Art & Architecture

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Director's Note

"The world is but a canvas of our imagination" the American poet and writer Henry David Thoreau famously said, and nowhere is this perhaps more evident than in the art and architecture of a city. The dividing line between art and architecture is often blurred – when is a building of visionary design deemed a work of art? – but the creative process of executing a painting or a sculpture, or erecting a building – from architectural plans to its physical construction – are not dissimilar.

It is impossible to speak of our art and architectural icons without mentioning Tan Swie Hian. The virtuoso artist returns to the National Library after a long hiatus to present a new solo exhibition of his quintessential works along with his cherished notebooks of scribblings and sketches – as Chung Sang Hong tells us. Don't miss "Anatomy of a Free Mind: Tan Swie Hian's Notebooks and Creations" on level 10 of the National Library Building, which opens to the public on 22 November 2016.

Still on the subject of art, Nadia Arianna Ramli writes about the community of Singaporean women sculptors who have held their own in an art form that has long been dominated by men. Going beyond the shores of our little island, Patricia Bjaaland Welch examines the tiger motif in Asian art and literature.

Purpose-built HDB flats, at least the ones from yesteryear, may not have won any design awards, but who is to say they are not iconic? You can't be anywhere except in Singapore when you see laundry-laden bamboo poles suspended out of kitchen windows. Yu-Mei Balasingamchow recounts the trials of early public housing in Singapore.

Pearl Bank apartments in Chinatown, built in 1976 and touted as the "tallest apartment block in Southeast Asia" at the time, is regrettably, a sorry sight today. Yet, the architectural icon has sufficient merit to warrant conservation, according to Justin Zhuang.

If you've ever wondered how Golden Shoe Car Park in Market Street got its quirky name, then read Lim Tin Seng's article on the history of Singapore's business district. Hint: the original area zoned for development took the quirky shape of an upturned lady's shoe.

Two colonial-era icons, the Sri Mariamman Temple and the Padang, along with several of the original buildings surrounding the latter, are still around today. Anasuya Soundararajan and Sri Asrina Tanuri describe the architectural details of Singapore's oldest Hindu temple, while Dr Lai Chee Kien explains why and how the Padang became a symbol of British order and might during the colonial era.

During the Japanese Occupation, Christian POWs erected makeshift churches in their camps with whatever materials they could salvage – testimony of religious fortitude in the face of persecution. Gracie Lee chronicles the architecture of these churches as featured in the book, *The Churches of the Captivity in Malaya*.

To raise awareness of our legal history, a new permanent exhibition, "Law of the Land: Highlights of Singapore's Constitutional Documents", opens on 19 October 2016 at the former Chief Justice's Chamber and Office at the National Gallery Singapore. Kevin Khoo previews a selection of rare materials taken from the collections of the National Archives of Singapore and the National Library.

Finally, on a more sombre note, we pay tribute to our much-loved late President S R Nathan, who not only read voraciously but was also the author and co-author of seven books. We honour his memory by featuring two milestone events – how he met his wife Urmila (or Umi as he fondly referred to her) and the *Laju* hijack incident – from his book *50 Stories from My Life*.

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

Mrs Wai Yin Pryke
Director
National Library

Baring
Mind
and Soul

Tan Swie Hian

After a long absence of 43 years, Singapore's celebrated multi-hyphenate artist returns to the National Library with a new solo exhibition. **Chung Sang Hong** tells you more.

