Council Book Awards in 1986. The idea for the novel first came to Hon in 1982, and it took her eight months to complete the first draft.<sup>24</sup> Taking the form of a bildungsroman, the novel is about the adventures of a young Asiatic scientist, Yva Yolan, who joins the massive intergalactic spacecraft Star Sapphire.

Another locally published sci-fi novel is *2084* (1996) by Raju Chellam. Chellam's career in the info-technology industry may have given shape to this sci-fi satire. The



**[Left]** Cover of the January 1991 (1st quarter) issue of *Tesseract*. A total of 10 issues were produced over a three-year period until the end of 1992. All rights reserved, Science Fiction Association (Singapore). (1990). *Tesseract*. Singapore: SFAS. (Call no.: Rq809.3876205 T)

**[Far left]** *Star Sapphire* is arguably the first Singaporean sci-fi novel. It was highly commended in the "Fiction in English" category of the National Book Development Council Book Awards in 1986. Pictured here is the cover of the first edition published in 1985. All rights reserved, Han, M. (1985). *Star Sapphire*. Singapore: Times Books International. Available via PublicationSG.

action – which spans across a two-week period and set in Singapore – details a political crisis, and ideas such as space colonisation, inter-planetary mining and a water-based economy that threatens to cripple a country.<sup>25</sup>

## The Science Fiction Association

The growing interest in sci-fi led to the establishment of the Science Fiction Association (Singapore) (SFAS) in 1989. The association was set up by a group of local die-hard science fiction addicts for the purpose of increasing "public's awareness of sci-fi and fantasy as a legitimate genre of literature and art".

The SFAS published a quarterly magazine called *Tesseract*, with the inaugural issue launched in January 1990. A total of 10 issues of the illustrated, black-and-white magazine were produced over a three-year period until the end of 1992.<sup>26</sup> *Tesseract* was described by the editor, Glen Low, as "a balance of science fiction stories from contributors, features on sci-fi films and books that hit the international market, and illustrations".<sup>27</sup> Its newsletter, *The Event Horizon*, included an editor's note, information on SFAS gatherings, and bite-sized

information on sci-fi news and reviews.<sup>28</sup> The launch of the association in 1990 was graced by the aforementioned Aldiss. In an interview Aldiss said:

"Singapore is a natural place for science fiction. Science fiction is an extrapolation of present-day trends – it also serves as a critique of society. It offers new visions, new ways of looking at things. Especially in a highly technological society like Singapore, it has a major role to play in the education of the imagination."<sup>29</sup>

The association also organised an art competition for sci-fi and fantasy works, titled "Windows of the Mind", to coincide with the Singapore Festival of Arts held that year. The first prize went to local author and illustrator, Joash Moo.<sup>30</sup>

By the 2000s, there were more platforms and opportunities for writers – both novice and established authors – to experiment with sci-fi and for fans to get together. As Singapore moves towards the vision of a "smart nation", perhaps sci-fi does have a "natural place" in the city-state. ♦

Times, p. 38. New guys in town. (1991, December 29). *The Straits Times*, p. 10. Retrieved from NewspaperSG; Wong, R. (1983). *The valiant Pluto-Man of Singapore*. Singapore: Fantasy Comics; Captain V Productions. (1988). *The amazing adventures of Captain V*. Singapore: Captain V Productions. Available via PublicationSG.

1 Lundberg, J. E. (Ed.). (2013–). *LONTAR: The Journal of Southeast Asian Speculative Fiction*. Singapore: Math Paper Press (2013–), Epigram Books (2016–). (Call no.: RSING 828.995903 LJSASF); Chng, J., & Yang, J. (Eds.). (2012). *The ayam curtain*. Singapore: Math Paper Press. (Call no.: RSING S823 AYA); Lim, R., & Maisarah Abu Samah. (Eds.). (2012). *The steampowered globe*. Singapore: ASIFF. (Call no.: RSING S823 STE)

2 Naz Achnas. (1953). *Tungga dan piring terbang*. Singapore: MIBS. Available via PublicationSG; Van Der Putten, J., & Barnard, T. P. (2007). Old Malay heroes never die. In I. Gordon, M. Jankovich & M. P. McAllister (Eds.), *Film and comic books* (pp. 249, 293). Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. (Call no.: RART 791.43657 FIL)

3 Yap, C. (1982, December 21). Enter Pluto-Man. *The Straits Times*, p. 1; Chandran, K. (1987, December 12). The amazing adventures of Captain V. *The Straits Times*, p. 1; Tan, H. Y. (1995, July 15). What's so funny? *The Straits*

## SCI-FI ON SCREEN AND STAGE

### English

Stella Kon's exploration with sci-fi in *Eston* (1995) won her the merit prize in the 1994 Singapore Literature Prize competition. Two chapters from the novel – "The Tunnel" and "The Jungle" – were adapted for the stage as a double-bill by the bilingual theatre group, The Fun Stage, in December 2003.<sup>1</sup>

Another print-to-stage adaptation is Singaporean novelist Tan Hwee Hwee's *Mammon Inc* (2001), which was written for the stage by playwright Eng Wee Ling. Set in Singapore, London and New York, the satirical dystopian science fiction novel is based on the Singaporean-born Chiah Deng, who was torn between her dream of becoming a poet or accepting a job at the sinister multinational conglomerate Mammon Inc. Staged by Action Theatre from 20–23 June 2002, the director, Ekachai Uekrongtham, shared at the play's press conference that a brief lightsaber sequence would make its appearance on stage because the book featured many *Star Wars*-inspired characters. The play's opening and second night performances were sold out by early June.<sup>2</sup>

### Chinese

Journalists from the Chinese newspaper, *Lianhe Zaobao*, staged four Chinese plays in July 1985 as part of its *A Night of Comedies* performance held at the Victoria Theatre. Two of the plays – *Hopeful for the Son* and *Happy Forever* – were adapted from Taiwanese futurist science fiction stories. The former puts the spotlight on modern birth control and paid surrogacy, while the latter tells of one man's search for happiness on

the moon.<sup>3</sup> Sci-fi also hit the small screen in the 1980s when the former Singapore Broadcasting Corporation produced the first Mandarin science fiction serial, *Man From The Past*, in 1985, and the 1988 sci-fi romantic comedy series *Star Maiden*.<sup>4</sup>

### Malay

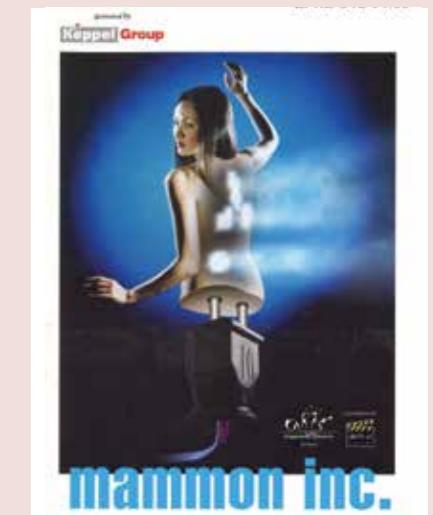
In 1986, local comedian Ahmad Nawi scripted his first play titled *Para Benon*. The 45-minute drama, which was staged on 15 October as part of Sriwana's annual show, *Malam Puspasari*, is set in a post-apocalyptic world and centres on a group of nuclear holocaust survivors attempting to rebuild civilisation in the 23rd century. In an interview, Ahmad shared that "this is the first time that an attempt has been made to stage a science fiction drama, albeit a comedy [in Malay]."<sup>5</sup> The cast was dressed in specially designed "space-age costumes".<sup>5</sup>

### Tamil

In 1966, the first Tamil science fiction play with a local setting was written and directed by theatre pioneer, S. S. Sarma. Titled *Vinveli Veeran (The Man from Outer Space)*, the set design and costume included "dancing amidst the clouds in space, a robot man and a Science Lab".<sup>6</sup> It was lauded as

a pioneering effort to explore different genres within the Tamil theatre scene. The play details the story of a local professor who seeks to explore outer space and highlights two themes: science and the concept of a higher being.<sup>7</sup>

Singaporean novelist Tan Hwee Hwee's novel *Mammon Inc* (2001) was adapted into a play by Eng Wee Ling and staged by Action Theatre in June 2002. All rights reserved, Action Theatre, Singapore (2002). (Call no.: RCLOS 012).



2. Cameras to roll for SBC's first sci-fi production. *The Straits Times*, p. 4; Wee, T. L. (1988, March 14). Criticism of SBC unfair. *The Straits Times*, p. 22; Star Maiden cast draws the crowds despite rain. (1988, February 21). *The Straits Times*, p. 3. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

5 Haron A. Rahman. (1986, October 13). A show to entertain and to introduce new faces. *The Straits Times*, p. 4. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

6 Varathan, S., & S. Hamid. (2008). *Cirkappūr Tamil nāṭaka varalāru 1935–2007= Development of Tamil drama in Singapore from 1935–2007*. Cirkappūr: Cirkappūr Intiyak Kalaiñar Cañkam. (Call no.: Tamil RSING 792.095957 VAR)

7 50 Faces. (2014, August 23). *SS53of5\_Breaking New Ground* [Video recording]. Retrieved from 50 Faces website.

1 Madhavan, S. (2003, December 27). Performances. *The Business Times*, p. 15; Onn, C. (2003, December 29). *Eston* is far from fun. *The Straits Times*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

2 Suhaila Sulaiman. (2002, May 24). Breaking stereotypes and finding identity. *The Straits Times*, p. 5; Chow, C. (2002, June 6). Drawing inspiration from the Force. *The Straits Times*, p. 4. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

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4 Wong, S.Y. (1984, December 9). A first attempt at adult comedy. *Singapore Monitor*, p. 12; Tan, J. (1984, December 21). Lim, 1981, p. 132.

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23 Cover story. (1991, August 31). *The Straits Times*, p. 8. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

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25 Koh, B.S. (1990, October 20). Surface treatment. *The Straits Times*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

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29 Lee, M. (1990, October 30). Sci-fi fanatics. *The New Paper*, p. 16. Retrieved from NewspaperSG; *The Straits Times*, 17 Oct 1990, p. 25; Aldiss, B. (1991). *Tesseract*, Jan Qrt 8-9. [Brian Aldiss unbound]. (Call no.: RSING q809.3876205 T]

30 Koh, B.S. (1990, October 20). Surface treatment. *The Straits Times*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

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# Alam Puisi Melayu Singapura Selepas Merdeka

Singapore's Malay publishing scene was thrown into disarray when the country exited Malaysia in 1965. **Juffri Bin Supa'at** charts the development of Malay poetry in Singapore since Independence.

*"Ahli bahasa yang memakai akal memikirkan puisi adalah tenunan sehelai kain yang dicermati menjadi rapi lagi dihalusi kepadatan dalamnya coraknya terperinci tiada sebenarnya lepas dari ikatan meliputi seluruh buatan dan rekaan sehingga terlahirlah sebuah puisi tiada sehurstupun salah tempatnya lengkap dalam fikiran sehingga tiada sehembuspun nafas terasa kerana ketidaaan suara manusia yang menuliskannya."<sup>1</sup>*

- Masuri S. N.

**P**eranan Singapura dalam sastera Melayu klasik dan moden amat penting dan tidak boleh diketepikan. Singapura pernah menjadi pusat penerbitan dan percetakan Asia Tenggara pada abad ke 19 sehingga awal abad ke 20 serta berfungsi sebagai pusat intelektual, pendidikan dan kebudayaan Melayu yang telah menarik para penggiat seni dari merata Alam Melayu dan dunia. Sesungguhnya, Singapura pernah menjadi nadi utama dalam proses permodenan dan perkembangan sastera di intelektual Melayu.

Apabila Singapura berpisah dengan Malaysia dan menjadi sebuah negara merdeka pada tahun 1965, sejarah ke-

milangan ini mula kelihatan pudar terutama sekali bila tumpuan lebih diberikan kepada pembangunan ekonomi untuk penakatan Singapura sebagai sebuah negara yang baru. Malah, ada yang berpendapat bahawa sastera Melayu di Singapura akan mula kendur dan tidak dapat bertahan, terutama apabila ramai sasterawan-sasterawan yang pada suatu masa bergiat dan merancakkan taman sastera di Singapura mula berhijrah atau pulang ke negeri masing-masing. Tapi seperti bait-bait puisi Jalan Permulaan Suratman Markasan, ramai juga yang menetap dan meneruskan perjuangan sastera di sini kerana:

**Juffri Bin Supa'at** is a Senior Librarian with the National Library, Singapore. He has curated several exhibitions featuring the works of Malay literary pioneers, and compiled and edited bibliographies on Singapore Malay literature and its pioneer writers.

**Juffri Bin Supa'at** bertugas sebagai pustakawan kanan di Perpustakaan Negara Singapura dan pernah menjadi kurator beberapa pameran yang memaparkan beberapa sasterawan perintis Singapura. Selain itu, Juffri juga telah menyusun dan menyunting Bibliografi Sastera Melayu Singapura serta beberapa bibliografi sasterawan perintis yang lain.

*"Singapuraku  
Aku mengerti  
di sini darah ibuku tumpah,  
di sini tulang-belulangku akan  
merapuh  
di sisi anak-anakku membesar  
seperti paya terus melebar  
di atas batu-bata & pasir-masir  
bertakhta,  
lalu manusia seribu tahun  
menghamba."<sup>2</sup>*

- Suratman Markasan

Namun kenyataannya tidak begitu. Sejak tahun 1965 sehingga kini, taman sastera di sini sentiasa subur dan tumbuh sepanjang masa terutama dari segi puisi. Pertumbuhan ini dapat dilihat di dalam esei ini yang menyorot perkembangan puisi Melayu di Singapura dari tahun 1965 sehingga sekarang.

Menurut Masuri S. N., "Di antara tahun-tahun 1965 hingga 1970, puisi Melayu Singapura masih terus berkembang, terutama diciptakan oleh penyair-penyalir veteran seperti Mas. A. Ghani Hamid, Noor S.I. dan A. Salam Ayub."<sup>3</sup> Kehadiran tokoh-tokoh perintis ini, termasuk Masuri dan Suratman Markasan yang masih tetap tinggal di sini, masih tetap gigih berkarya walaupun pada masa yang sama telah mula lahir karya penyair-penyalir yang lebih muda dan ada yang baru mula berkarya.

Namun, pada luarannya, bentuk dan isinya masih tetap sama dengan trend perkembangan sastera di Malaysia kerana "mereka masih belum terasa ke dalam batinnya akan perubahan politik, sosial, ekonomi dan pendidikan yang mulai sedikit demi sedikit menampakkan corak dan dasarnya yang berbeza antara kedua negara ini."<sup>4</sup>

Perkembangan puisi Melayu di Singapura juga telah dirancakkan dengan kegiatan sastera pada tahun 70an dan kehadiran kehadiran penyair-penyalir muda yang membentuk kumpulan Gelora. Kumpulan ini telah menganjurkan beberapa kegiatan seperti Malam Gelora. Ini diikuti pula dengan pembentukan Pertubuhan Aktivis Sastera Singapura (PASS) pada tahun 1972 oleh "sekumpulan penulis muda yang sebahagiannya terdiri dari bekas peserta kursus wartawan yang dianjurkan oleh Persatuan Wartawan Melayu Singapura."<sup>5</sup> Pada tahun 1973 pula, Perkumpungan Sastera telah dianjurkan oleh ASAS '50 dengan matlamat untuk menunjukkan tentang "wujudnya sastera Melayu Singapura dan sekaligus cuba menarik golongan penulis/penyair baru untuk turut serta dan terlibat di dalamnya."

Antara penyair-penyalir yang mula menyerlah tahun 1970an ini ialah Djamat

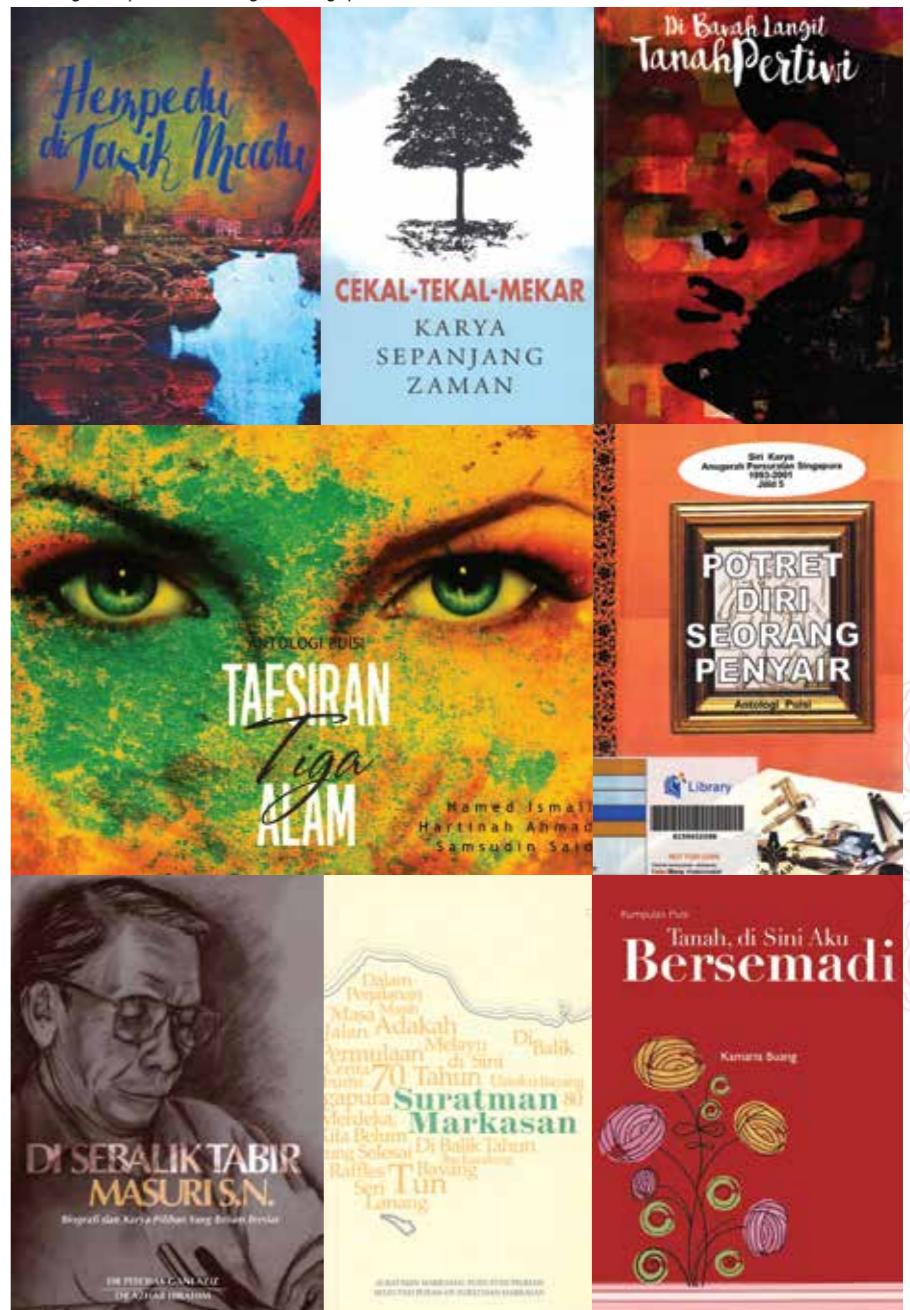
Tukimin, Mohamed Latiff Mohamed, Noor Hidayat, Noor Yusman Abdullah dan Ajaki. Namun, Masuri<sup>6</sup> mengulas bahawa tema dan persoalan penyair-penyalir ini lebih bertolak dari:

- kisah kehidupan peribadi,
- bentuk romantik estetik yakni mencapai kepuasan peribadi,
- kritikan terhadap budaya masyarakat, dan juga
- sajak-sajak yang membantah terhadap ketidakadilan dan inginkan kemajuan sosial, politik dan lain-lain.

wawasan yang agak segar dan baru pengucapannya, terutama dari segi mereka memilih subjek atau pokok persoalan yang dibicarakan dalam puisi-puisi ciptaan-nya. Mereka dapat melihat dengan lebih tegas dan terus terang akan keadaan kesekitaran dan perubahan yang sedang berlaku di dalam masyarakatnya dan dengan menggunakan Bahasa yang sedikit sebanyak telah memeranjatkan serta mengocakkan perkembangan puisi Melayu Singapura yang agak lesu dan lembab pada waktu itu."<sup>7</sup>

Pada tahun akhir 1970an pula sekumpulan mahasiswa di Universiti Singapura mula bergiat dengan menerbitkan jurnal

Sebahagian karya-karya puisi penulis Singapura yang telah diterbitkan di dalam dan luar negara. Gambar: Lembaga Perpustakaan Negara, Singapura.



sastera berjudul *Jejak Kembara* dan juga sekumpulan penulis muda yang bergiat di Perpustakaan Negara, cawangan Toa Payoh. Kumpulan ini telah menerbitkan majalah *Gema Pustaka*. Antara para penyair-penyair yang dilahirkan ialah Hadijah Rahmat, Rasiah Halil, Rohman Munasip dan Norulashikin Jamain.