Chung Sang Hong is Assistant Director (Exhibitions & Curation) at the National Library, Singapore. He is the lead curator of the "Anatomy of a Free Mind: Tan Swie Hian's Notebooks and Creations" exhibition.
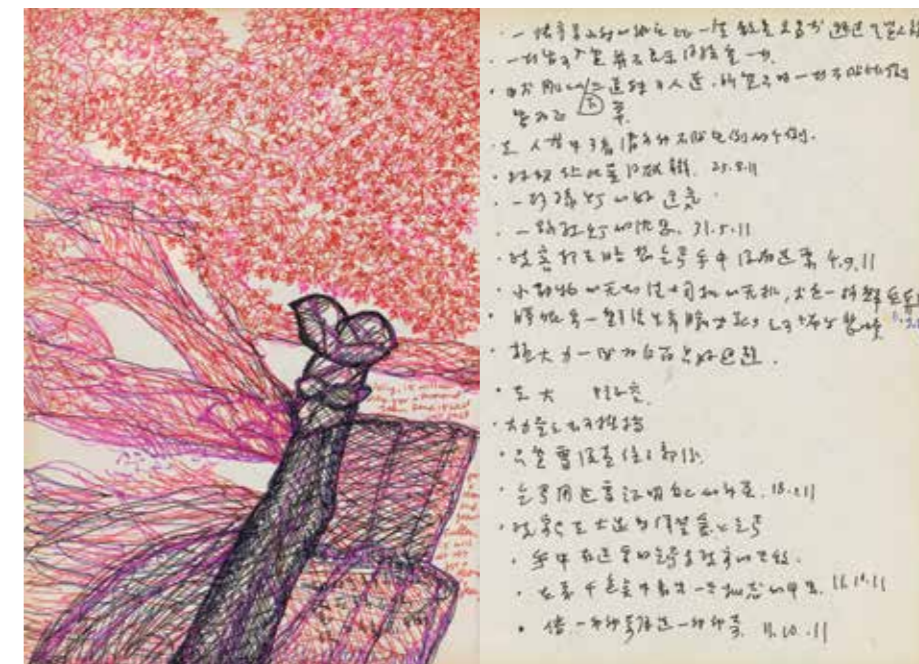
(Facing page) Portrait of Tan Swie Hian. *Collection of Tan Swie Hian.*
(Above) Tan Swie Hian's notebooks offer an inkling into the thought processes he engages in when creating his artworks. These pages show handwritten notes and a sketch of his painting "Ode to Euphrates Poplar". Donated by Tan Swie Hian. *Collection of National Library, Singapore.*

*j*ournaling has been used by great artists since time immemorial. Michelangelo's notebooks are not only a priceless archive of his creative inspirations but also offer a rare glimpse into his private life. From snippets of poetry, random doodles and ethereal drawings to memos and practical listings of food and expenses, the notebooks cast a light into the Italian master's inner world; the connections and juxtapositions of words and images divulge the thinking and creative processes behind his works.[1]

That same deep introspection, an intimate baring of the mind and soul as it were, is similarly revealed in the private notebooks of Tan Swie Hian, whom *Time* magazine proclaimed in 2003 as "Singapore's Renaissance man".[2] For those who are familiar with the works of Tan, this epithet is a justifiably fitting tribute.

Now for the first time, the National Library, Singapore, presents the acclaimed artist's never-before-published notebooks as well as his celebrated works of art and writings in an exhibition entitled "Anatomy of a Free Mind: Tan Swie Hian's Notebooks and Creations". To be showcased at level 10 of the National Library Building, the exhibition opens its doors to the public on 22 November 2016.

The notebooks, which Tan has since donated to the National Library, are key to understanding the psyche and creative thinking of this much-lauded artist. Containing sketches, drawings and writings, they are a window to Tan's formidable mind, which he describes as an "immense web with myriads of beings hanging."[3] The exhibition aims to draw people into the unfettered mind and soul of the artist, and reveal how his ideas, passions, philosophical insights and spiritual enlightenment are manifested through his artistic and literary creations.

Tan refers to his notebooks as his "secret garden", and he is thus the diligent and disciplined "gardener" who painstakingly and lovingly cultivates and nurtures the seedlings of inspiration. So intrinsically important are these notebooks that Tan considers them as his "companions in life": they never leave his side – they are stashed into his briefcase, they clutter his desk and even his bedside.

The pages are filled from cover to cover, with almost every square inch of space used for his creative musings – sketches of visions from his meditations, drawings of his inner and outer realities, poetry verses, revisited memories, reflections on his latest creations, annotations of ancient classical texts he has read, and more.[4]

To Tan, the notebooks serve the important purpose of documentation and reference – as a cerebral artist he writes before, during or after the execution of his works – and to the interested observer, they offer rare vistas of the artist's creative mindscape.

Singapore's Renaissance Man

Tan Swie Hian was born in Indonesia in 1943 and moved to Singapore when he was three. While as a student at the Chinese High School, Tan already displayed his prodigious talents in art, calligraphy and poetry. He later pursued a degree in Modern Languages and Literature at Nanyang University, graduating in 1968. In the same year he published his first anthology, *The Giant* – a collection of Chinese modernist poetry – a landmark work that earned him recognition as a poet of standing.[5] Since then, Tan has published close to 40 collections of poetry, essays, novels, fables, critiques and translated works.

The year 1973 was a turning point in Tan's life: he received spiritual illumination for the first time and deepened his faith in Buddhism. After this metaphysical awakening, Tan channeled his creative energies into the visual arts and took the path towards becoming an artist, expressing himself through different media and genres. As a deeply religious person, the tenets of Buddhist teachings are apparent in many of his works, which often depict the spiritual insights and visions gleaned from his meditations.

As a polymath, Tan has a natural affinity for languages – he is proficient in Mandarin, English, French and Malay – and is widely read, being well versed in both Eastern and Western philosophic

traditions. His creations are therefore enriched by diverse cultural influences. Although deeply steeped in Chinese artistic traditions, Tan straddles the visual languages of the East and the West, freely fusing and experimenting with different art forms in his work.

A String of Awards and Accolades

Tan has won a string of prestigious awards both locally – including the Cultural Medallion in 1987, and the Meritorious Service Medal in 2003 for his contributions to Singapore culture – and internationally. In 2003, the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, conferred on Tan the Crystal Award for his outstanding artistic achievements and contribution to cross-cultural un-

derstanding. And in 2006, he received the Officier de l'Ordre National de la Legion d'Honneur (Officer in the National Order of the Legion of Honour) medal – France's highest honour for individuals who have distinguished themselves in civilian or military life.

Time and again, Tan's paintings have made headline news as they set record prices in art auctions.[6] In December 2012, his oil and acrylic work, "When the Moon is Orbed", fetched an astounding RMB18.975 million (S$3.7 million) at a Beijing art auction.[7] Barely two years later, his ink-on-rice-paper painting, "Portrait of Bada Shanren", went under the gavel for a record RMB20.7 million (S$4.4 million) in Beijing.[8] With this sale, Tan has clearly made his name as the most expensive living artist in Southeast Asia.

More recently in May 2016, a set of six lithographed sketches done by former South African president Nelson Mandela – someone whom Tan greatly admires – and painted over by the artist was sold for HK$3.52 million (S$630,000), the highest-paid piece at an auction in Hong Kong. The images depict the hands and arms of Mandela breaking free from manacles.[9]

Anatomy of a Free Mind: The Exhibition

The works presented in "Anatomy of a Free Mind: Tan Swie Hian's Notebooks and Creations" reflect the full depth and diversity of Tan's creative expressions. Representing a considerable part of Tan's oeuvre, the exhibition features paintings, sculptures, public art, calligraphy, seal carvings, photographs, lithographs, mul-

"The Nelson Mandela Unity Series" (2004). Acrylic, ink and pencil on monochrome lithos, 131 cm x 150 cm. *Collection of Julien La Chon.*

(Left) "Graffitied Portrait of Charlie Chaplin" (2013). Ink and acrylic on rice paper, 226 cm x 105.4 cm. *Collection of Tan Swie Hian.*
(Below) "A Couple" (2014). Oil, acrylic and ink on canvas, 213.5 cm x 339 cm. *Collection of Tan Swie Hian.*

timedia creations (dance choreographies, performances and musical compositions) as well as his literary output (poetry, fables and essays). To contextualise his works, the artist transcribed the notes and writings from his notebooks – elucidating the rationale and thinking behind each art piece – to be displayed alongside the works.