Kemudian lahir pula generasi penulis dan peminat sastera baharu dengan profil atau latar pendidikan yang berbeza sesuai dengan sistem pendidikan nasional Singapura, terutama golongan penyair pasca 1965, khususnya generasi penyair selepas tahun 1980an yang telah membawa nafas baru dalam pengucapan seni di sini hasil pendedahan kepada suasana hidup dan rasa keyakinan diri baru dan mereka tidak lagi mewarisi beban emosi dari sejarah lalu. Adalah penting untuk melihat corak perkembangan dan perubahan yang berlaku dalam pengucapan puisi Melayu ini sebab rata-rata para penyair kumpulan ini mempunyai pengalaman hidup yang berbeza.

Pada tahun 1980an dan 1990an, kita juga menyaksikan penubuhan

Kupuja (Kumpulan Pemuisi Remaja) yang menampung anggota belia ASAS '50, KAMUS (Kumpulan Angkatan Muda Sastera) yang didaftarkan pada tahun 1989. Kamus telah melahirkan beberapa orang penyair seperti Ahmad Mohd Tahir dan Mustapha Mohamed.

Kumpulan muda ini mula mendapat ruang bertapak di persada puisi Singapura pada pertengahan tahun 1990an. Menurut Rasiah Halil,<sup>8</sup> para penulis yang menulis pada tahun-tahun 1995–99 telah juga menyelongkar pelbagai persoalan peribadi, sosial, keagamaan, ekonomi dan politik. Rasiah mendapati suara-suara penyair ini lebih damai berbanding dengan tahun-tahun 1970an, walaupun isu-isu yang diterokai tidak semestinya yang enak dan muluk sahaja.

Antara sebab-sebab yang diutarakan ialah kemungkinan keadaan dan ekonomi masyarakat yang semakin mantap, makaluan rasa penyair tidak selangit dan sekeras seperti tahun-tahun 1970an. Selain nama-nama yang sudahpun dikenali seperti Masuri, MAS, Suratman Markasan, Mohamed Latiff Mohamed, Isa

Kamari, Norul Ashikin Jamain, A Rahim Basri, Asmin dan Rohman Munasip, terdapat juga "kalangan penyair-penyair yang lebih muda pula" seperti Shaffiq Selamat, Juffri Supa'at, Normala Md Yusope, Noridah Kamari, Chairul Fahmy Hussaini, Sharifah Khadijah Aljoofri dan lain-lain."<sup>9</sup>

Pada tahun 2000an kita juga dapat melihat beberapa rancangan seperti "Santai Puisi" yang dianjurkan oleh kumpulan belia ASAS '50 untuk menarik minat golongan belia menyertai kegiatan sastera. Beberapa tahun kebelakangan ini, acara "Gig Puisi" telah diadakan di perpustakaan awam. Apa yang menariknya, rancangan-rancangan ini bukan sahaja menyediakan wadah untuk para penyair yang baru dan muda, bahkan penyair-penyair yang mapan juga turut sama ikut serta sebagai memberi sokongan. Selain itu, acara sebegini diharapkan dapat memberi ruang bagi penyair yang baru dan mapan berkumpul dan saling bertukar pengalaman.

Anugerah Persuratan 2009–2015 juga telah menemui beberapa nama baru yang menjadi penerima Hadiah Persuratan seperti Noor Hasnah Adam, Hidayat Hamzah, Ciung Winara, Kamaria Buang dan Mohamed Naguib Ngadnan di samping beberapa penyair yang mapan seperti Johar Buang, Hamed Ismail dan Peter Augustine Goh walaupun ada antara mereka memang sudah lama bergiat dalam arena sastera.

Penyair bukan sekadar penggiat seni tetapi harus menjadi pemikir masyarakat, menyampaikan luahan dan gerak rasa masyarakat serta mencari dan menemukan jalan penyelesaian kemelut yang dihadapi masyarakatnya. Di dalam buku *Sastera dan Manusia Baru*, Hadijah berpendapat bahawa:

"Manusia Melayu baru yang perlu dibentuk ialah manusia Melayu yang moden, yang tidak mudah digugat oleh perkembangan semasa, sama ada yang datang dari dalam atau luar negara, bahkan dapat memberi sumbang yang bermakna dan dapat dibanggakan untuk pembangunan masyarakat dan negaranya serta mampu pula mengukuhkan identiti dan maruah budaya dan agamanya. Tegasnya, kita perlu menjadi masyarakat teladan membentuk suatu ummah yang benar-benar terpuji dan dihormati."<sup>10</sup>

Kita dapat melihat isu ini di sentuh para penyair yang telah diulas di dalam Potret Puisi Melayu Singapura,

Mohamed Latiff Mohamed sedang mendeklamasi puisi di sesi "Gig Puisi" diiringi tiupan seruling oleh Ciung Winara. Gambar: Lembaga Perpustakaan Negara, Singapura.



[Kanan] Kamaria Buang menerima hadiah bahagian puisi eceran daripada Prof Madya Dr Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim, Setiausaha Parliment Kanan, Kementerian Pembangunan Sosial dan Keluarga & Kementerian Pendidikan merangkap Pengerusi Majlis Bahasa Melayu Singapura. Gambar: Ihsan Majlis Bahasa Melayu Singapura.  
[Kiri] Johar Buang dinobatkan sebagai penerima Anugerah Tun Seri Lanang di majlis Anugerah Persuratan 2015. Gambar: Ihsan Majlis Bahasa Melayu Singapura.



Isa Kamari.<sup>11</sup> Di dalam buku ini, terdapat 44 orang penyair dari yang mapan iaitu golongan perintis sehingga yang muda telah disorot. Menurut Isa, di dalam "perihal sistem sosio-budaya Melayu yang menghambat kemajuan masyarakat pula, dalam tafsirannya yang luas, kesemua penyair yang dikaji kumpulan puisinya telah membicarakan dengan rinci dengan keprihatinan yang tinggi dan halus."<sup>12</sup> Cuma jangkauan serta penekanan dalam pengucapan mereka adalah rencam walaupun terasnya tetap ke arah pengukuhan dan penyepaduan jatidiri dan maruah bangsa dan agama.

Sayembara-sayembara puisi seperti Anugerah Pena Emas yang dianjurkan Majlis Seni Kebangsaan (NAC) dan per-

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- 7 Masuri S. N. (1985). *Puisi Melayu di Singapura dalam The poetry of Singapore* [p. 23]. Singapore: The ASEAN Board. [Call no.: Malay RSING 899.281 MAS]
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- 13 *Cekal-tekal-mekar: Karya sepanjang zaman* [p. 60]. (2014). Singapore: National Library Board. [Call no.: Malay SING CEK]
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Engku yang terus tegar  
Ajar semua untuk tidak gentar."<sup>13</sup>  
– Noridah Kamari

"Jalan...Jalan,  
jalan dan jalan....  
Jangan berhenti separuh jalan.

Biar sampai ke hujung jalan,  
Sampai matlamat jalan kesampaian,  
Atau sampai tak boleh jalan."<sup>14</sup>  
– Muhammad Ariff Ahmad

Penulis ingin merakamkan penghargaan kepada Dr Pitchay Gani Aziz, mantan Presiden ASAS '50, atas bantuan mengulas artikel ini. ♦

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Clyde Elliott was the first Hollywood director to shoot a feature film in Singapore. Chua Ai Lin examines the authenticity of the three movies he produced here in the 1930s.

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**S**ingapore entered Hollywood's popular imagination at the turn of the 20th century when motion pictures began showing scenes of a modern and exotic Asian port city with a heady mix of the East and the West.

In January 1936, an article in *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* suggested that with so many American filmmakers arriving on its shores, Singapore was fast "becoming the equatorial Hollywood".<sup>1</sup> Just two months later, an editorial in the same newspaper entitled "The Film Invasion" described the large influx "of film people from Hollywood", including "such famous names as Frank Buck, Ward Wing, Tay Garnett, James A. Fitzpatrick, and Percy Marmont, to say nothing of Charlie Chaplin".<sup>2</sup>

The earliest footages of Singapore would have been newsreels, documentaries and travelogues. Twenty-four such films from 1900 to 1919 and nine from 1920 to 1928 have been identified, most notably works by the leading international newsreel production company, Pathé, as well as four short films by Gaston Méliès (brother of the famous French filmmaker George Méliès) in 1913, which were screened in American cinemas that year.<sup>3</sup>

From 1928 onwards, longer feature films of Singapore were produced. Some of these depicted Singapore as an obscure locale in the exotic East with no actual footage of the island, while others tried to inject varying degrees of realism with artificial studio settings and stock footage of scenes of Malayan life.

These films included *Across to Singapore* (1928), *Sal of Singapore* (1928), *The Crimson City* (1928; also known by its Italian title, *La schiava di Singapore*), *The Letter* (1928), *The Road to Singapore* (1931), *Rich and Strange* (1931), *Out of Singapore* (1932), *Malay Nights* (1932; also titled as *Shadows of Singapore*), *Singapore Sue* (1932) and *West of Singapore* (1933).<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, none of these films were ever shot in Singapore.

#### Bring 'Em Back Alive (1932)

Possibly the first Hollywood director to shoot a feature film on-location in Singapore was Clyde Ernest Elliott, who visited the

island on several occasions. Elliott's first release was a short travelogue as part of the *Post Travel Series* in 1918, which inspired him to go on to make three feature films in the 1930s: *Bring 'Em Back Alive* (1932), *Devil Tiger* (1934) and *Booloo* (1938), each time attempting to depict Malaya as realistically as he could within the limitations of the Hollywood studio system.

Building on the established practice of newsreel filming, *Bring 'Em Back Alive* was a documentary feature film based on the adventures of Frank Buck, a real-life Texan wildlife collector who had established his base in Singapore since World War I. Already a well-known major supplier of animals to zoos in America, Buck's book of the same title became a bestseller in the US when it was published in 1930.<sup>5</sup>

This paved the way for the equally successful film adaption of the book by Buck and Elliott, backed by Van Beuren Studios and distributed by RKO Pictures. Box office takings hit a whopping US\$1 million within the first eight months of *Bring 'Em Back Alive*'s release and the film became one of RKO's most profitable productions in

1932.<sup>6</sup> Following the release of the film, Buck travelled to London and the US, giving promotional talks and press interviews to coincide with its screening.<sup>7</sup>

Ostensibly a documentary, *Bring 'Em Back Alive* was heavily criticised by more discerning audiences, with American naturalist Harry McGuire referring caustically to Buck's film as a "hocus pocus" work of "nature faking of the worst kind". *The Straits Times* published an article by B. Lumsden Milne, who wrote that he became "hot under the collar" at the string of inaccuracies in the film, and admonished Buck for his inability "to pronounce Malay names correctly".<sup>8</sup>

Frank Buck bore the brunt of the bad press as the author of the book but blamed the failings of the film on Clyde Elliott. The latter had readily admitted in public that the scenes of a tiger being shot dead and a python fighting a crocodile had been staged for the camera.<sup>9</sup> In response Buck said of Elliott:

"To my mind he has been very silly and rather ridiculous. All pictures are made to entertain people and if

**[Facing page]** *Bring 'Em Back Alive* (1932) was a documentary feature based on the adventures of Frank Buck, a Texan wildlife collector who established his base in Singapore during World War I. Directed by Clyde E. Elliott, the film's box office takings hit a million dollars within eight months of its release. The film poster here has been superimposed digitally with the title of this article. *Image source: Iceposter.com*.

**[Below]** In their interview with American periodical, *Modern Mechanix and Inventions*, Frank Buck and the main cameraman, Nick Cavalire, explained how they capitalised on normal patterns of animal behaviour around a watering hole to lure a tiger into a forced encounter with a python for one of the scenes. Their interview was published as "How Frank Buck Filmed His Tiger-Python Battle" in the November 1932 edition of the periodical.

**[Right]** Director Clyde E. Elliott and the wildlife collector Frank Buck getting ready to leave for Singapore to film *Bring 'Em Back Alive* in 1932. *Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons*.

a fellow stands up and deliberately spoils the illusion he is biting the hand that feeds him.... I don't mean we want to fool people – as a matter of fact the picture was made under more natural circumstances than any other of its kind."<sup>10</sup>

Such controversies were nothing new in the context of the times. Huber S. Banner, an expert on Java, had this to say about the film:



#### How FRANK BUCK Filmed His TIGER-PYTHON Battle

by ALFRED ALBELL

Everyone who has seen Frank Buck's "Bring 'Em Back Alive," that amazing movie of jungle life, is asking the question: "How did they ever film that spectacular battle between a Bengal tiger and a 30-foot python? Was it faked? How did the cameramen happen to be on the scene—and how did they escape with their own lives?" Read the answer in this article.

So I went directly to headquarters of the expedition to find out for readers of *MODERN MECHANIX AND INVENTIONS* just how the technical and mechanical problems of making this wonder-movie were solved.

Both Frank Buck and Nick Cavalire, cameraman who shot many of the scenes, agree that the tiger-python episodes were the most spectacular in the picture. Just what happened during the filming is going to be told you now for the first time, by special permission of the copyright owners, so as to avoid trouble.

The success of the whole picture revolved around so simple a thing as a jungle water hole. The expedition spotted the water hole early in the game. It was the only one for miles around and the natives in jungle here, knew that tigers and later animals in the district would come to it.

It was here that a python met a crocodile. This was not a coincidence, but strictly in keeping with the ways of jungle inhabitants. On this particular occasion the expedition was tracking a tiger which had been sighted in the vicinity by natives. Figuring that the tiger would show up at the water hole sooner or later, they repaired there, preparing their camera nests as shown in an accompanying drawing, but the first place for their lenses proved to be the python and crocodile.

In the picture you see the two reptiles splashing and threshing in the water. You

**WHO won—the python or the tiger?** This is the question which is boloring thousands of folks who have seen Frank Buck's startling movie of jungle life, "Bring 'Em Back Alive," and who have been vividly

both the python and the tiger escape with their lives after their amazing battle, which endures on the screen for fully ten minutes?

And how in the world did Frank Buck and his cameramen happen to be on the

**FRANK BUCK, leader of a captured leopard cat. Buck found the cat for his companion, Nick Cavalire, who used it as a model for a drawing. The cat was later released.**

**FRANK BUCK, leader of a captured leopard cat. Buck found the cat for his companion, Nick Cavalire, who used it as a model for a drawing. The cat was later released.**

"The trouble is, though, that after seeing one of these jungle films that are all the rage nowadays – Frank Buck's epic of the Malayan forests, 'Bring 'Em Back Alive', for instance – nobody will believe that one doesn't go about in constant peril."<sup>11</sup>

*Bring 'Em Back Alive* was quite likely one of the more realistic films around, as Buck asserted, going by the detailed description of "How Frank Buck Filmed His Tiger-Python Battle" in an article from the American periodical, *Modern Mechanix and Inventions*. When interviewed, Buck and the main cameraman, Nick Cavaliere, explained how they studied the natural patterns of animal behaviour around a watering hole and lured a tiger into a forced encounter with a python.<sup>12</sup>

There were many different levels of artifice involved in making *Bring 'Em Back Alive*; the staged animal encounters were only one aspect. The other deception involved the locations where these scenes were shot. Viewers were led to believe that they were watching the action from the heart of the Malayan jungle when, in fact, the close-up scenes were shot along Jurong Road, just miles away from downtown Singapore.<sup>13</sup>

By providing a tropical location for the filming, Singapore became an essential component in creating the illusion of realism that had caught the attention of international audiences. Buck's emphasis on a successful "illusion" and that "all pictures are made to entertain" made it clear that this form of filmmaking was of a different spirit from newsreels and documentary films.

*Bring 'Em Back Alive* not only propelled Buck to stardom, but also thrust Malaya into the consciousness of international audiences. Many cinemas even displayed maps of Malaya alongside the film's publicity posters. "At last, many people realised that Singapore is not in South Africa or China, or anywhere but where it is," declared the director Elliott.<sup>14</sup>

#### Devil Tiger (1934)

Inspired by the success of *Bring 'Em Back Alive* and the cinematic potential of Malaya, Clyde Elliott returned to Singapore in November 1932 with a Hollywood crew and cast led by rising star, Marion Burns, to film *Man-Eater*, "a Malayan talkie drama" for Fox Film Corporation (released in 1934 as *Devil Tiger*). While *Bring 'Em Back Alive* was "a purely animal story", *Man-Eater* moved one step further from documentary films with its dramatised storyline.<sup>15</sup>

## MARION BURNS and KANE RICHMOND here at last in the film produced in Singapore and Malaya— “DEVIL TIGER”



*Devil Tiger* (1934), directed by Clyde Elliott, was the first Hollywood talkie produced in Singapore. The film featured well-known American stars such as Marion Burns and Kane Richmond. *The Straits Times*, 5 May 1934, p. 3.