As an artist, much of Tan's output is difficult to pin down and define: versatility and freedom of expression are hallmarks of his works, and much of it cannot be categorised into any particular subject, medium or genre. While the body of works presented in this exhibition has its subtle interconnectedness, a few themes stand out.

Tribute to Masters

Tan Swie Hian is deeply interested in people. He has painted many portraits of

personalities – in art, literature, politics and other fields – whom he admires. In this exhibition, portraits and works paying tribute to some of these luminaries can be seen: these include Pablo Picasso, Leonor Fini, Bada Shanren (八大山人), Charlie Chaplin, Franz Kafka, Virginia Woolf, Steve Jobs and Nelson Mandela, to name a few.

One of the paintings, titled "A Couple", is an unusual portrayal of Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's founding prime minister, and his wife as a young couple quite obviously in love. The painting, inspired by a 1946 photograph of the couple when they were law students in Cambridge University, England, depicts Lee Kuan Yew and Kwa Geok Choo in the first blush of youth, and exudes warmth and carefree pleasure – one can almost feel the sunshine that bathes the couple in vibrant colour.

The portrait, which is devoid of any political undertones, is an ode to a love that spanned over six decades. Tan began painting this portrait on Valentine's Day in 2009 and completed it only in 2014. When Kwa passed away in October 2010, he added two Vanda Miss Joaquim orchids, Singapore's national flower, by her side as a tribute to the devoted mother and loving wife.

Spiritual and Philosophical Insights

Perhaps Tan's most enigmatic and intriguing works are those inspired by his

spiritual and philosophical enlightenment. While meditating one day in September 2009, Tan had a vision in which he saw the full moon hovering above the parted foliage of a tree reflected onto a still blue pond. He quickly captured the vision in a sketch in his notebook. The ethereal scene was eventually depicted in the oil and acrylic painting "When the Moon is Orbed".

The symbolism of the full moon is manifold: traditionally it represents togetherness of people; but in Buddhism, it symbolises the clarity of the mind and the enlightenment of a truth seeker. A smaller-scale reproduction of this work is displayed at the exhibition.

The centrepiece of the exhibition is a unique mixed media sculpture entitled "The Celestial Web", a sizable dome-shaped structure made of coiled metal wires adorned with "creatures" moulded from clay. The sculpture, inspired by Tan's Buddhist faith, is the embodiment of his perspective that all beings, sentient and non-sentient, are interconnected by an immense web of everlasting universal love.

Interestingly, "The Celestial Web" began life as a poem with 117 verses that Tan specially composed for the Singapore Arts Festival in 2003. The poem was inspired by the philosophical teachings in the Buddhist scripture *Avatamsaka Sutra,* which espouses the notion that all beings in the universe are interconnected and, are in fact, one. The poem was performed at the festival's opening act, "Instant is

a Millennium – A Musical Conversation with Tan Swie Hian", by the Singapore Chinese Orchestra. The performance took the form of a symphonic orchestration of recitation, chorus and music with the artist simultaneously writing the poem in Chinese calligraphy on stage.[10]

The poem subsequently spawned the creation of two other art forms: an oil painting (2003) and the aforementioned sculpture (2010) of the same title. In the 2008 Chingay parade, the concept was reimagined, taking the form of a 22-metre-long by six-metre-high mobile float featuring dancers and a live recitation of the poem. Tan's uncanny ability to reinvent and morph his literary and artistic creations into other art forms is a distinguishing trademark of his multimedia artworks.

Inspirations from Life

At the same time, one would be wrong to assume that Tan Swie Hian's art belongs in the esoteric realm of philosophy and spirituality, understood by only a privileged few. In fact, the down-to-earth artist lives a simple and disciplined life revolving around creating art, writing and meditation, and is a keen and compassionate observer of life and the people around him. Occasionally, he takes pleasure in enjoying good food and fine wines with friends.

Tan loves animals, especially cats, and a Chinese ink on paper scroll titled

"Cat's Cradle" is testament to this. In 1984, the artist's daughter kept a pair of kittens as pets. From observing the kittens' lively movements when they were playing or fighting, Tan executed the painting as a study of the rhythm of moving lines. The painting, with seven pairs of cats in various poses of action, is so vividly captured that it even incurred the jealousy of another pet cat of his daughter's – she kept glaring and mewing at the painting!

On 26 December 2004, in a cataclysmic event that would be remembered in years to come, an earthquake in Indonesia triggered a tsunami in the Indian Ocean that struck 14 countries, claiming the lives of more than 230,000 people.[11] In memory of the lives lost to this tragedy, Tan created the sculpture, "The Straw Dog".

The concept for the sculpture came from a quote by Lao Tze (also Lao Tzu or Laozi, the Chinese philosopher) in the classic *Tao Te Ching* (道德经) which says that "Heaven and Earth are merciless, treating all beings as straw dogs." ("天地不仁，以万物为刍狗。"). In ancient China, the straw dog was a sculpted object offered in worship, to be discarded after sacrificial rites were offered. As no visual reference of the actual object exists, Tan created the sculpture from his imagination. The austere looking bronze sculpture is a grim reminder of the vulnerability and fragility of life.

Tan held his first ever solo art exhibition in 1973 when "Paintings of Infused Contemplation" opened at the since