However, *Man-Eater* was not the first American feature drama to go on location in Singapore. Barely a month earlier, an American crew under the direction of Ward Wing and funded by the independent B. F. Zeidman Productions, with a script by the director's wife Lori Bara, about a "simple native romance" set in a pearl diving community, had started filming *Samarang* (see text box opposite) in Singapore.<sup>16</sup>

These movies were part of a trend beginning in the late 1920s of "natural dramas" – scripted, fictional films – shot in exotic locations with a cast of local actors.<sup>17</sup> Elliott's progression from animal behaviour to human drama was mirrored by the career of fellow American filmmaker Ernest Schoedsack, whose biography and documentary film *Rango* (1931) provided the inspiration for the iconic movie *King Kong* (1933). The latter was written by Schoedsack's long-time collaborator and friend, Merian Cooper.<sup>18</sup>

As a silent film by an independent production company, Ward Wing's *Samarang* (1933) was quite different in scale from *Devil Tiger*. The latter was funded by a major studio, featured a well-known Hollywood cast, and most importantly, was the first talkie entirely produced in Malaya and Singapore.<sup>19</sup> Elliott arrived in Singapore with eight tons of equipment, a cameraman, sound engineers, "three rising stars in Hollywood" – Marion Burns, Kane Richmond and Harry Woods – as well as a reporter from *The New York Times*. After the ignominious fallout with Frank Buck, this time around Elliott turned to a local Eurasian zoological collector, Herbert de Souza, for professional advice on the animal scenes.<sup>20</sup> Many Caucasian residents

a Fox Film made by Clyde Elliott the producer of "Bring 'Em Back Alive"

Were you at Sea View Hotel when some of the scenes were taken there?

Singapore background." He also criticised the "over-coloured imaginations of 'hokum' writers who spend a few days here, then go back to the States and write of the gin-sling and champagne imbibing 'beachcombers' and such characters dear to the penny novelettes."<sup>21</sup>

Despite the good reviews, *Devil Tiger*, however, failed to make its mark

at the box office. That honour went to *The Jungle Princess* (1936), a Paramount Pictures film that was written and directed by William Thiele, and became the most successful film set in Malaya since *Bring 'Em Back Alive*.<sup>25</sup> The film also launched the career of Dorothy Lamour, who became known for her exotic sarong costumes in many Hollywood films, an

image created by her role as a native girl in *The Jungle Princess*.

Although filmed in Hawaii, *The Jungle Princess* was the first talkie to use actual Malay dialogue, and reflected its supposedly multiethnic Malayan milieu by including characters who were clearly meant to be Chinese alongside Malay villagers and European hunters.<sup>26</sup> Tightly directed and

#### SAMARANG (1933) SPARKS A FRENZY

Moving away from a jungle setting, *Samarang* (1933) was shot along the coast and offshore islands near Singapore. Filming began in October 1932 with a cast of local amateurs. The female lead – "Sai-Yu, beautiful daughter of the tribal chieftain" – was played by a local actress named Therese Seth, an amateur Eurasian dancer of Armenian ancestry who had been talent-spotted earlier. The male protagonist, a pearl diver named Ahmang, was played by an Englishman, Captain Albert Victor Cockle, who was Chief Inspector of Police and an amateur actor. His "exceptionally fine physique" led to comparisons with the Hollywood Tarzan star, Johnny Weissmuller.<sup>1</sup>

The director, Ward Wing, went to great lengths to make the movie convincing. Screen tests were held at which several *bangsawan* actors auditioned.<sup>2</sup> He engaged extras from the Sakai tribe, "reputed to be cannibals", to play the part of "natives" in spite of the difficulties involved:

Only one man could be found who could speak the Sakai language, but he was Chinese and knew no English, so a Malay who spoke Chinese was found, but he, in turn, could not speak English, so Wing had to tell an English-

*Samarang* (1933) was directed by Ward Wing, produced by United Artists and B. F. Zeidman, and distributed by United Artists. The female lead was played by a local Eurasian actress named Therese Seth, while the male protagonist was played by Captain Albert Victor Cockle, a British expatriate who was Chief Inspector of Police and an amateur actor. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.



speaking Malay what he wanted. The Malay would tell the Malay speaking Chinese, who would tell the Chinaman, who would tell the Sakai!<sup>3</sup>

Even the lead actor Cockle had to assist the director in translating instructions into Malay, while additional Tamil interpreters were hired for the Indian supporting cast members. No effort too was spared in maximising the dramatic potential of the natural surroundings. The underwater scenes of a real-life fight between a tiger shark and octopus, shot by cinematographer Stacy Woodward, were considered to be of important documentary value by experts in the US.<sup>4</sup>

A review in *The New York Times* praised the film as "a picture distinguished by the obvious authenticity of many of its scenes. The flashes of the divers are shrewdly pictured – first by the men plunging into the sea and later by revealing them below, picking up shells. It is, of course, a fiction story to which a certain realism is lent by the portrayals by the natives."<sup>5</sup>

The ethnographic details in parts of the film, particularly the opening scene filmed in a Malay *kampong*, provided a veneer of respectability for the risqué scenes featuring Cockle and Seth, who were clothed in the skimpiest of loincloths and flirted openly with each other. Although Seth wears a bikini top in this scene, for most of the 58 minutes of the rest of the film, she is topless.<sup>6</sup>

The film also inspired a mini-revolution in America. For the film's opening in New York, the "Samarang Club" was inaugurated, "which provided that all its members should wear bathing shorts and not the complete costume". At Californian seaside resorts, men flouted local laws and went swimming with bare chests, causing many of them to be hauled before the local magistrate. As members of clubs were exempt from such laws, many joined the Samarang Club.<sup>7</sup>

Passing for a quasi-documentary on natives of the South Seas, *Samarang* depicted the nude female body in a way that mainstream films set in Western society were not allowed to. The Pacific Islands and Bali, in particular, were popular locations for similar "nature dramas" with themes of sexuality. On-location filming and the use of a local amateur cast, even if the action was fictional rather than ethnographic documentation, was likely to have been the key to sneaking such salacious content past conservative elements in Hollywood and the American censors.

#### Notes

- 1 Samarang: Highlights of the film. [1933, September 29]. *Alhambra Magazine*. (Not available in NLB holdings); Wright, N.H. (2003). *Respected citizens: The history of Armenians in Singapore and Malaya* (p. 293). Middle Park, Vic.: Amassia Publishing. [Call no.: RSING 305.89192 WRI]; *Who's Who in Malaya*, 1939. [1939]. Singapore: Fishers Ltd. [Call no.: RCLOS 920.9595 WHO-RFL]; Thrills by Edgar Wallace. [1932, October 3] *The Straits Times*, p. 12. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 2 Trial of Malay film talent. [1932, October 10]. *Singapore Daily News*, p. 6. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 3 Telling the world. [1933, September 20]. *Alhambra Magazine*. (Not available in NLB holdings)
- 4 Pearl and shark story filmed here. [1932, December 1]. *The Malaya Tribune*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG; Mortal combat of tiger shark and octopus in "Samarang" is remarkable camera record. [1933, September 20]. *Alhambra Magazine*.
- 5 Hall, M. [1933, June 29]. Dramatic adventures of a pearl diver featured in a film at the Rivoli. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from The New York Times website.
- 6 Wing, W. [1933]. *Shark Woman, a.k.a. Samarang*. Alpha Home Entertainment (Reprint in 2012). (Not available in NLB holdings)
- 7 Wing, 1933; Shocked by bathers. [1934, March 18]. *The Straits Times*, p. 3. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

combining drama, comedy, romance and jungle action with captivating vocals by Lamour, the film played to full houses in Singapore. Unlike previous Malayan films, this one received the thumbs up from local critics.<sup>27</sup> *The Jungle Princess* even inspired an Indonesian remake entitled *Terang Boelan* (1937), scripted by the Indonesian journalist Saeroen, with cinematography by an Indonesian Chinese, David Wong.<sup>28</sup>

### Booloo (1938)

Just months after the well-received release of *The Jungle Princess*, Paramount Pictures upped the ante with a similar tropical jungle romance-adventure filmed on location in Singapore. *Booloo* (1938) became Clyde Elliott's third directorial outing in Malaya, after *Bring 'Em Back Alive* and *Devil Tiger*.<sup>29</sup> With 10 tons of "the most up-to-date, portable, light and sound equipment" this time, Elliott had more sophisticated tools and resources to work with on *Booloo* compared to his previous Malayan films.<sup>30</sup>

The story behind *Booloo* expresses most clearly the tension between realism and staged fiction. Although Elliott had been criticised for taking creative licence in *Bring 'Em Back Alive* and *Devil Tiger*, with *Booloo*, he struggled to preserve authenticity in his film against commercial impositions from his bosses at Hollywood's Paramount Studios. Like *Samarang*, *Booloo* was intended to feature local amateur actors from Malaya cast alongside the Paramount actor Colin Tapely.<sup>31</sup>

After an exhaustive search in which "girls from practically every class of Singapore society from Tanglin to Chinatown [were] given film tests", a Javanese dancer named Ratna Asmara from the Dardennalla travelling performance troupe was eventually cast in the lead role of a Malay girl. Her Malay beau was played by a local Eurasian, Fred Pullen.<sup>32</sup> Supporting roles were undertaken by other locals Elliott had worked with previously on *Devil Tiger*: Herbert de Souza, the aforementioned wildlife collector; Ah Ho, a Chinese male; and Ah Lee, a Chinese seven-year-old boy who played a minor role, as well as Europeans based in Singapore, such as the professional actor Carl Lawson, and two army officers.<sup>33</sup>

With the casting of Ratna Asmara, it would seem that *Booloo* would achieve what both *Samarang* and *The Jungle Princess* could not – the role of a Malay protagonist played by an Asian actress speaking in her natural vernacular. But this was simply too real for American

audiences to accept, and, to Elliott's dismay, most of his location shoots with the Malayan cast were left on the cutting-room floor.<sup>34</sup> Paramount decided to reshoot most of the film in Hollywood and Ratna Asmara was replaced by the Hawaiian-American actress Mamo Clark of *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935), in which she starred alongside the screen legend Clark Gable.<sup>35</sup> If Dorothy Lamour had been convincing enough as a native Malay girl in *The Jungle Princess*, then casting a genuine native girl was of minor importance when compared to Mamo Clark's celebrity status.

While *The Jungle Princess* successfully recreated elements of Malaya in its Hawaiian setting, *Booloo*'s stronger attempt at realism failed to make it a better film. It never achieved the success of *The Jungle Princess*, instead receiving scathing reviews which panned its "silly story" and the "jungle and Hollywood sequences [which] have been spliced together so crudely". Not even the Caucasian-looking Fred Pullen, acting as a Malay boy, passed the film editing, and only one of his scenes remained. Pullen was "extremely disappointed" and wrote to the producers to

complain about his axing.<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, *Booloo* was the last of the pre-war feature films to be shot in Singapore to receive an international commercial release.

### The Real Singapore?

The portrayal of Singapore in these Hollywood films veered between fact and fantasy. They were shot on location, in tropical jungles to depict the habitat of wild animals in *Bring 'Em Back Alive*, or a Malay village in *Samarang*. Whether accused of zoological "fakery" or showing a genuine Malay kampong in Bedok, both films were successful at the Singapore box office.<sup>37</sup> The local setting and familiar faces seen on the big screen for the first time were enough to attract Singapore viewers, if only out of curiosity. The urban cinema-goers of Singapore who admired all things modern suddenly had rural village life presented to them in a new light.

Singapore also played into other stereotypes, as with the early seafaring and illicit romance-themed films that lacked authentic location footage. Various strategies were employed in the representation



(Left) *The Jungle Princess* (1936), starring Dorothy Lamour as a native girl, is the first talkie to use actual Malay dialogue. The story reflected multiethnic Malayan society by including a Chinese servant alongside Malay villagers and European hunters. Image source: [Iceposter.com](#).

(Below) Hawaiian-American actress Mamo Clark replaced the Javanese dancer Ratna Asmara as the female lead in Clyde Elliott's *Booloo* (1938) at the film editing stage. Courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#). (Bottom) Many of the scenes in *Booloo* (1938) that featured a Malayan cast were eventually re-shot in Hollywood in order to make the film more appealing to its American audiences. *The Straits Times*, 18 July 1937, p. 5.



**REAL MALAYAN JUNGLE FOR SCREEN**  
**Ex-R.A.F. Pilot To Head Local Cast In "Booloo"**  
**SPECIAL SOUND KIT FOR UNIT DUE NEXT WEEK**

HANDSOME former R.A.F. officer, Colin Tapley, who will be the only European in the cast of the new Paramount jungle film "Booloo," to be made in Malaya

of Singapore as a bustling Asian urban centre, and attracted critical responses from local audiences. Alfred Hitchcock's *Rich and Strange* (1931) included only brief street scenes of downtown Singapore, most likely taken from stock footage.<sup>38</sup> In 1936, Tay Garnett filmed Singapore scenes for his film *Trade Winds*, to be used as rear projections for actors in a Hollywood studio, while *Booloo* went further in hiring over 200 extras – Malays, Chinese and Indian men, women and children, including "Chinese coolies and ricksha boys" – to film train scenes at the railway station.<sup>39</sup>

By March 1936, Singapore audiences had seen enough Hollywood versions of their island to invoke a scathing editorial in *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*: The writer bemoaned the "romanticising of our tropic city" and film directors who reinforce the stereotype of "Singapore as a tropical playground for its amorous and loose-moralled inhabitants".

When *Booloo* was finally screened in Singapore, its valiant attempt at a realistic portrayal of Singapore urban life also came under fire. A letter to *The Straits Times* asked why the film was "trying to show the world that the Asiatic population of this city consists of nothing but hawkers, satai-men, poultry-farmers, ice-water sellers, pig rearers, and half-naked Chinese coolies".<sup>40</sup> The author, calling himself "No Hokum Here", demanded to know if the authorities would "allow this sort of thing to be shown to the rest of the world". Local audiences were astute enough to spot "fakery" as well as orientalist stereotypes in Western films.

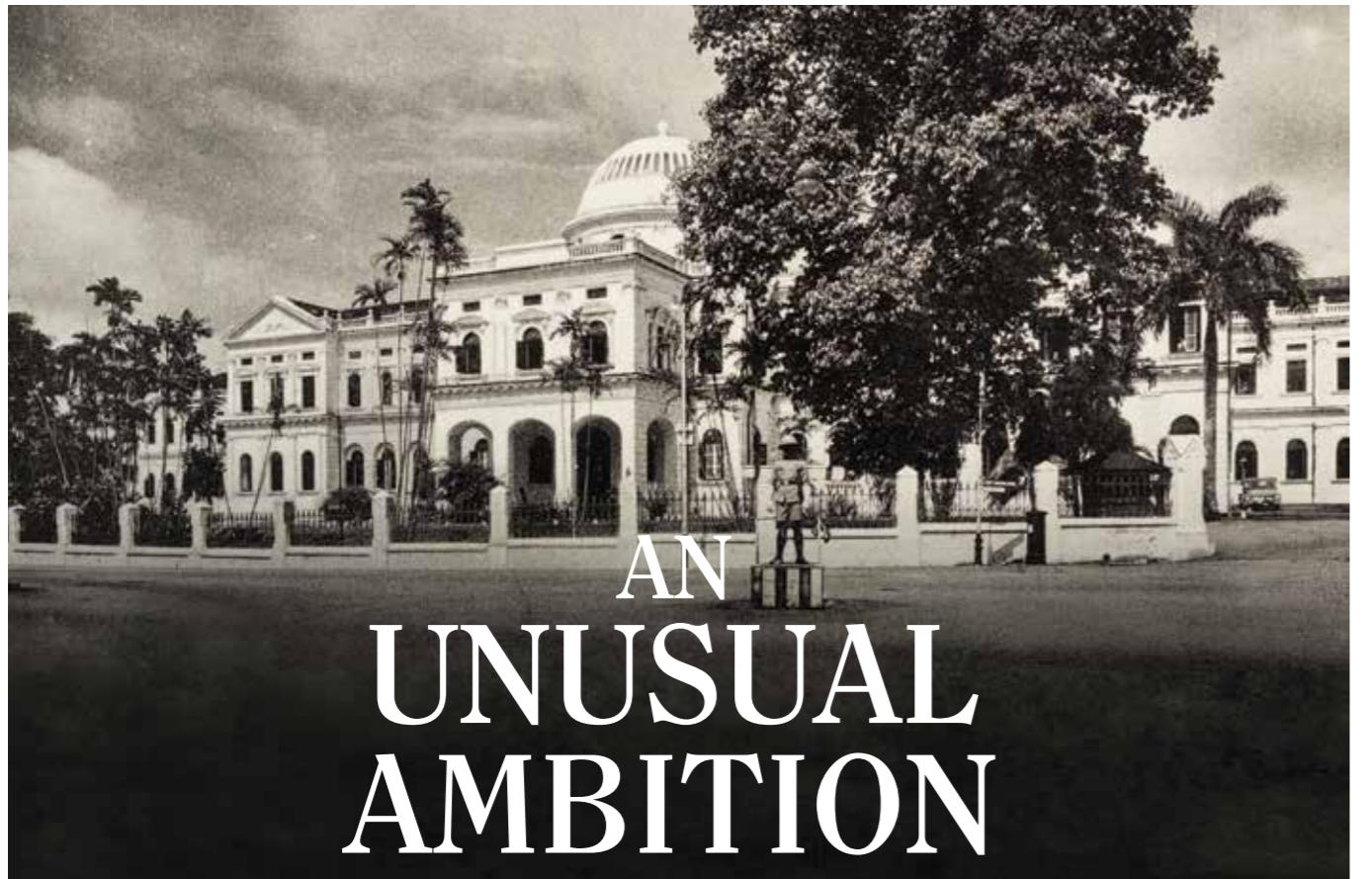
Singapore was very much on Hollywood's mental map of the world, but whether that impression was much like the real Singapore was questioned by its residents and cinema-goers.

Clyde Elliott managed to complete filming three feature films on location between 1932 and 1938, each time attempting a deeper, more realistic depiction of Malayan society. But realism was the least important factor when it came to the commercial aspirations of Hollywood studios. Attempts to depict Asian society more accurately failed to make it to the big screen, and misrepresentations of Singapore as a seedy maritime port-of-call or where life-threatening jungle encounters were a regular occurrence continued. For audiences in Singapore, the release of these films was received with far less enthusiasm than the excitement of witnessing American cast and crew working on location during the films' production. ♦

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# AN UNUSUAL AMBITION

## THE EARLY LIBRARIANS

**Bonny Tan** traces the careers of little-known librarians, Padma Daniel and her mentor Kate Edith Savage-Bailey, and the circumstances that led to their career choices in pre-war Singapore.

A

"A rather unusual ambition" wrote Reverend Basil Colby Roberts, the Singapore Anglican Bishop, in a letter dated 11 December 1935 to Frederick N. Chasen, then Director of the Raffles Library and Museum.<sup>1</sup> Roberts was endorsing Padma Daniel in her application as a volunteer at the library.

It was an unusual ambition on many fronts. First, the Library Association in Britain had stringent requirements for prospective librarians. Besides passing a qualifying exam, applicants were required to have at least three years' experience working in a library. Second, the library domain was very much a man's world, with most qualified librarians and library patrons being primarily Caucasian and

male. Padma was possibly the first local woman seeking a career in librarianship.

### The First Library Opens

The earliest record of a local employed as a librarian in Singapore is that of Ram[s]amy Pillay who, in 1837, was paid a monthly salary of \$4 as Assistant Teacher and Librarian of the Singapore Free School. He had excelled in his studies, and was likely a fresh graduate and untrained in librarianship. The school library housed a modest collection of fewer than 400 volumes although members of the public could also join as subscribers.<sup>2</sup>

On 22 January 1845, the library was renamed the Singapore Library. This was the first public library in Singapore, serving primarily paying subscribers. Some three decades later, on 1 July 1874, the colonial government took over the running of the library, officially adding to it the functions

of a museum, relocating the premises to Stamford Road and renaming it Raffles Library and Museum.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, British libraries came under the umbrella of the UK's Library Association, which was formed in 1877. Besides promoting libraries and looking after the professional standards of librarians, it held biannual qualifying examinations for would-be librarians in the British Empire.