(Below) Sketches and notes of the meditative vision which led to the painting, "When the Moon is Orbed". Donated by Tan Swie Hian. *Collection of National Library, Singapore.*
(Right) Detail from "When the Moon Is Orbed" (2012). Oil and acrylic on canvas, 140 cm x 206 cm. *Private collection.*
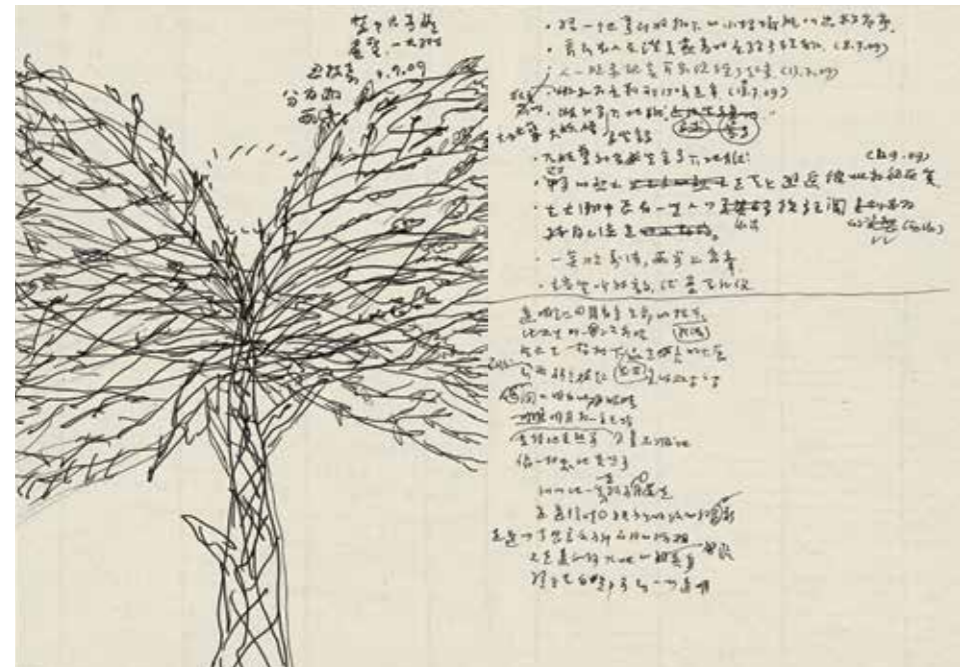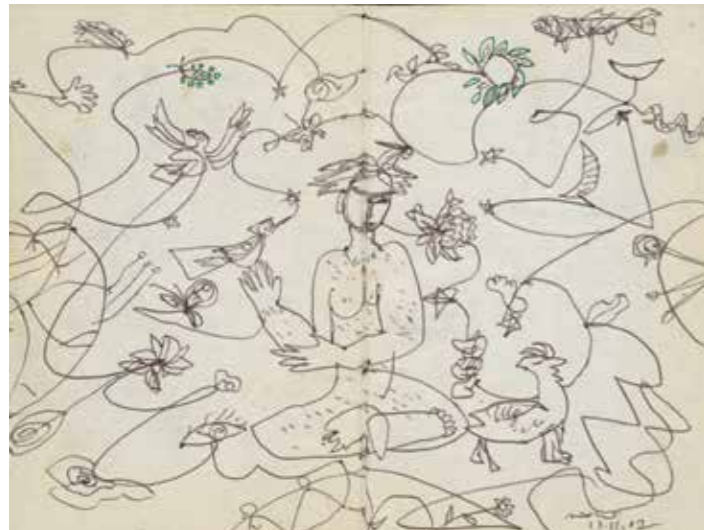
(Top) "The Celestial Web" (2010). Mixed media sculpture, 308 cm x 210 cm x 125 cm. *Collection of Tan Swie Hian Museum.*
(Above left) Pages from Tan Swie Hian's notebook showing the sketch of "The Celestial Web". Donated by Tan Swie Hian. *Collection of National Library, Singapore.*
(Above right) "The Straw Dog" (2004). Bronze sculpture, 153 cm x 40 cm x 90 cm. *Collection of Tan Swie Hian Museum.*

About the Exhibition

"Anatomy of a Free Mind: Tan Swie Hian's Notebooks and Creations" opens on 22 November 2016 at the gallery on Level 10 of the National Library Building on Victoria Street.

The exhibition will feature over 100 works of artistic and literary creations by Tan Swie Hian comprising paintings, sculptures, calligraphy, seal carvings, photographs, lithographs, and multimedia and literary works.

Tan's notebooks, manuscripts and related paraphernalia will be also displayed alongside the respective artworks.

To commemorate the exhibition, a 272-page companion book of the same name, published by the National Library and Editions Didier Millet, will be launched at the exhibition and sold at major book-shops in Singapore as well as on online stores. The book includes an introduction and notes by writer Yap Su-Yin, and essays by Tan that shed light on his explorations of new artistic mediums.

A series of programmes has been organised in conjunction with the exhibition, including monthly guided tours by the curators and public talks. Of special highlight is a guided tour that is open to the public and a talk by the artist himself.

Also look out for the smaller scale roving exhibition on Tan's literary works that will take place at the Jurong Regional Library (1 November–29 December 2016) followed by the Central Public Library (30 December 2016–28 February 2017).
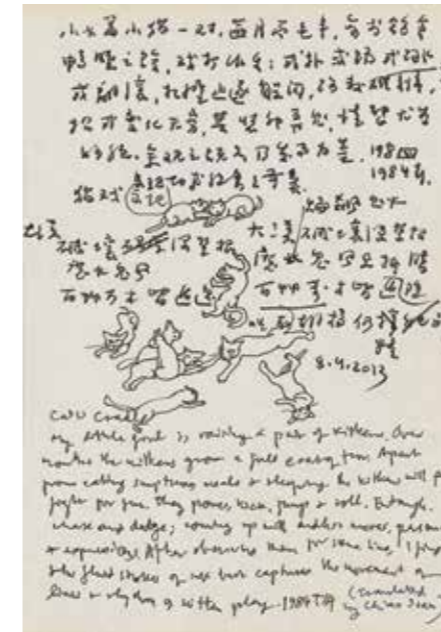
demolished red-brick National Library building on Stamford Road. Almost 43 years later, in November 2016, the art-ist returns to the National Library with "Anatomy of a Free Mind" – the first ever exhibition to showcase his private notebooks and illustrious body of works created during that long absence. The National Library is honoured to partner Tan Swie Hian in charting and presenting his fascinating creative journeys over the past four decades.