However, it was not until 1920 that a qualified librarian, James Johnston, was recruited from Britain to manage the Raffles Library. Some of his key accomplishments during his 15-year tenure included the opening of the Junior Library for children on 21 July 1923, billed as "the first of its kind in Malaya";<sup>4</sup> and the establishment of the Malaysia Room in 1926, otherwise known as the "Q" Room<sup>5</sup> – the latter was a reference to the shelf mark that identified works on the Straits Settlements, Malaya and the Malay Archipelago.

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### The Seeds of Librarianship

The Junior Library and the Malaysia Room were likely factors that influenced locals to consider taking up a career in librarianship. However, Padma's interests in books and reading were likely nurtured from an early age at home.

### Family Influence

Padma Daniel was born on 31 August 1919, the eldest child of George O. Daniel and Harriet Fletcher, ethnic Indians from Travancore, India. George's interest in books likely began as a young boy when his active involvement at church in India led him to meet an English expatriate with an extensive home library.<sup>6</sup>

He continued this interest in books, mainly Christian publications, first working in Rangoon, Burma, for five years, managing the *Rangoon Diocesan Magazine* for the Anglican Diocese,<sup>7</sup> before being appointed as Honorary Secretary and Treasurer for the *Diocesan Magazine* in Singapore in 1917.<sup>8</sup>

In Singapore, he also managed the Book Depot – which in time became informally known as Daniel's Depot – a supplier of Christian books as well as books "both ancient and modern".<sup>9</sup> Early advertisements for the Book Depot included listings of books for boys and girls, dictionaries, art picture books and novels.<sup>10</sup> Padma likely had privileged access to many of these titles and invariably developed a love for reading.

### The Junior Library

When the Junior Library first opened on 21 July 1923, it was housed in a large room on the ground floor next to the Raffles Library's Public Room.

The Junior Library had a collection of more than 1,000 books, among which were Greek classics such as the *Iliad*, *Odyssey* and *Aeneid* as well as works by famed writers like Daniel Defoe, Jules Verne, R. L. Stevenson, R. M. Ballantyne and Mark Twain. Johnston the Librarian said of the collection in February 1930:

"It might be of interest to some to know that many of the local children whether Malay, Chinese, or Indian are just as ready to read and enjoy the tales by these authors with the same enthusiasm as boys in England..."<sup>11</sup>

In truth, a survey of the reading tastes of children at the Junior Library in 1938 revealed a diet of mainly fairy tales and annuals.<sup>12</sup> A regular column in *The Straits Times* on 13 September 1936, had this to say: "One of the curious things about the

growth of English education in Malaya is the popularity of the 'twopenny weeklies' among the Asiatic."<sup>13</sup>

Popular children's magazines such as *The Children's Newspaper*, *The Boy's Own Paper* and *Meccano Magazine* took up to a month to be shipped from England, and the original cost of two pence apiece would be raised to 12 cents upon arrival. Those in the know would purchase cheaper, secondhand copies or unsold editions but it was still cheaper to get hold of these popular reads at the Junior Library.

### Early Student Writings

The growing interest in reading among students sparked an interest in writing. A regular column for older boys titled "Boys' Corner" made its appearance in *The Malaya Tribune* in 1930 with contributions from the boys at Raffles Institution, St Joseph's Institution and Anglo-Chinese School.<sup>14</sup>

Not to be left out, there were calls for a "Girls' Corner" in early 1931 but the editors, concerned that interest could not

be sustained, suggested that the girls contribute to the existing "Women's Corner" instead.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless by May 1931, a writer using the pseudonym "Cicily" created a furore when her article was published in "Boys' Corner". The article was essentially a complaint about boys from certain distinguished schools who loitered at street corners to harass and ogle at girls.<sup>16</sup>

After several appeals, an attempt was made in the 9 May 1931 edition of *The Malaya Tribune* with the publication of an article, "To Bob or not to Bob", by a writer named "Evelyn" and the promise of a weekly Wednesday column if successful.<sup>17</sup> By 20 May, the "Girls' Corner" had become a regular feature. One contributor suggested that girls leave the "high-brow" subject of fashion and love to the "Women's Corner" and concentrate on games, arts and other topics that would appeal more to a modern schoolgirl.<sup>18</sup> Invariably, many of the contributors to the Girls' Corner were from the Raffles Girls' School, some of whom were Padma's contemporaries.

### LOVE UNITES PEOPLE

*Memoirs of a Christian Worker in Singapore from 1913 to 1959*

By  
George Daniel



(Facing page) Exterior view of the Raffles Library and Museum at Stamford Road in this photo taken in the 1930s, during the time when Padma Daniel and Kate Edith Savage-Bailey were working there as librarians. Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.

(Left) George Daniel's book, *Love Unites People: Memoirs of a Christian Worker in Singapore from 1913 to 1959*. Published in 1959, the book makes references to the life of his daughter, Padma Daniel. All rights reserved, Daniel, G. (1959). *Love Unites People: Memoirs of a Christian Worker in Singapore from 1913 to 1959*. Singapore: G. Daniel. (Call no.: RCLOS 275.957 DAN)

(Below) The Junior Library at the Raffles Library, c.1950s. The low wooden tables and chairs were specially designed for children's use. The wooden 20-compartment catalogue card cabinet can be seen on the right-hand side of the photograph. Image source: National Library Board, Singapore.



### The Challenges

Despite their vociferous voices, girls remained in the minority, both as contributors to newspaper columns and as patrons of the library. When the Junior Library first started in 1923, there were 365 subscribers with 278 of them being boys, mainly students of nearby schools.<sup>19</sup> A decade later in 1933, the number of subscribers had grown to more than 1,000, although girls only constituted a small fraction at 12 percent. Most of the female subscribers were students of Raffles Girls' School, where Padma studied.

Interestingly, when the Junior Library first opened, fiction books were shelved separately for boys and girls. There were also different opening days for the sexes: Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays were reserved for girls, while Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays were for boys. By 1929, this gender segregation had been removed.

However, there remained other barriers for both boys and girls in joining the library. At \$2 a year or 50 cents a quarter, not everyone could afford the subscription fee. Added to this was the library's distance from those living in the suburbs and its restrictive opening hours. The Straits Settlements (Singapore) Association "believed that the Raffles Library fails, by reason of its high cost and its situation and hours, to appeal to considerable sections of the English speaking and English reading public which have small means and little spare time". It called for branch libraries and reading rooms to be established in the suburbs.<sup>20</sup>

### The Making of a Librarian

It was against this backdrop that Padma Daniel first emerged on the library scene. Much of what is known of Padma has been

gleaned from her father's letters of introduction and appeal for employment. By 1 January 1936, the request for employment had been approved and Padma began her volunteer position as an unpaid apprentice at the Raffles Library.

By this time, the librarian James Johnston had retired and in his place was Kate Edith Savage-Bailey. She had arrived in Malaya in 1910 with her husband Arnold Savage-Bailey, a well-known solicitor who became partner at a law firm in Kuala Lumpur, and later in Penang. An unfortunate accident led to his sudden demise on 1 April 1935.<sup>21</sup>

Kate chose to remain in Malaya after the tragedy, moving to Singapore to take up the position of temporary librarian at the Raffles Library on 13 September 1935.<sup>22</sup> When Padma joined the library, Kate had only served a mere four months. Padma was about four years older than Kate's youngest daughter, Dulcie Gray. Besides being Padma's supervisor, Kate may have been a mother-figure who inspired Padma to further her reading and research interests. Padma would have witnessed Kate introducing major changes at the Raffles Library during her first year of service.

This included opening the Raffles Library half an hour earlier at 8.30 am.<sup>23</sup> When Kate's contract was extended for another two years of service, she turned her energies to the heritage collections. She installed new bookcases in the Malaysia Room, and published the J. V. Mills Map Collection Index to make the maps more accessible. For home loans, Kate made arrangements for more open access, including purchasing duplicate titles.<sup>24</sup>

Outside library duties, Kate regularly contributed articles to *The Straits Times* on topics relating to Malaya, such as living and travelling in Malaya, on local

domestic help, and Malayan architecture. She republished her children's book, *Squeee-umph!! A Malayan Elephant* (1929), in 1934, and released *The Jungle Omnibus*, a collection of four short stories about Malayan animals, in 1936. *The Malaya Tribune* praised the book for its "pure and fluent" style and commented that "it is the type of book which will give delight as well as instruction, and it should be in the possession of all children in this country who are being taught English."<sup>25</sup> Between March and June 1937, she gave frequent talks on the radio, most of which were readings of her children's books.

### Padma's Legacy

Having served three years, Kate went on a year's furlough from September 1938 until July 1939, during which time the Raffles Library was placed under the charge of Mrs. C. B. Rea.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, Padma was confirmed as a Junior Assistant Librarian on 1 October 1938, having passed her Library Association examination in December the previous year. Whilst preparing for her next examination in December 1940, Padma continued with her two-year correspondence course on top of her work at the library. Her father had written in to ask if a paid position as Junior Librarian would be offered to her upon completion of the full course, but the reply is not known.<sup>27</sup>

In 1938, Tan Soo Chye, a local graduate of Raffles College, filled the newly created position of archivist at the Raffles Museum. While his time was spent organising the

George Daniel's letter dated 11 December 1935 to the Director of the Raffles Library and Museum asking if the Raffles Library would consider admitting his daughter, Padma Daniel, as an unpaid apprentice. The application was successful and Padma began her apprenticeship at the Raffles Library in January 1936. *Image source: Colonial Secretary Office paper 6414 dated 1938 [CSO 6414/1938]*

December 11th 1935

The Director,  
Raffles Library & Museum,  
Singapore.

Dear Sir,

Miss Buckle, Principal, Raffles Girls' School, has advised me to get in touch with you in regard to the possibility of getting my daughter (Madeline Padma Daniel) admitted as an unpaid apprentice in Raffles Library. My daughter wishes to qualify herself as a Librarian by passing the Examinations of the Library Association, and Miss Buckle has very kindly arranged with the Inspector of Schools to make some enquiries regarding the holding of the Examinations under proper supervision.

In the meantime, the Library Association has sent me full particulars regarding their Examinations and an application form to be filled in by my daughter so that she can be admitted straight away as a "Corresponding Member". She is at the moment sitting for the Cambridge Senior Examination and desires to begin her studies as soon as possible for the Elementary Examination of the Library Association by enrolling for their Correspondence Courses vide attached application form.

I now beg to submit this formal application, and enclose details which may be required for your reference, together with a letter of recommendation from the Lord Bishop of Singapore under whom I am working.

I beg to remain,  
Dear Sir,  
Yours faithfully,

*Geo. O. Daniel*

archives, he also began to work on "a paper on the location, nature and condition of the Straits Settlements' archives".<sup>28</sup>

Around this time, Padma likely began work on her bibliographic listing of books in the Malaysia Room. This was a comprehensive listing of titles in the Raffles Library and Museum relating to Malaya, a collection that Kate had worked on previously and which Padma was likely to have helped organise. Padma's compilation was eventually published in December 1941 as *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Books Relating to Malaysia in the Raffles Museum & Library, Singapore*.

The onset of World War II, however, put a halt to Padma's career. With the Japanese troops advancing down the Malay Peninsula, Padma evacuated to Bombay, India, on 8 January 1942, just weeks before Singapore fell. She was soon followed by her mother and two siblings. Another brother was already safe in Delhi, studying at St Stephen's College, but one stayed behind to serve in the Medical Auxiliary Service in Singapore. Her father remained behind to manage the Book Depot, by then known as the SPCK Churchshop. He lost all contact with the family until they were

reunited towards the end of the Japanese Occupation in 1945.<sup>29</sup>

Unfortunately, Kate did not survive the war. The ship she boarded, the *S.S. Rooseboom*, which was heading for Padang in late February 1942, was sunk by a Japanese submarine near Batavia.<sup>30</sup>

After the war, Padma's catalogue remained one of the few available for purchase. Costing \$3.50, it was used to rebuild the Malayan Collections as it listed key pre-war titles, including fictional works with a local setting.<sup>31</sup> On her return to Malaya, Padma moved to Kajang, Selangor.<sup>32</sup> Little else is known of Padma thereafter or whether she fulfilled her "unusual ambition" of becoming a qualified librarian.

Both Padma's catalogue and Kate's *The Jungle Omnibus* are available on microfilm at the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library, National Library Building. ♦

The author would like to acknowledge the help of Gracie Lee, Senior Librarian at the National Library, and Fiona Tan, Assistant Archivist at the National Archives of Singapore.

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# தமிழ் முரசில் 1936–1960 வரை வெளிவந்த சிறுகதைகள் – இரு பார்வை

**Sundari Balasubramaniam** reviews a selection of short stories published in *Tamil Murasu* during the tumultuous years from 1936 to 1960 when Singapore transitioned from British rule and Japanese Occupation to self-governance.

தமிழ்லக்கியம் என்பது தமிழ்நாட்டுக்கு மட்டும் என்ற நிலைமாறி இன்று உலகெங்கும் புலம்பெயர்ந்த தமிழர்களால் மட்டுமின்றி பல வெளிநாட்டவர்களாலும் செழுமைப்படுத்தப்படுகிறது. குறிப்பாக இலங்கை, சிங்கப்பூர், மலேசியா, கனடா, ஜோரோப்பா ஆகிய நாடுகளில் வாழும் எண்ணற்ற தமிழர்கள் இன்றும் சிறந்த படைப்புகளை வெளியிட்டுத் தமிழை உண்ணத் திருந்தனர். செழிப்பான வாழ்வாதாரத்தைத் தேடி இங்கு சூடியேறியதிலிருக்காதன் ஆரம்பகாலங்களில்தமிழ்மொழியை வளர்க்கப் பாடுபட்டனர்.<sup>1</sup> தமிழ் மொழி மீது அவர்களுக்கிருந்த

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சுந்தரி பாலசுப்ரமணியமலீ கொங் சியன் மேற்கோள் நூலகத்தில் நூலகராகப் பணிபுரிகிறார். மேற்கோள் சேவை, தகவல் ஆய்வு மற்றும் தமிழ்த் தொகுப்பு நிர்வகித்தல் ஆகியன் இவரின் பணியாகும்.

நன்கொடையார்களைச் சந்தித்து, அளவளாவி, தேசிய நூலகத்தில் இல்லாத நூல்களை /பிரதிகளை அவர்களிடமிருந்து பெற்று, நூலக வளத்தை மேம்படுத்துதல் நாட்டு புஷ்பலதாவின் பணியாகும்.

ஆரம்பமுதங்களை இலக்கியவாதிகளாக அடையாளப்படுத்திக் கொள்ளும் போக்கும் இதற்கு உறுதுணையாக இருந்தன. ஆனால் அன்றைய எழுத்தாளர்கள் பொருளாதார வசதியில் பின்தங்கியிருந்தனர். பலர் தினக் கூலிகளாகவும், சாலை இடும் வேலையிலும், துறைமுகத்திலும், தோட்டங்களில் வேலை செய்யவர்களாகவும் இருந்தனர். ஆனால் அனைவரும் தாங்கள் ஒரு எழுத்தாளராக அங்கீகரிக்கப்படவேண்டும் என்ற ஒரே நோக்கத்தோடு பாடுபட்டனர். இந்த ஆர்வத்தால் அவர்கள் தமிழில் சுயமாகவே, இலக்கணப்பிழை இல்லாமல் கதை, கவிதை எழுத, மேடைகளில் பேசக் கற்றுக்கொண்டனர். பி. கிருஷ்ணன் அவர்கள் தமிழமைப்பற்றிக் கூறும்பொழுது, தாமாகவே சங்க இலக்கியங்களைக் கற்றுத் தேர்ந்ததாகக் குறிப்பிட்டுள்ளார்.<sup>2</sup> இவரைப்போல் பலரும் தங்களைச் சிறந்த எழுத்தாளர்களைக்கொள்ளப் பாடுபட்டனர். அதில் பலனும் கண்டனர். அவர்களுள் சிலர் வாணாவியிலும் பத்திரிகைக்கு துறையிலும் வேலை செய்தனர். பி. கிருஷ்ணன், ந. பழநிவேலு போன்றோர் வாணாவியில் வேலை செய்ததால் அவர்கள் படைப்பிற்குப் பணமும் கிடைத்தது. மற்றவர்களுக்கு அந்த வாய்ப்பு இல்லை.

## தமிழக்கு ஆதரவு

1935-இல் கோ சாரங்கபாணி ஆசிரியராக இருந்து ஆரம்பிக்கப்பட்ட தமிழ் முரசு நாளிதழ், தமிழ் நேசன் நாளிதழ் மேம்படுத்துதல் நாட்டு புஷ்பலதாவின் பணியாகும்.

1936 இல் கோ சாரங்கபாணி தமிழ் முரசின் உரிமையாளரானார். அவர் ஆரம்பித்த தமிழர் முன்னேற்ற கழகம் பல நாடுகளின்களை அரங்கேற்றியது. அவை பெரும்பாலும் தமிழ் மக்களிடையே நிலவிய சாதி வேற்றுமை, தமிழ் மக்களின் தன்னம்பிக்கையற்ற நிலை, பெண்கள் முன்னேற்றம், மூட பழக்கவழக்கங்கள் போன்ற சீர்திருத்தக்கருத்துக்களை முன்வைத்து எழுதப்பட்ட நாடுகளாகும். மேலும் தமிழர் திருநாள், பொங்கல் திருநாள் ஆகிய சமூகக் கொண்டாட்டங்கள் அக்காலகட்டத்தில் மக்களின் அறிவுப்பசிக்கு விருந்தாக அமைந்தன. கவிதை, கதை எழுதும் போட்டிகள், மக்களின் எழுத்தார்வத்தைப் பெறிதும் வளர்த்தன. 1932-இல், கோ. சாரங்கபாணி, 'தமிழ் எங்கள் உயிர்' என்னும் குறிக்கோளுடன் நிதி திரட்டி, 1956-இல், சிங்கப்பூர் பல்கலைக் கழகத்தில் தமிழை முதன்மையாகக் கொண்ட இந்திய ஆய்வுத் துறை தொடர்க்க வழி செய்தார். பின்பு 1959-இல், இத்துறை கோலாலம்பூருக்கு மாற்றப்பட்டது.<sup>3</sup>

தமிழ் முரசில் எழுதிய நம் எழுத்தாளர்களுள் வெகு சிலரே தங்கள் படைப்புகளை புத்தகமாக வெளியிட்டனர். பலரின் குறைந்த வருமானத்தில் அது வெறும் கனவாகவே இருந்தது. 1963 ஆம் ஆண்டில் தொழிலாளர்களின் வேலை நிறுத்தத்தினால் தமிழ் முரசு பதிப்பகம் ஒரு வருடகாலம் மூடப்பட்டது. அதன் விளைவாக கோ. சாரங்கபாணி ஆரம்பித்த தமிழர் திருநாளும் நிறுத்தப்பட்டது. 1964 ஆம் ஆண்டு மீண்டும் பதிப்பை ஆரம்பித்ததும் எழுத்தாளர்கள் மீண்டும் தங்கள் எழுத்துப் பணியைத் தொடர்ந்தனர்.<sup>4</sup> அத்துடன் சிங்கப்பூர் மலையாவானொலிகளும் அவர்களின் படைப்புகளை ஒலிபரப்பின. 1950களில் வாணாவியில் பல தமிழ் நிகழ்ச்சிகள் ஒலிபரப்பப்பட்டன. பள்ளி மாணவர்களுக்கென்று தனி நிகழ்ச்சிகள், கதை நேரம், நாடக அரங்கம், கவிதை அரங்கம் போன்ற பல அங்கங்கள் தமிழை செழுமையாக வளர்க்க உதவின.

இக்கட்டுரை, 1936 முதல் 1960 வரை தமிழ்முரசில் வெளிவந்த சிறுகதைகள் பற்றிய ஒர் அலசவாகும். இந்த காலகட்டத்தில் சிங்கப்பூர் பல சவால்கலைச் சந்தித்தது. போர், ஜப்பானிய ஆதிக்கம், அதைத் தொடர்ந்த ஒரு நிலையில்லாத அமைதியற்ற காலம் என வரிசையாக மக்கள் பல சிரமங்களை எதிர்நோக்கிய காலம். அத்தகைய 50, 60களில் அதிகமான சிறுகதைகள்



(எதிர்பக்கம்) 1936–1960 வரை தமிழ் முரசில் வெளிவந்த சிறுகதைகள், கவிதைகளின் தொகுப்பு. எல்லா உரிமையும் பெற்றது டாக்டர் சீதாலட்சுமி, சுந்தரி பாலசுப்ரமணியம். (2009). சிங்கப்பூர் தமிழ் சிறுகதைகள், கவிதைகள்-ஒர் அடைவு. சிங்கப்பூர்: தேசிய நூலகம். (டைப்புறம்) கோ. சாரங்கபாணி-இளைய வசதி. (Call no.: Tamil RSING 016.894811 SIN-[LIB])

(மேலே, இடப்புறம்) கோ. சாரங்கபாணி-இளைய வசதி. (1975). சிங்கப்பூர்: தமிழ் முரசு. (டைப்புறம்) 2008 இல் பி. கிருஷ்ணன் ஜனாதிபதி திரு நாதன் அவர்களிடமிருந்து கலாசார பதக்கத்தைப் பெறுகிறார்.

வெளிவந்தன. தேசிய நூலக வாரியம் வெளியிட்டுள்ளதை தொகுப்பில் 602 சிறுகதைகள் பதிவுசெய்யப்பட்டுள்ளன. மக்களின் ஆர்வமும், தமிழ்ப் பற்றுமே இதற்குக் காரணமாகும்.

## 1935–1960: தமிழ் முரசு

நா. கோவிந்தசாமி 30களைச் சீர்திருத்தக் காலம் எனக் கூறுகிறார்.<sup>5</sup> 1930களில் தமிழ்முரசில் வெளிவந்த சிறுகதைகளில் பெரும்பாலும் சீர்திருத்தக் கருத்துக்களும், காதல் கதைகளுமே அதிகமாகக் காணப்பட்டன. அக்காலகட்டங்களில் மக்கள் அதிக மூடப் பழக்கவழக்கங்களால் கட்டுண்டிருந்தனர். விதவைகளை ஒதுக்குவது, சுகுணங்கள் பார்ப்பது, சாதிக்கு முக்கியத்துவம் கொடுப்பது, என பலவகைகளில் பிற்போக்கான நிலைத்தன்மை கொண்டிருந்தனர். அவை எல்லாவற்றையும் தம் படைப்புகளில் சாடினார், ந. பழநிவேலு. 30களில் அதிகமாக தமிழ்முரசில் கதை எழுதியவர்களுள் ந. பழநிவேலும் ஒருவர். இவரின் கதைகளில், விதவைகள் மறுமணம் புரிந்தனர். மேலம்பட்டவகுப்பினரும் கீழ்ம்பட்டவகுப்பினரும் திருமணத்தில் ஒன்றுக்கிடனர். அடிமைத்தனத்தை விட்டு அநியாயத்தை எதிர்த்தனர். பெண்கள் அடக்குமுறையை எதிர்த்தப்போராடினர். இளைஞர்கள் சீர்திருத்தக் கல்யாணம் செய்தனர்.

## இரட்டைத் தலைப்புகள்

30 களில் இரட்டைத் தலைப்புகள் கொண்ட சிறுகதைள் பல காணப்பட்டன. தமிழகக் கதைகளிலும் இவ்வழக்கம் கையாளப்பட்டுள்ளது.<sup>7</sup> கதையின் முக்கிய கதாபாத்திரத்தின் பெயர் முதலிலும் பிறகு கதையின் கருப்பொருளும் வருகிறது. கதையின் தலைப்பு மக்களிடம் ஆர்வத்தைத் தூண்டலவல்லதாக இருக்கவேண்டும் என எழுத்தாளர்கள் நினைத்திருக்கலாம். ந. பழநிவேலு எழுதிய "சுகுண சுந்தரம் அல்லது ஜாதிக் கொடுமை" (1936, செப்.12) சாதி வேற்றுமையால் காதலர்கள் இருக்கும் கொடுமையைச் சித்திரிக்கிறார். எம். ஆறுமுகம் எழுதிய "ஞான சேகரன் அல்லது காதலின் விளைவு" (1937, பிப்.20) என்ற கதையிலும் சாதி வேற்றுமையால் காதல் நிராகரிக்கப்பட்டு காதலர்கள் இருக்கின்றனர். வை. ராஜெரத்தினம் எழுதிய "கனகம் அல்லது கலக்கமுற்ற காரிகைகள்" (1937, ஜூன்.22) என்ற கதையில் பெண்களுக்கு நடக்கும் அநீதிகளை எதிர்க்கும்



கதாநாயகனைக் காணலாம். த. ராஜம்மா எழுதிய “உத்தம நன்பன் அல்லது குணசுந்தரியின் மனமாற்றம்” (1940, ஜன.6) என்ற கதையில் மாற்றாந்தாய் கொடுமையும் பிறகு நன்பனின் உதவியால் அவள் மனமாற்றம் அடைந்து கழந்தைகளைப் பேணுவதும் சுவையாகக் கூறப்பட்டுள்ளன.

## കത്തെപ്പ് പിൻ്നണ്ണി

40, 50களில் தினசரி வாழ்க்கையில் நடக்கும் நிகழ்ச்சிகளை கதைகளில் அதிகமாகக் காணப்பட்டன. நாட்டின் நடப்பு விவகாரங்கள் குறித்த கதைகள் குறைவே.<sup>8</sup> ச. குருசாமி, வல்லிக்கண்ணன், ந. பழநிவேலு, அறிவானந்தன், மு.சு. குருசாமி, முருகு (அ. முருகையன்), ரெ. கார்த்திகேச, தே. நவமணி, மா. ராமையா, இராச இளவழகன், தமிழ்ச்செல்வன், துலாக்கோல், புதுமைதாசன் (பி. கிருஷ்ணன்), வள்ளிமணாளன் (சே.வ. சண்முகம்) போன்றோர் அதிகமாகக் கதை எழுதியவர்கள். இக்காலகட்டத்தில் வெளிவந்த கதைகள் பலவும் வறுமை, காதல், தியாகம், காதலுக்காகத் தன்னுயிர் மாய்த்துக் கொள்ளுதல், சாதிக் கொடுமை, தொழிலாளிகளைக் கொடுமைப்படுத்தும் முதலாளிகள், மூடநம்பிக்கை போன்ற கருத்துக்களே மேலோங்கி இருந்தன. சிங்கப்பூர் பின்னணியில் வெகு சில கதைகளே வெளிவந்தன. தமிழ் நாட்டின் தாக்கமே மேலோங்கியிருந்தது. இவர்களின் கதைக் கருப்பொருளை பின்வருமாறு பிரிக்கலாம்:

- காதல்
  - வறுமை
  - சமூகச் சீர்கேடுகள்/சாகி வேற்றுமை/ மூடநம்பிக்கை

காகல்

1940, 50, 60களில் வெளிவந்த சிறுகடைகள் மிகுதியாகக் காதல் கருப்பொருள்ளையேக் கொண்டிருந்தன. அதிலும் சாதி வேற்றுமையால் பிரிந்த காதலவர்கள், குடும்பக் கௌரவத்தினால்



பிரிந்த காதலர்கள், மற்றவர்களுக்காகக் காதலைத் தியாகம் செய்தவர்கள், காதல் கைகூடாமல் உயிரைவிட்டவர்கள் என இவைகளைச் சுற்றியேக்கதைகள் பின்னாப்பட்டிருந்தன

“இதுதான் வாழ்க்கை” என்ற கதை, பெற்றோர்களால் ஒன்று சேர முடியாமல் பிரிந்த காதலர்கள் பற்றியது. “மயக்கம் தெளிகிறது”<sup>10</sup> என்ற கதையில் ஆணவும் கொண்ட மனைவியால் கணவன் அடையும் துண்பமும் பிறகு அவள் திருந்தி கணவனை மதித்து நடத்தலும் கதையின் கருப்பொருளாகும். “பிரிவு”<sup>11</sup> என்ற கதையில் வெளிநாட்டு மாப்பிள்ளைக்குத் தன் பெண்ணை திருமணம் செய்து கொடுத்தாலும் அவளை அனுப்ப மனியில்லாமல் தன்னுடனே வைத்துக்கொள்கிறார் பெண்ணின் தந்தை. கணவன் மேல் கொண்ட அன்பால் வாடிய மகள் இறந்து விடுகிறாள். “அனாதைக் குடும்பம்”<sup>12</sup> என்ற கதையில் இருவேறு இனத்தவர் காதலித்து மனம் முடிக்கின்றனர். ஆனால் இருவரின் கலாசாரமும் வேறு என்பதால் வாழ்க்கையில் சந்தேகப் புயல் வீச்கிறது. பிறகு தெளிவடைகின்றனர். “குடும்பப் பெருமையா?”<sup>13</sup> என்ற கதையில் குடும்பப் பெருமையைக் காரணம் காட்டி மகளின் காதலை எதிர்க்கும் பெற்றோர் அவளை ஒரு நோயாளிக்குத் திருமணம் செய்து வைக்கின்றனர். சில வருடங்களில் விதவையான அவளை, அவள் காதலன் மறுமணம் செய்ய அனுமதி வேண்ட, அதையும் மறுக்கும் அவர்கள் இறுதியில் அவளைக் காலனுக்குப் பலிகொடுக்கின்றனர்.

വന്നതെ

காதலுக்கு அடுத்தபடியாக அதிகமாக வந்த கதைகள் வறுமையைக் கருப்பார்டாகக் கொண்டுள்ளன. கொந்தீவிப்பான் அக்காலகட்டத்தில் மக்களின் வாழ்வாதாரமே போராட்டத்தில் இருந்தது. ஆயினும் அவர்களின் எழுத்தார்வம் குறையவில்லை. தங்கள் வறுமையை, வாழ்க்கையின் போராட்டங்களை எழுத்தில் வெளிக்கொண்டந்தனர்.

அப்பாவும் மகனும்<sup>14</sup> என்ற கதையில் செல்வந்தரான தந்தை இறுதிவரை தன் மறுமகள் ஏழை என்ற ஒரே காரணத்தினால் அவளை ஏற்க மறுக்கிறார். “அவனும் கெட்டாள்” என்ற கதையில் ஏழைதகப்பனால் தன் பகட்டாளன் வாழ்வக்கு உதவ முடியாததால் தன் படிப்பையும் நிறுத்தி பலரின் ஆசை நாய்கியாய் வலம் வந்த நாய்கி இறுதியில் தன் தவறை உணர்கிறாள். “தங்கச்சங்கிலி”<sup>15</sup> என்ற கதையில் கூலித் தொழிலாளி ஒருவன் வறுமையால் தன் குடும்பத்தைத் தொலைக்க நேர்ந்த நிலையைக் காட்டுகிறார் ஆசிரியர். “அனாதை”<sup>16</sup> என்ற கதையில் ஒரு அனாதைக்கு உதவும் இரக்க குணம் மக்களுக்கு இல்லாததால் பசியால் அவன் இறக்க நேரிடுகிறது. “கடைசி முடிவு”<sup>17</sup> என்ற கதையில் வேலையிடத்தில் ஆட்குறறப்பு செய்ததால் வேலை இழந்து, கடன் அடைக்க வழியில்லாமல் குடும்பத்தோடு தற்கொலை செய்துகொள்ளும் ஒருவனின் நிலையை விவரிக்கிறது. “துணை”<sup>18</sup> என்ற கதையில் பணம் படைத்தவர்கள் உதவாமல் விரட்டப்படும் ஒரு பிச்சைக்காரனுக்கு ஒரு ஏழை கிழவி உதவுகிறாள். ஒரு ஏழைதான் மற்றொரு ஏழையின் துன்பத்தை உணர முடியும் என்பதாக முடிக்கிறார் ஆசிரியர்.

**சழுகச் சீர்கேடுகள்/முதலாளி கொடுமை**

சமுகச் சீர்கேடுகள், அதிகாரத்தைத் தவறாகப் பயன்படுத்தும் அதி காரிகள் போன்ற நடைமுறைகள் இன்றைய காலகட்டத்திற்கும் பொருந்தும்.

"பால் அபிவேகம்"<sup>19</sup> என்ற கதையில் ஏழை குழந்தையின் பசிக்கு பால் கொடுக்க மனமிலாத மக்கள் கோவில் சிலைக்குப் பால்

ந. பழநிவேலு அவர்கள் ஒரு கருத்தரங்கில் பேசுகிறார்.



1929-இல் ச.வே.ரா. பெரியார் மலேசியா வந்தபோது அவரை வராவேற்கும் கோ சா. எல்லா உரிமையும் பெற்றது. எம்.இனியாஸ் (2013). தமிழ்வேள் பற்றி. சிங்கப்பூர்: தமிழ்வேள் நற்பணி மன்றம். [Call no: Tamil RSING 070.4092 TAM]

அபிஷேகம் செய்வதை சாடுகிறார் ஆசிரியர். “சமூக சேவகி”<sup>20</sup> என்ற கதையின் நாயகி சமூக சேவை என்ற போர்வையில் விபசாரம் செய்கிறாள். “பண்பும் பெயரும்”<sup>21</sup> என்ற கதை லஞ்சம் வாங்கும் அதிகாரியைப் பற்றியது. பண்மாக வாங்காமல் அன்பளிப்பு என்ற பெயரில் பொருளாக வாங்குவதை சாடுகிறார். “உயர்வும் தாழ்வும்”<sup>22</sup> என்ற கதை, அலுவலகங்களில் உயர் அதிகாரிகள் தங்கள் அதிகாரத்தைப் பயன்படுத்தி பொற்யான மருத்துவச் சான்றிதழைக் காட்டி உல்லாச பயணம் செல்வதை வழக்கமாக்கிக் கொள்வதைக் கூறுகிறது. “அனுதாபத்துக்கு உரியவள்”<sup>23</sup> என்ற கதை ஆணாதிக்கத்தை வெளிப்படுத்துகிறது. வெளியில் மனைவியை மதிப்பவன் போல் நடிக்கும் கணவன், வீட்டில் அவளை சந்தேகித்து வார்த்தைகளால் கொடுமை படுத்துகிறான். “கஸ்தாரி”<sup>24</sup> என்ற கதை பெண்ணிற்கு இழைக்கும் கொடுமையை மையமாக வைத்து ஏழுதப்பட்டுள்ளது. “பிள்ளையோபிள்ளை”<sup>25</sup> என்ற கதையில் முதலாளியின் பாலியல் தொல்லைக்கு ஆளாகும் வேலையாளின் மனைவி தன் கணவன், குமந்தை என அனைவராயும் மெந்து மனநோயாளியிகிறாள்.

മുடിവരെ

அக்காலக்கட்டத்தில் ஈ. வே. பெரியார் அவர்கள் தமிழ்நாட்டில் ஏற்படுத்திய தாக்கம் இங்கும் எதிராளித்தது. 1929-இல் அவரின் வருகை இங்கு பெரும் விழிப்புணர்வை ஏற்படுத்தியது. சிங்கப்பூர்க் தமிழர்களின் வாழ்வில், அரசியல் கலப்பில்லாத சமூகச் சீர்த்திருத்தத்தை ஏற்படுத்த வேண்டும் என்ற நோக்கிலேயே 1932-இல் தமிழர் சீர்த்திருத்தச் சங்கம் தோற்றுவிக்கப்பட்டது. அடுத்து 1935-இல் தோன்றிய தமிழ் மரசு தமிழர்களிடையே ஏற்பட்ட கலை, இலக்கிய ஆர்வத்திற்கு விக்கிட்டது.

சில கதைகள் தவிர, பெரும்பாலானவை, தமிழ்நாட்டு சமூக வாழ்க்கையைப் பிரதிபலித்தன. சாதி ஒழிப்பு, கைம்பெண் மனம், பொருந்தா மனம், வறுமை, பொருளாதார ஏற்றத் தாழ்வு, மூடநம்பிக்கை போன்ற கருப்பொருள்களையே கொண்டிருந்தன. மேலும் அன்றைய காலகட்டத்தில் மக்களுக்கு இருந்த பொழுதுபோக்கு நாடகங்களும், திரைப்படங்களும்தான். அவற்றின் சார்தாங்களும் இச்சில உத்தகசுதாஸில் சான்றாலும்<sup>26</sup>

போர்க்காலங்கள், நிலையில்லாத கொந்தளிப்பான காலங்கள் என தடைகள் பல இருந்தாலும் அக்காலக்ட்ட படைப்புகள்தாம் சிங்கப்பூர் இலக்கியத்திற்கு வித்திட்டன என்று கூறினால் அது மிகையன்று. இன்று பலவாறாக வளர்ச்சி கண்டிருக்கும்

சிங்கை தமிழ் இலக்கியத்திற்கு மூல காரணம் நம் முன்னோடி எழுத்தாளர்களின் ஆரம்பகால படைப்புகளேயாகும். ♦

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# HEAVEN, EARTH AND BROTHERHOOD

Secret societies arrived on the back of mass migrations of Chinese to Asia in the colonial era.

**Makeswary Periasamy** highlights the National Library's collection of early books on Chinese triads.



The National Library's Rare Materials Collection – which comprises a valuable collection of books and printed items from as early as the 15th century – has a number of works on secret societies and their activities in colonial outposts such as Riau, Batavia, Penang, Singapore and Hong Kong.

These works were mostly written by Western colonial officials working in the region, such as William A. Pickering, Gustave Schlegel, William Stanton, William G. Stirling and J.S.M. Ward. Most of these writers were proficient in the Chinese language and gathered information on secret societies from interviews with detained members, from perusing seized documents, and in the case of William A. Pickering, by observing the initiation ceremonies of secret society members.<sup>1</sup>

The works of these colonial writers focused mainly on the Chinese secret society Tiandihui (天地会) – the “society of the three united, Heaven, Earth and Man” – which originated in China’s Fujian province in the mid-1700s.<sup>2</sup> The society was originally formed in China for the purpose of overthrowing

(Above) A censer of joss sticks – bearing the Chinese characters 反清復明 (fanqing fuming) – placed on the initiation altars of secret societies. The phrase means “Destroy the Qing, restore the Ming”. The porcelain censer rests on a three-legged stand, a distinguishing feature of Hung censers. The tripod symbolises the unity of heaven, earth and man. All rights reserved, Lim, I. (1999). *Secret Societies in Singapore: Featuring the William Stirling Collection* (p. 49). Singapore: National Heritage Board, Singapore History Museum. [Call no.: RSING 366.095957 LIM]

(Right) Three out of the five flags of ranks representing the five principal lodges of the Hung Society. Pictured here (from left to right) are the flags for Earl (伯), Baron (男) and Marquis (侯). The other two ranks are Viscount (子) and Duke (公). All rights reserved, Lim, I. (1999). *Secret Societies in Singapore: Featuring the William Stirling Collection* (p. 46). Singapore: National Heritage Board, Singapore History Museum. [Call no.: RSING 366.095957 LIM]

(Facing page) A snake tattoo on the forearm of a secret society member. Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

the Manchu-led Qing dynasty (1644–1912) and restoring the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) of ethnic Han Chinese.<sup>3</sup> Secret societies, which started off in various parts of Asia ostensibly to provide financial aid and social support to newly arrived Chinese immigrants, trace their roots primarily to the Tiandihui in China.

Besides comparing the secret societies to the Freemason<sup>4</sup> order of medieval England, the authors also describe the origins and governance of secret societies, initiation ceremonies for new members, secret society paraphernalia, the oaths and rites that bind the brotherhood through fictive kinship, as well as symbols and code words recognisable only to members.

## Works from the 1800s

One of the earliest works on Chinese secret societies in the Rare Materials Collection is a study in German – *Geschichte der brüderschaft des himmels und der erden: Der communistischen propaganda Chinas* (1852) – by the Dutch missionary E. H. Röttger. He translated the term “Tiandihui” into German as “Himmel, Erde, Bruderschaft”, which means “Heaven, Earth, Brotherhood”.<sup>5</sup>

Between 1832 and 1842, Röttger worked as a missionary in Riau island in Indonesia, interacting with the 5,000-strong Chinese population there and learning the ways of the Tiandihui. Due to ill health, he left for Europe to recuperate but returned for a second stint between 1844 and 1845.

A comprehensive 19th-century study on the Tiandihui is *Tian Ti Hwui: The Hung-League or Heaven-Earth-League, a Secret Society with the Chinese in China and India* (1866) by Gustave Schlegel, an interpreter with the Dutch colonial government in Indonesia (or Dutch Indies as it was known then).<sup>6</sup>

After spending several years in China, Schlegel arrived in Batavia (now Jakarta) as a Chinese interpreter in 1862. Through

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his work, he was able to gather much information on secret societies. One year into his posting, Schlegel was asked to translate documents found in the home of a secret society member who had been arrested. He also had access to secret society materials seized by the Dutch colonial government, as well as two Chinese manuscripts detailing secret society rites and oaths. In 1866, Schlegel published his landmark study on the Tiandihui.

The National Library also has a set of unbound manuscripts and documents – in English and Chinese – pertaining to various secret societies that were influential in Penang in the mid-1800s. Known as the *Chinese Secret Societies: A Collection of Manuscripts and Documents Relating to Secret Societies in Penang*,<sup>7</sup> it likely came from the office of the Chinese Protectorate in Penang, which was set up to manage the affairs of Chinese migrants, including the supervision of secret societies (similar offices were also set up in Malacca and Singapore). Of particular importance is a document containing parts of the 1868 Penang Riots Commission Report.<sup>8</sup>

The Penang Riots of 1867 involved four secret societies: Ghee Hin Society (also known as Kian Tek), Toh Peh Kong Society, White Flag Society and Red Flag Society. The riots started on 3 August 1867 over a “trifling quarrel” that subsequently escalated and lasted for 10 days. A commission of enquiry was subsequently set up to investigate the cause of the riots.<sup>9</sup>

The Penang collection also includes William A. Pickering’s article on “Chinese Secret Societies” (1879), which describes a Tiandihui initiation ceremony he witnessed in Singapore. Pickering became the first Protector of the Chinese in Singapore in 1877, and he himself joined the Tiandihui. This was at a time when the Tiandihui was a registered de facto society in Singapore.<sup>10</sup> Pickering’s fluency in Mandarin and Chinese dialects had helped him earn the trust of the Chinese.

## Works from the 1900s

William G. Stirling was the Assistant Protector of the Chinese in Singapore between 1921 and 1931 when he co-authored the three-volume work, *The Hung Society or the Society of Heaven and Earth* (1925–26), with J.S.M. Ward, who had previously written on the subject of Freemasonry.<sup>11</sup> In this publication, the authors attempted to prove that the Freemasons and Tiandihui shared common origins.<sup>12</sup>

Stirling, a Freemason himself and married to a Chinese, used Schlegel’s work as a basis to understand the secret societies he was dealing with. Stirling penned the first volume on the history of the Tiandihui, and explained in detail its initiation ceremonies and rituals. Ward wrote the other two volumes, comparing the Tiandihui’s ceremonies with those from other ancient cultures.

In Singapore, the Tiandihui took on the name Ghee Hin Kongsi (meaning “Rise of the Righteousness”), and became the first secret society to be formed here in 1820. In 1972, it further entrenched itself as a legitimate society with the purchase of a temple at No. 4 China Street.<sup>13</sup> Although members paid annual and initiation fees, Stirling observed that revenue was also collected via illegal means such as gambling, opium sales and prostitution.

In 1890, when secret societies were declared illegal in Singapore following the enactment of the 1889 Societies Ordinance, most of the documents and paraphernalia belonging to the society were destroyed by the colonial authorities. Fortunately, a number of seals and certificates were salvaged and surrendered to the office of the Protector of the Chinese. These items are now part of the William Stirling Collection at the National Museum of Singapore.



*The Triad Society: or, Heaven and Earth Association* (1900) was originally written by William J. Stanton in the late 1890s as a series of journal articles. Stanton, a British police officer in Hong Kong, could speak Chinese dialects and was instrumental in suppressing the activities of the secret societies.<sup>14</sup>

The publication provides a comprehensive overview of Hong Kong’s Triad Society – the Tien Ti Hin or the Heaven and Earth Association. Stanton reproduced in his book the membership certificates of 10 secret societies that he had collected all over Southeast Asia.<sup>15</sup> In addition to translating and explaining the various seals used by the Triad Society, Stanton also described the methods used to verify the identity of a member. These included hand signs, code words, asking specific test questions (see text box below) as well as knowledge of certain arrangements of objects such as teacups.

The Rare Materials Collection’s most recent work on the Tiandihui is *Triad and Tabut: A Survey of the Origin and Diffusion of Chinese and Mohamedan Secret Societies in the Malay Peninsula A.D. 1800–1935* (1941).<sup>16</sup> Printed for internal distribution and intended for use by government authorities only, it is based on an unfinished manuscript by Mervyn Llewelyn Wynne, a senior police officer in Penang.

Wynne reviewed the history and development of the Chinese and Malay secret societies in Malaya by collating all the earlier works. He completed the first part of his research in December 1936 but was unable to finish the work as he was killed at the start of the Japanese Occupation in 1942.

Although incomplete, Wynne’s work provides a comprehensive overview of secret societies in 19th-century Malaya and makes reference to many documents that are no longer available.<sup>17</sup> The National Library holds a copy of the rare 1941 imprint as well as three copies of the 1957 re-issued version with a foreword by Wilfred L. Blythe, the former Colonial Secretary of Singapore. ♦

## TRIAD TALK

Why is your hair so unkempt?

I was born under a peach tree.

Why is your hair so long?

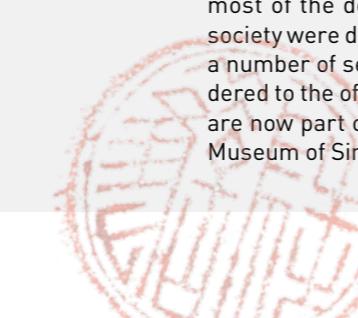
It is the Star God of Longevity.

How many eyebrow hairs do you have?

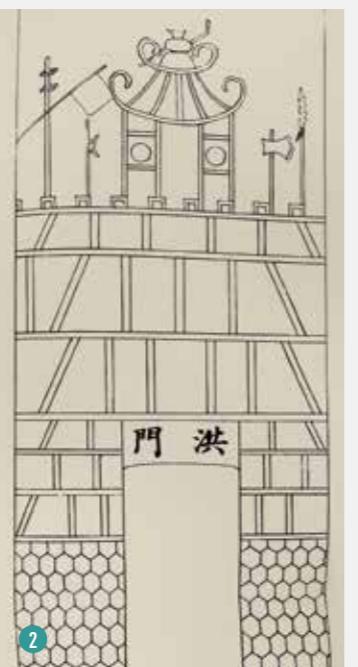
36 on the left and 72 on the right.

Why is your coat so old?

It was handed down by the Five Patriarchs.



1. In this 1852 German-language book on Chinese secret societies in Riau, Indonesia, Dutch missionary E. H. Röttger discusses the history, structure and initiation rituals of triads using information gleaned from interviews with society members and the local Chinese community. The pentagon-shaped seal of the Chinese secret society Tiandihui on page 11 of the book shows the five Chinese characters – 土 (earth), 木 (wood), 水 (water), 金 (metal) and 火 (fire). These represent the five elements in Chinese philosophy. All rights reserved, Röttger, E. H. (1852). *Geschichte der brüderschaft des himmels und der erden: Der communistischen propaganda China's Berlin: In Commission bei Wilhelm Hertz.* Collection of the National Library, Singapore, Accession no.: B20032051B.



2. This illustration is taken from another seminal 19th-century work on secret societies in Indonesia. In his book written in English and published in 1866, Gustave Schlegel, an interpreter with the Dutch colonial government in Batavia, drew similarities between the Freemasons of Europe and the Chinese secret society Tiandihui through the use of their symbols and rituals. In this diagram from Tab. IV of the book, the Hung Gate (洪門; Hongmen) is the first of three symbolic gates that the initiate must pass through during the member initiation ceremony, in which initiates are introduced to the origins of the Tiandihui, its leaders and members as well as its rules and oaths. All rights reserved, Schlegel, G. (1866). *Thian Ti Hwui: The Hung-League or Heaven-Earth-League, a Secret Society with the Chinese in China and India.* Batavia: Lange & Co. Collection of the National Library, Singapore, Accession no.: B29259841G.

3. William G. Stirling, Assistant Protector of the Chinese in Singapore between 1921 and 1931, and J.S.M. Ward co-authored this important three-volume work on secret societies in Singapore. *The Hung Society or the Society of Heaven and Earth* was published between 1925 and 1926. Pictured here is the title page of Volume 1 with the colourful frontispiece titled "A Triad Plan of the Mystic Journey as Portrayed in the Arrangement of the Lodge". On page 132 of the book (see below) is the "grand membership certificate" of the Ghee Hin Society. This impression was taken from the original "chop" that was seized when the society was declared illegal in 1890. Ghee Hin ("Rise of the Righteousness") was regarded as the first secret society in Singapore and was formally registered in 1820. All rights reserved, Ward, J. S. M., & Stirling, W. G. (1925-1926). *The Hung Society or the Society of Heaven and Earth.* London: The Baskerville Press. Collection of the National Library, Singapore, Accession nos.: B029243651 [v. 1], B02924366J [v. 2], B02924367K [v. 3].

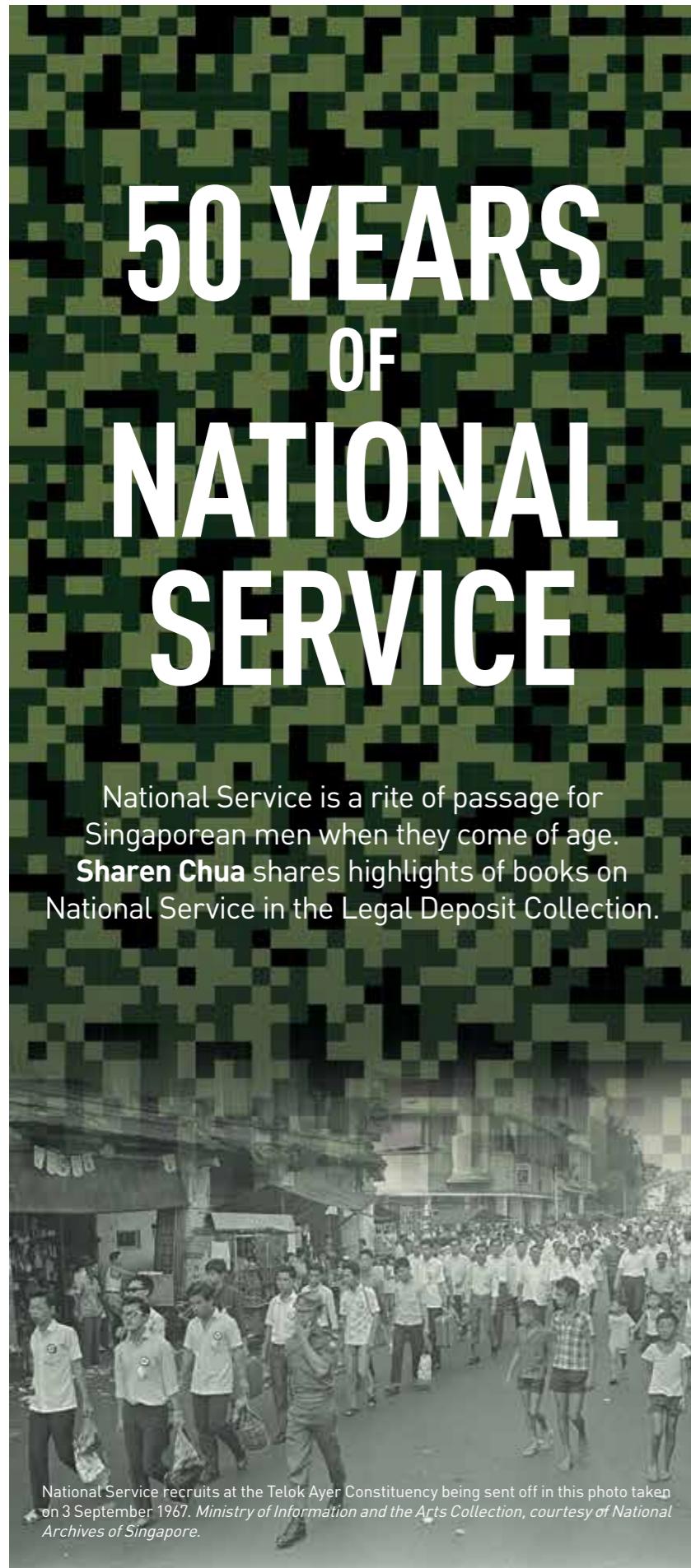


4. Also in the collection of the National Library is a set of unbound documents – in English and Chinese – pertaining to various secret societies in Penang in the mid-1800s. The provenance of these documents is unclear; they were likely seized from various sources and kept at the office of the Chinese Protectorate in Penang. Shown here are membership certificates, notices, forms and receipts which were printed on white, yellow or red cloth. To make the documents unintelligible to non-members and confound the authorities, secret societies would rearrange the Chinese characters, create abbreviations or use ideograms. All rights reserved, Chinese Secret Societies: A Collection of Manuscripts and Documents Relating to Secret Societies in Penang. (1867). Collection of the National Library, Singapore, Accession no.: B02461230G.

5. Published in 1900, *The Triad Society: Or, Heaven and Earth Association* was written by William J. Stanton, a British police officer in Hong Kong. The book contains reprints of articles originally written for *The China Review* in the late 1890s. Stanton was a Chinese speaker and was able to interact with triad members in Hong Kong when gathering information for his book. The cover design of the book represents the ritual flags placed in a peck, or wooden tub, of rice on the altar during the initiation ceremony. These flags represent the five lodges of the Hung Society. On page 72 of the book (pictured here) is a membership certificate of the Triad Society, which comprises a square enclosing an octagon. Printed within the latter is the verse composed by its five founders. The verse has been handed down and "used as a memorial and sign of membership". Members had to carry the certificate with them at all times. All rights reserved, Stanton, W. J. (1900). *The Triad Society: Or, Heaven and Earth Association.* Hong Kong: Printed by Kelly & Walsh. Collection of the National Library, Singapore, Accession no.: B18990109D.

#### Notes

- Murray, D. H., & Qin, B. (1994). *The origins of the Tiandihui: The Chinese triads in legend and history* [p. 89]. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press. [Call no.: RCLOS 951 MUR-[GH]]
- Lim, I. (1999). *Secret societies in Singapore: Featuring the William Stirling collection* [p. 10]. Singapore: National Heritage Board, Singapore History Museum. [Call no.: RSING 366.095957 LIM]
- Vaughan, J. D. (1974). *The manners and customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements* [p. 92]. Singapore: Oxford University Press. [Call no.: RSING 390.0951 VAU-[CUS]]
- Freemasonry is a secular fraternal order, traditionally encompassing male members only and which traces its origins to ancient times. Members are taught the society's principles through rituals and symbols, and although it is not a religious order, members are expected to follow certain rules of morality and spirituality.
- Röttger, E. H. (1852). *Geschichte der brüderschaft des himmels und der erden: Der communistischen propaganda China's.* Berlin: In Commission bei Wilhelm Hertz. [Call no.: RRARE 366.0951; Microfilm no.: NL 24374]
- The *Thian Ti Hwui* was originally published as second of three studies by Gustave Schlegel in a single volume with the general title, *Verhandelingen van het Bataviatisch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen, Deel XXXII*. The other two works by Schlegel in this volume include the original editions of the *Ho Tsien Ki*, of *Geschiedenis van het Gebloemde Briefpapier: Chinesche Roman* (Dutch Translation of a Chinese Literary Work) and the *Lets over De Prostitutie in China* (Schlegel's Study of Prostitution in China). The National Library's copy of *Thian Ti Hwui* is also bound together with these two works.
- [Chinese secret societies: A collection of manuscripts and documents relating to secret societies in Penang.]* (1867). [Call no.: RRARE 364.1060959113 CHI; Microfilm no.: NL 18296]
- The full report, including testimonies from the 71 witnesses interviewed, was presented at the Straits Settlements Legislative Council in 1868.
- Comber, L. (1959). *Chinese secret societies in Malaya: A survey of the Triad Society from 1800-1900* [pp. 110-112]. New York: Published for the Association for Asian Studies by J.J. Augustin. [Call no.: RCLOS 366.09595 COM-[GH]]; Straits Settlements. (1868). *Report of the Commissioners appointed under act XXI of 1867 to enquire into the Penang riots; Together with proceedings of the committee, minutes of evidence and appendix* [p. vii]. Penang: Colonial Government of the Straits Settlements. [Call no.: RRARE 366.0951 STA; Microfilm no.: NL 1100]
- Murray & Qin, 1994, p. 97.
- Ward, J. S. M., & Stirling, W. G. (1925-1926). *The Hung Society or the Society of Heaven and Earth.* London: The Baskerville Press. [Call no.: RRARE 366.09595 WAR; Microfilm no.: NL 25414]
- Murray & Qin, 1994, p. 100.
- Lim, 1999, p. 15.
- Stanton, W. J. (1900). *The Triad Society: Or, Heaven and Earth Association.* Hong Kong: Printed by Kelly & Walsh. [Call no.: RRARE 366.0951 STA; Microfilm no.: NL 25923]
- Murray & Qin, 1994, p. 100.
- Wynne, M. L. (1941). *Triad and tabut: A survey of the origin and diffusion of Chinese and Mohamedan secret societies in the Malay Peninsula A.D. 1800-1935.* Singapore: Government Printing Office. [Call no.: RRARE 366.09595 WYN]
- Wong, L. K., & Wong, C. S. (1960, March). Secret Societies in Malaya. *Journal of Southeast Asian history*, 1(1), 97-114, pp. 97-98. [Call no.: RCLOS 959.05 JSA-[SEA]]



# 50 YEARS OF NATIONAL SERVICE

National Service is a rite of passage for Singaporean men when they come of age. **Sharen Chua** shares highlights of books on National Service in the Legal Deposit Collection.

**Sharen Chua** is a Librarian with the National Library, Singapore. She is part of the team that oversees the statutory functions of the National Library, in particular Legal Deposit.

Singapore celebrates 50 years of National Service in 2017. The compulsory enlistment of soldiers was introduced in 1967 with the passing of the National Service (Amendment) Act on 17 March that year.<sup>1</sup> This was not the first time the government had tried to implement a mandatory conscript service. In May 1954, the British attempted to introduce National Service but the move was met with violent protests by Chinese middle school students – later known as the National Service Riots of 1954 – who refused to support the colonial government.<sup>2</sup>

## The Need for National Service

When Singapore separated from Malaysia on 9 August 1965, the island-state saw the need to beef up its security with a conscript service. This would supplement the skeletal military forces comprising 1 SIR and 2 SIR (1st and 2nd Battalion, Singapore Infantry Regiment) and the PDF (People's Defence Force). The withdrawal of the British army in the late 1960s would only underscore the need for Singapore to have a military that could be reckoned with.

As founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew described it: "We thought it important for people in and outside Singapore to know that despite our small population, we could mobilise a large fighting force at short notice."<sup>3</sup>

As Singapore was not large or wealthy enough to support an effective full-time military force, the option was to have a regular corps supplemented by a conscript reserve.<sup>4</sup> However, both Lee and then Minister for Defence Goh Keng Swee were aware that conscription would not be well received by the public. They believed that education was the key to changing the people's mindset. Among other things, the National Police Cadet Corps and National Cadet Corps were established in secondary schools as a co-curricular activity, helping to prepare teenage boys for National Service and inculcate a sense of patriotism. By 1972, some 90 percent of secondary schools were participating in the cadet corps.<sup>5</sup>

The government's strategy to convince the public of the importance of having a strong national defence worked. Although anti-National Service protests broke out on 17 March 1967 on the back of the government announcement three days earlier, these were not as serious as the riots that took place in 1954.<sup>6</sup>

On 17 August 1967, the first batch of 9,000 male youths born between 1 January and 30 June 1949 were enlisted for National Service.<sup>7</sup>

The pioneer batch of 900 men were conscripted into the Army's 3rd and 4th SIR for two-year full-time National Service, while the rest served

part-time in the PDF, Special Constabulary and Vigilante Corps.<sup>8</sup>

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE LEGAL DEPOSIT COLLECTION

Over the years, the National Library has collected – via Legal Deposit – various published materials relating to National Service in Singapore. These include orientation handbooks for recruits, parents' handbooks, code of conduct guidebooks, commemorative publications as well as personal accounts by former recruits of their National Service experience. Here are some highlights from the collection:

**National Service and You** (1967) [Call no.: RCLOS 355.2236095957 SIN]

Published in the four official languages, these booklets answered basic questions such as what National Service is, how to register, how to request for a deferment, penalties for failing to report and how to apply for an exit permit.

**The Army and You: Orientation Handbook** (1967); **The Singapore Vigilante Corps: Orientation Handbook** (1967); **The Singapore Special Constabulary: Orientation Handbook** (1967) [Call nos.: RCLOS 355.225 SIN; RCLOS 355.232 SIN; RCLOS 351.742 SIN]

These were orientation handbooks written to help recruits understand what National Service was all about.

**Code of Conduct for the Singapore Armed Forces** (1967) [Call no.: RCLOS 355.13 SIN]

This booklet clearly lists out the rules that recruits had to abide by at all times, such as not talking or boasting about their vocation, not drinking alcohol excessively and the importance of safeguarding confidential information.

**My Son – The NS Man: What Parents Should Know About NS** (1990) [Call no.: RSING 355.2236095957 MY]

This handbook provides parents with a better understanding of the National Service experience and the roles that their sons would play

in contributing to the defence and security of Singapore.

**Michael Chiang's Hit Play, Army Daze: From Real Blur to Real Men** (1996) [Call no.: RSING 355.1095957 CHI]

This comic book is based on the well-known play of the same title by Michael Chiang. It tells of the coming of age of six boys from diverse backgrounds as they experience army life together.

**Shoulder to Shoulder: Our National Service Journal: Commemorating 35 years of National Service** (2002) [Call no.: RSING 355.223095957 KOH]

In the Foreword to this commemorative book, then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong wrote that "our National Servicemen have provided the bedrock of peace and stability upon which we have built our economy and society".

**40 Years & 40 Stories of National Service (2007)** [Call no.: RSING 355.223095957 FOR]

Published in 2007 to commemorate 40 years of National Service, this anthology features the stories and personal experiences of 39 men whose stints in National Service spanned the four decades. The reader is encouraged to pen his own experience as the 40th story.

**Ah Boys to Men** (2013) [Call no.: RSING 741.595957 NEO]

Adapted from Jack Neo's popular 2012 film, *Ah Boys to Men*, this coming-of-age comic book of the same title chronicles the experiences of a group of boys undergoing Basic Military Training.

**With Pride We Lead : 21 Strategies to Lead, Excel and Overcome as an NSF** (2015) [Legal Deposit Collection]

Author Victor Lim (using the moniker Vic Van Dam) shares his personal account of the National Service experience, including tips on how to excel as a soldier.

## WHAT IS THE LEGAL DEPOSIT?

One of the statutory functions of the National Library Board Act is Legal Deposit. Under the act, all publishers, commercial or otherwise, are required by law to deposit two copies of every work published in Singapore with the National Library within four weeks of its publication. The Legal Deposit function ensures that Singapore's published heritage is preserved for future generations. Legal Deposit also acts as a repository for published materials, providing exposure via the online catalogue, PublicationSG: catalogue.nlb.gov.sg/publicationsg. For more information, please visit [www.nlb.gov.sg/Deposit](http://www.nlb.gov.sg/Deposit).

## Notes

1 Republic of Singapore. *Government gazette. Acts supplement*. (1967, March 17). The National Service (Amendment) Act 1975 (Act 2 of 1967, p. 109). Singapore: [s.n.]. [Call no.: RCLOS 348.5957SGGAS-IIWE]

2 Liu, H., & Wong, S. K. (2004). *Singapore Chinese society in transition: Business, politics & socio-economic change, 1945–1965* (pp. 142–146). New York: Peter Lang. [Call no.: RSING 959.5704 LIU-[HIS]]; Clutterbuck, R. L. (1984). *Conflict and violence in Singapore and Malaysia 1945–1983* (pp. 82–84). Singapore: G. Brash. [Call no.: RSING 959.57 CLU-[HIS]]

3 Lee, Kuan Yew. (2015). *From third world to first: The Singapore story, 1965–2000: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (p. 33). Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions: Straits Times Press. [Call no. 959.5705092LEE-[HIS]]

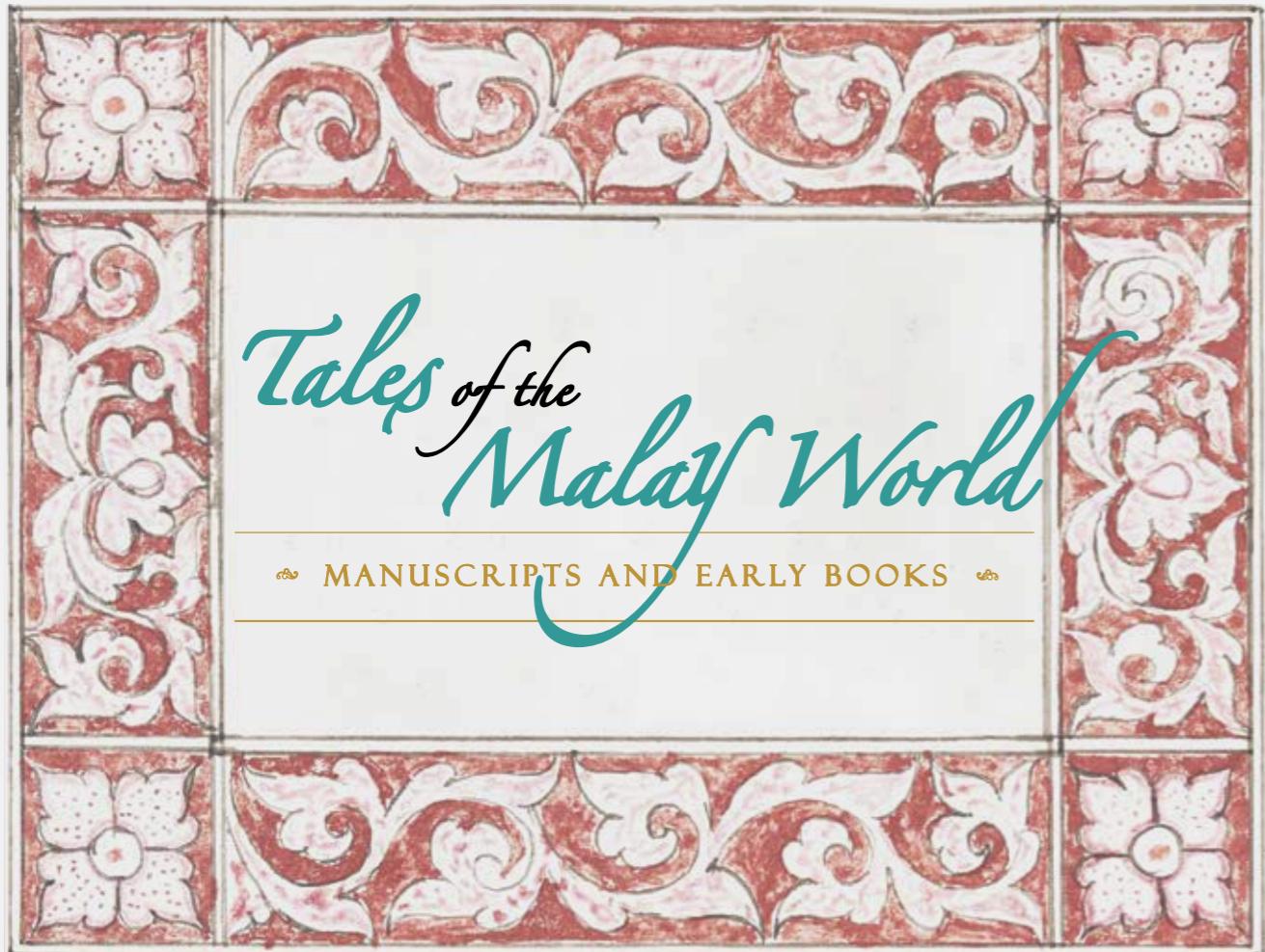
4 *National service and you* (p. 5). (1967). Singapore: Printed by the Govt. Print. Off. [Call no.: RCLOS 355.2236095957 SIN]

5 Lee, 2015, p. 33; Singapore. Parliament. *Parliamentary debates: Official report*. (1972, November 22). Considered in Committee, Reported and Third Reading of the National Cadet Corps Bill (Vol. 32, col. 376). Singapore: Govt. Printer. [Call no.: RSING 328.5957 SIN]

6 Chiang, M. (1997). *SAF and 30 years of National Service* (pp. 18–19). Singapore: Armour Publishing for MINDEF Public Affairs. [Call no.: RSING 355.22 CHI]; *40 years & 40 stories of National Service* (p. 29). (2007). Singapore: Landmark Books. [Call no.: RSING 355.223095957 FOR]

7 All set for call-up of first batch. (1967, March 14). *The Straits Times*, p. 20. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

8 *40 years & 40 stories of National Service*, 2007, p. 29.



Literary works in the ancient Malay-speaking world were not enjoyed silently but read aloud to an audience, as **Tan Huism** tells us in this latest exhibition by the National Library.

"That night the war-chiefs and the young nobles were waiting in the hall of audience, and the young nobles said, 'Why do we sit here idly? It would be well for us to read a tale of war that we may profit from it.' ... 'Take this message to the Ruler, that all of us crave from him the Story of Muhammad Hanafiah, in the hope that we may obtain profit from it, for the Franks are attacking tomorrow'".<sup>1</sup>

— *Sejarah Melayu*, translated by Charles C. Brown

"Maka hari pun malam-lah, maka segala hulubalang dan segala anak tuan2 semua-nya bertunggu di-balairong. Maka kata segala anak tuan2 itu, 'Apa kita buat bertunggu di balairong diam2 sahaja?'

**Tan Huism** is Deputy Director of Content and Services at the National Library, Singapore, where she oversees exhibitions and the Singapore & Southeast Asia collections.

Baik kita membaca hikayat perang, supaya kita beroleh faedah daripadanya.' ... 'Pergi memohonkan Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiah, sembahkan mudah-mudahan dapat patek2 itu mengambil faedah daripada-nya, kerana Feringgi akan melanggar esok hari'".<sup>2</sup>

— *Sejarah Melayu*, edited by William G. Shellabear

**F**or many of us, the idea of reading a book is a solitary affair — we all read silently, as one is often reminded in libraries. Except of course when we read a story to a child, or when an author reads an excerpt of his or her work at a public reading.

While reading silently is the accepted norm today, this was not necessarily the case in the Malay-speaking world before the 20th century. There are numerous descriptions in old Malay manuscripts that describe the practice of reading literary works out aloud to an audience. The consumption of literature back then was a largely communal affair.

"Tales of the Malay World: Manuscripts and Early Books" is the National Library's latest exhibition, to be launched on

18 August 2017 at the National Library Building on Victoria Street. The exhibition will showcase a selection of old Malay manuscripts and early printed books from the 18th to the early 20th centuries. The materials come from the National Library's Rare Material Collections as well as institutions in the United Kingdom and Netherlands, and museums in Singapore. The oldest item in the exhibition is a manuscript of the *Syair Perang Mengkasar* (*Poem of the Makassar War*), which was copied around 1710 in Ambon.

#### The Age of Malay Manuscripts

For centuries, Malay functioned as a language of trade and diplomacy in the cosmopolitan trading centres of maritime Southeast Asia. Malay was also the literary language of the region. What has survived today from these literary traditions are texts derived from manuscripts written in Jawi (Malay written in a modified Arabic script). Aside from religious texts, there are court chronicles, narratives that recount fantastic adventures (*hikayat*) of kings and heroes as well as romantic poetry (*syair*). These tales provide a glimpse of the society during which these writings were produced and read.

Various scholars have tried to estimate the number of Malay manuscripts in libraries around the world, and have put the figure at around 10,000.<sup>3</sup> The tropical climate of the region has had detrimental effects over the years on these paper-based materials, but even so, 10,000 is a small number — an indication perhaps of the relatively small output of Malay manuscripts in the first place.

This scarcity of manuscripts was noted during the early 19th century. Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, the accomplished Malay scholar better known as Munsyi Abdullah [1797(?)–1854], found it extremely difficult to procure manuscripts for Europeans who wanted to learn more about the language and region. The dearth of such manuscripts is partially attributed to the manner in which these texts were used; most manuscripts were held in the royal courts, in the hands of feudal elites or storytellers. Furthermore, perhaps because literary texts were meant to be performed for an audience, there was less of a need for stories to be written down.<sup>4</sup>

European officials and scholars of the late 18th and early 19th centuries collected Malay manuscripts in earnest in their attempts to learn the language and understand the culture in order to control and administer the region. This in turn created a commercial market for Malay manuscripts, some of which eventually found new homes in libraries in UK and Europe. The exhibition provides a unique opportunity for visitors to view rare manuscripts that have been borrowed from the British Library and Royal Asiatic Society in the UK and the Leiden University Library in the Netherlands and shown in Singapore for the first time.

Starting from the mid-19th century onwards, the Malay manuscript tradition was impacted by the appearance of a fledgling Muslim<sup>5</sup> printing scene in Singapore. By the late 19th century, Singapore had become the leading centre for the printing of Malay and Muslim books in Southeast Asia.

The first printers used a method of printing known as lithography to reproduce the physical characteristics of a handwritten manuscript cheaply and in large quantities. These early printed *hikayat* and *syair* were even used in a similar way as their original handwritten counterparts, ie recited and sung for an audience. Nevertheless, over time, the advent of printing and other societal changes, such as the introduction of the Western school system, were to affect the ways in which people traditionally interacted with the written text — effectively spelling the end of the manuscript tradition.

The impact of printing and the development of the early Malay/Muslim printing scene in Singapore will be explored in the exhibition. To emphasise the importance of the oral and aural aspects of traditional Malay written literature,<sup>6</sup> visitors will also be able to hear the recitation of a *hikayat* (or narrative prose) upon entering the exhibition space. In addition, there will be opportunities to encounter literary works that continue to capture the public's imagination to this day, such as the *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals), *Hikayat Hang Tuah* and folk tales featuring the wily mousedeer (*sang kanchil*). ♦

#### EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS

(Right) A *syair* is a narrative poem that rhymes. This was a popular literary genre in the Malay world from the end of the 18th century, and was one of the most popular forms of literature published by early Malay/Muslim presses well into the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The origins of the *syair* form, however, are unclear. This romantic poem, the *Syair Ken Tambuhan*, tells the tragic love story of Princess Ken Tambuhan and Prince Kertapati, based on the popular Panji tales<sup>7</sup> from Java. This particular *syair* has been hailed by 19th-century European scholars as a work of literary merit. The vivid descriptions in *Syair Ken Tambuhan* were intended by the author to evoke feelings of compassion and sympathy for the heroine. Romantic *syair* were dismissed by some early Malay male scholars as trivial as they believed that its recitation could arouse immoral emotions in listeners.<sup>8</sup> According to the colophon, this *syair* was copied by an *anak peranakan* (local-born person of mixed origins). Collection of the Leiden University Library, Cod.Or 1965.



**(Right)** In the preface of *Cetra Empat Orang Fakir* (*Tales of the Four Dervishes*), the translator Mahmud bin Sayid Mu'alim bin Arsyad Marican recounts how he was introduced to this story by his Jawi Peranakan<sup>9</sup> friend in Singapore. He also writes that his Malay work was translated from a Persian text attributed to the famous Sufi Amir Khusrau Dehlavi (1253–1325). Professor Vladimir Braginsky<sup>10</sup> has, however, identified Mahmud's source as a popular Urdu translation of Amir Khusrau's work by Mir Amman (1750–1837) titled *Bagh-o bahar* (*The Garden and Spring Season*). First translated in the Islamic year 1262 (1846) and then transcribed in 1263 (1847), this manuscript by Mahmud is early evidence of the wave of literary contacts forged between Islamic India and the Malay world in the 19th century. The colophon – which mentions the names of the translator and copyist as well as the date and place it was completed (Singapore) – is found below the inverted triangle depicted here. *Collection of the National Library, Singapore, Accession no.: B162833801.*

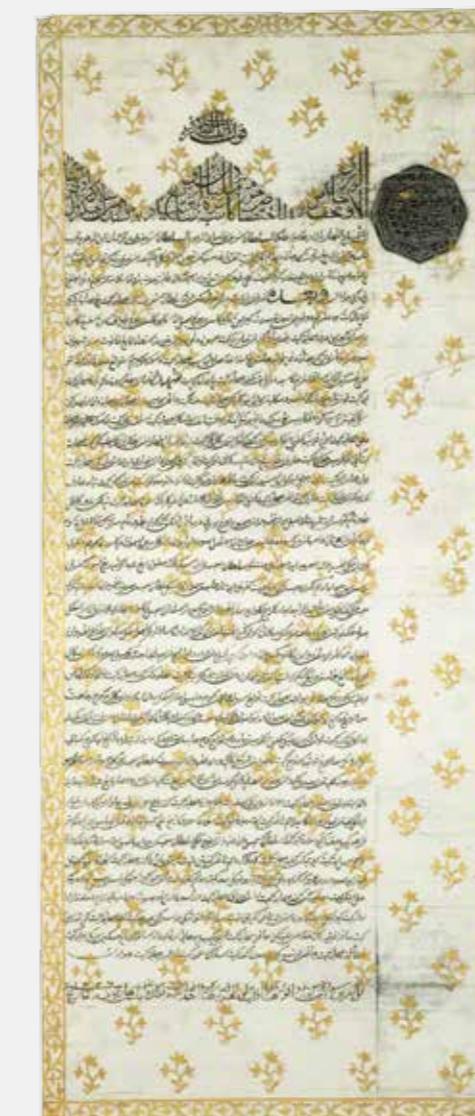
**(Bottom right)** The *Sulalat al-Salatin*, or *Genealogy of Kings*, is one of the earliest and most famous texts in Malay literature. It is more popularly known as the *Sejarah Melayu* or *Malay Annals*, titles that were first coined by John Leyden, a Scotsman and friend of Stamford Raffles, in 1821.<sup>11</sup> Composed around the 17th century, the *Sulalat al-Salatin* chronicles the history and genealogy of the Melaka Sultanate (1400 [?]-1511). The work was produced not so much to record history as to help bolster support for the Melakan rulers and their heirs in Johor and Riau. In the 19th century, a copy of the text was preserved as part of the regalia of the Riau court; it was wrapped in yellow silk and read out loud during certain court ceremonies. One of the episodes featured in the work recounts how Sang Nila Utama, a prince from Sumatra, arrived on the island of Temasek and established a city that he named Singapura. This particular copy of the manuscript – famously known as *Raffles 18* – once belonged to Stamford Raffles, and is believed to be one of the earliest recensions of the original text. *Collection of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, United Kingdom, Raffles Malay 18.*



**(Left)** The majority of early Malay manuscripts are generally devoid of ornamentation. This rare and highly decorated manuscript from Penang, titled *Taj al-Salatin* (*The Crown of Kings*), is considered as one of the most beautiful by experts. The opening and closing pages are elaborately adorned with blue, red, yellow and gold design elements, while on other pages the text is enclosed within multicoloured frames. The decorative style of the opening pages seen here is reminiscent of Indo-Persian and Ottoman manuscripts.<sup>12</sup> The manuscript is a didactic work describing the roles and responsibilities of kings and the nobility as well as commoners. It is believed to have been composed in Aceh in 1603 by Bukhari al-Johori or al-Jauhari (the "jewel merchant") and was very popular among the ruling elite right up to the 19th century. The colophon states that the manuscript was copied by a scribe named Muhammad bin Umar Syaikh Farid on 4 Zulhijjah 1239 (30 July 1824). *Collection of The British Library, Or. MS. 13295.*

سَاهَ بَادِرَ سُلْطَانَ رَوْمَ دَانِ اَنْتَ مَالِكَ الْجَاهِرَ اَنْ بَحْرَاتَ خَانَ فُونَ بَرْفُوقَدَهَاتِ  
بَرْ تَائِعِسَتِ لَهَكَرَ سُلْطَانَ رَوْمَ فُونَ دَادِ اَنْتَ مَالِكَ الْجَاهِرَ اَنْ بَحْرَاتَ خَانَ فُونَ تَائِلَكَ  
نَائِلَكَهَ كَائِسَسِ بَيْعَكَا سَانَ الْوَرْتِيْغَهَ اَوْ لِجَيْنَ فِي تَيَادِ بَرَافِيْسَاهَ  
كَنْ كَيْنِلَهَ تَكَرِيْهَ رَهَمَرَ سُلْطَانَ رَوْمَ فُونَ بَرِيْتَهَ اَنْتَ مَالِكَ الْجَاهِرَ  
عَالَكَهَ خَرَنَدِ تَكَرِيْهَ رَوْمَ دَانِ بَحْرَهَ خَانَ بَجَاهَهَ  
كَنْلَارِ عَيْهَهَ تَكَرِيْهَ رَوْمَ  
اَنْتَيِيْهَ بَلْخَيْرَ  
سَهَلَ سَلِيلَ دَرْ فَدِيْهَ قَهَّاهَ اَلَهَ اَنْتَكَرِيْهَ بَيْعَهَهَ اَوْ لِجَيْنَ كَهَ مَنْفُولَهَ اَهَلَهَ اَهَلَهَ اَهَلَهَ فِيْجَهَهَ  
سَيْيَدَ دَارِسَ اَنْمَهَ فُولَهَيَكَ اَوْ لِجَيْنَ كَهَ مَنْفُولَهَ اَهَلَهَ اَهَلَهَ اَهَلَهَ

**(Right)** The *Sejarah Melayu* – an important literary work on the history and genealogy of the Malay kings of the Melaka Sultanate (1400–1511) tells of Melakan warriors who asked for the *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiah* to be read to them as part of their preparations on the night before they went to war with the Portuguese invaders. The *hikayat* (narrative tale) recounts the exploits of the legendary Islamic warrior Muhammad Hanafiyah who was the half-brother of Hasan and Hussein (the grandsons of the Prophet Muhammad).<sup>13</sup> According to the scholar Brakel, the *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiah* is believed to have been translated not long after the Persian original was written, possibly in northeast Sumatra in the 14th century.<sup>14</sup> It continued to be very popular until the late 19th century and was reprinted many times by early Malay/Muslim printers in Singapore. According to the colophon, this manuscript was copied by Muhammad Kasim and completed on 29 Jamadilakhir 1220 (22 September 1805). *Collection of The British Library MSS Malay B6, John Leyden collection.*



**(Left)** Stamford Raffles (1781–1826) was based in Melaka when he received this letter in February 1811 from Sultan Syarif Kasim (1766–1819), the ruler of Pontianak in western Kalimantan. Appointed as the Agent of the Governor-General to the Malay States, Raffles had sent letters to various indigenous rulers to ask for their support against the British invasion of Java. In the letter, Sultan Syarif requested for British support against "their" common enemy, the Sultan of Sambas (also in western Kalimantan).<sup>15</sup> The letter ends with Sultan Syarif informing Raffles that he would be sending him two Malay manuscripts – a legal text (*undang-undang*) and the *Hikayat Raja Iskandar*. Raffles was a collector of Malay manuscripts and is believed to have single-handedly created – through his avid collecting activities – a public market for such written texts.<sup>16</sup> *Collection of The British Library, MSS Eur.D.742/1, f33a.*

#### Notes

- Brown, C. C. (1976). *Sejarah Melayu, or, Malay annals* (p. 162). Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press. [Call no.: RSING 959.503 SEJ]
- Shellabear, W. G. (1967). *Sejarah Melayu* (p. 264). Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press. [Call no.: Malay RCLOS 959.5 SEJ]
- See Ding, C. M. (1987, October). Access to Malay manuscripts. *Bidragen tot de Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde*, 143(4), 425–451. Retrieved from JSTOR via NLB's eResources website.
- Proudfoot, I. (2002). From recital to sight reading: The silencing of texts in Malaysia. *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 30(87), 117–144. Retrieved from JSTOR via NLB's eResources website.
- The term "Muslim" is used here in the same way as Ian Proudfoot, to refer to the religious faith of the agents who produced the materials and not necessarily the content of the publications. See Proudfoot, I. (1993). *Early Malay printed books: A provisional account of materials published in the Singapore-Malaysia area up to 1920, noting holdings in major public collections* (pp. 27, 432). Malaysia: Academy of Malay Studies and the Library, University of Malaya. [Call no.: RSING 015.5957 PRO-[LIB]]
- Amin Sweeney was one of the first scholars to stress the importance of the oral in written Malay literature. See Sweeney, A. (1980). *Authors and audiences in traditional Malay literature*. Berkeley: Center for South and Southeast Asia Studies, University of California, Detroit, Mich. distribution by the Cellar Book Shop. [Call no.: RCLOS 899.23009 SWE]
- Panji tales from ancient Java recount the adventures of the hero named Panji who takes on different disguises and names in search of his beloved princess.
- Hijjas, M. (2011). *Victorious wives: The disguised heroine in 19th-century Malay syair*. Singapore: NUS Press. [Call no.: RSEA 899.2810093522 HIJ]
- Jawi Peranakan refers to the children of Indian Muslim and Malay marriages.
- Braginsky, V. (2009). The story of four dervishes: The first translation from Urdu in traditional Malay literature. *Jurnal e-Utama*, 2. Retrieved from Jurnal e-Utama website.

**(Left)** Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir (1797[?]-1854), better known as Munsyi Abdullah was a scholar and translator, and was famously known as the "father of Malay printing". His autobiography, the *Hikayat Abdullah* (*Stories of Abdullah*), was published in 1849 in collaboration with Reverend Benjamin Keasberry (1811-1875), a Protestant missionary. Munsyi Abdullah was the first non-European to have his works published in Malay. Written as a memoir, the work is a record of the socio-political landscape of Singapore, Melaka and the kingdoms of Johor and Riau-Lingga at the beginning of the 20th century. It is one of the most impressive Malay works printed in the Straits Settlements during the 19th century. Shown here is the beautifully coloured double frontispiece of the *Hikayat Abdullah*. This copy was donated to the National Library, Singapore, by Reverend George Frederick Hose in 1879. *Collection of the National Library, Singapore, Accession no.: B03014389F.*

**(Right)** Like traditional handwritten manuscripts, printed *syair* and *hikayat* were recited aloud in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A popular *syair* at the time was the *Syair Abdul Muluk* (*Poem of Abdul Muluk*) as evidenced by the number of multiple editions by various printers.<sup>17</sup> This particular edition shown here was lithographed by one of the early prominent printers, Muhammad Amin, in the Islamic year 1311 (1893/4). The romantic poem is believed to have been composed by Raja Salihah<sup>18</sup> of the Riau court in Penyengat. She is the younger sister of Raja Ali Haji, scholar and author of *Tuhfat al-Nafis* (*The Precious Gift*) which recounts the story of the relationship between the Malay and Bugis rulers. The protagonist in the poem is Abdul Muluk's second wife, Siti Rafi'ah, who disguised herself as a man in order to rescue her husband and his first wife from captivity. *Collection of the National Library, Singapore, Accession no.: B29362100A.*



The National Library would like to thank William and Judith Bollinger. Their generous donations have enabled Malay manuscripts in the collection of the British Library to be digitised and made available on BookSG at: [eresources.nlb.gov.sg/printheritage/](http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/printheritage/)

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"Tales of the Malay World: Manuscripts and Early Books" is held on level 10 of the National Library Building from 18 August 2017 to 25 February 2018.

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11 The first English translation of the *Sejarah Melayu* was by John Leyden (1775–1811), which was published posthumously in 1821. See Leyden, J. (1821). *Malay annals/translated from the Malay language, by the late Joh Leyden. With an introduction, by Sir Stamford Raffles*. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown. [Call no.: RRARE 959.503 MAL; Microfilm no.: NL 25782]

12 Annabel Gallop has done an in-depth study of the design of this manuscript and raised the possibility of a Penang style of manuscript decoration. See Gallop, A. (n.d.). *Is there a Penang style of Malay manuscript illumination?* Retrieved from Malay Concordance website.

13 It is believed that early Malay literature inspired by Persian sources evolved over time to be less Shi'iitic, although some traces still remain.

14 Brakel, L. F. (1975). *The Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyah: A medieval Muslim-Malay romance* (pp. 54–57). The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff. [Call no.: RSEA 899.2300981 BRA]

15 For the entire transcript and translation of this letter, see Ahmat Adam. (2009). *Letters of sincerity: The Raffles collection of Malay letters (1780–1824): A descriptive account with notes and translation*. Kuala Lumpur: Malaysia: The Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. [Call no.: RSEA 959.503 AHM]

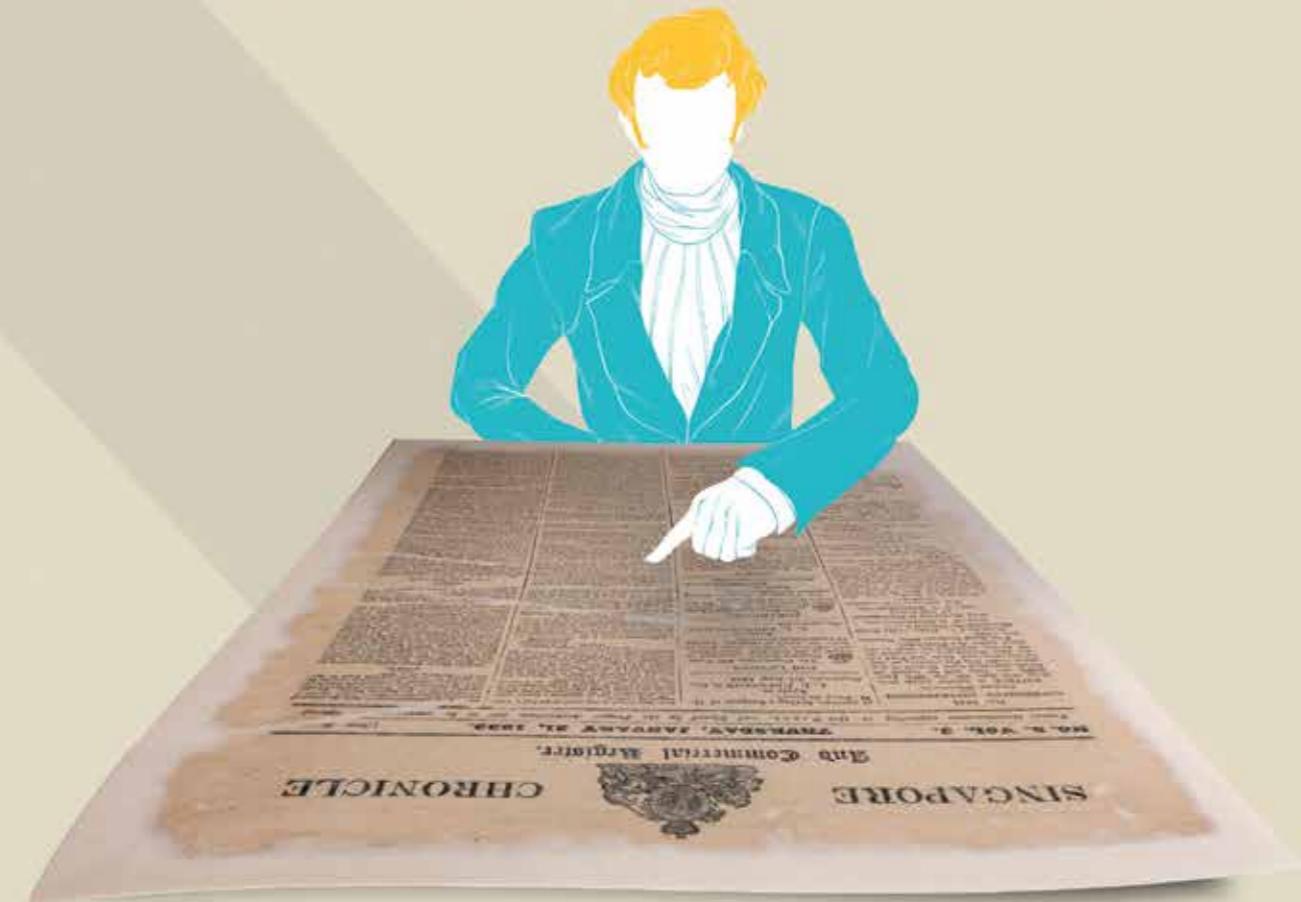
16 Proudfoot, 2002, pp. 117–144.

17 Proudfoot, 1993, p.38.

18 There are debates as to who might be the author of the *Syair Abdul Muluk*. The poem has also been attributed to Raja Ali Haji. For the discussions, see Braginsky, V. I. (2004). *The heritage of traditional Malay literature: A historical survey of genres, writings and literary views* (p. 542). Leiden: KITLV Press. [Call no.: RSEA 899.28 BRA]

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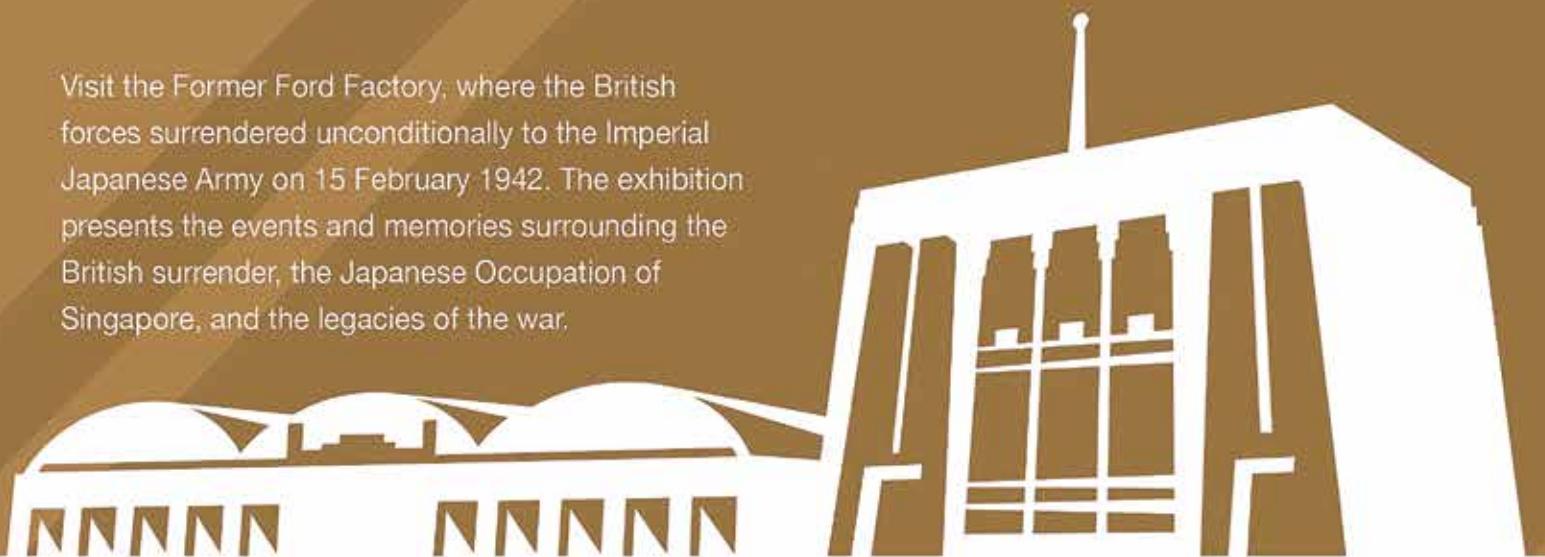
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