Over the years, Tan has generously donated more than 6,600 items from his personal collection to the National Library, including artworks and artefacts as well as manuscripts, notebooks and monographs. These are displayed at the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library at the National Library Building. His most recent donation includes the collection of notebooks displayed in the exhibition. ♦

(Right) "Cat's Cradle". (1984). Chinese ink on rice paper, 184 cm x 87 cm. *Collection of Tan Chiao Joan.*
(Top) Tan Swie Hian's sketches and notes on the painting. Donated by Tan Swie Hian. *Collection of National Library, Singapore.*

Notes
1 Princeton University Press (Producer). (2010, October 25). *Michelangelo: A life on paper* [Video file]. Retrieved from Brain Pickings website.
2 Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay. (n.d.). *Tan Swie Hian*. Retrieved from Tribute.sg website.
3 From a personal communication with Tan Swie Hian on 27 June 2016.
4 Yap, S. Y. (2016). *Anatomy of a free mind: Tan Swie Hian's notebooks and creations*. Singapore: National Library Board and Editions Dider Millet.

5 Tan, S. H. (2005). *Tan Swie Hian*. Retrieved from Tan Swie Hian website.
6 National Library Board. (2014, February 26). *Tan Swie Hian* written by Chor, Poh Chin. Retrieved from Singapore Infopedia.
7 Luxury Insider. (2012, December 4). *Most expensive living Singapore artist: Tan Swie Hian sells for S$3.7M*. Retrieved from Luxury Insider website.
8 Shetty, D. (2014, November 30). Tan Swie Hian's painting sold at auction for S$4.4 million, breaks

own record for priciest work by Singapore artist. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from Factiva.
9 Singapore Press Holdings. (2016, May 31). Mandela-Tan Swie Hian work sold for $630k. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from Factiva.
10 Singapore Chinese Orchestra. (2006). *The Celestial Web* [Recorded by Terence Cho]. Singapore: Singapore Chinese Orchestra Co Ltd.
11 Akkoc, R. (2014, December 1). 2004 Boxing Day tsunami facts. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from The Telegraph website.

悲悯人生

陈瑞献的文艺创作

Tan Swie Hian, whose paintings have fetched record prices, was in fact better known for his literary prowess when he first emerged in the arts scene. **Jessie Yak** highlights some of his poems, short stories and fables.

（上）陈瑞献的寓言《护舞》描写一只松鼠为爱护落叶，仔细地在落叶之间跳跃以避免踩到它们，借此强调对万物的关怀与慈悲；他也以此题材，绘就了上方的胶彩画《松鼠舞》。

（左）（从左到右）陈的三部著作－《陈瑞献文集》、《陈瑞献寓言》以及他的第一本诗集《巨人》。

提起享负盛名的新加坡多媒体艺术家陈瑞献，跃入大家脑海的应该大多为他一幅幅色彩丰富瑰丽的画作、构思奇巧或趣致的雕塑、苍劲豪迈的书法或刻字；他的艺术作品也享誉海外，画作在国际拍卖会上屡次刷新成交价；耀眼的艺术成就使他荣获多项本地及国际的奖项与殊荣。但事实上，他刚开始涉足艺术领域时，是以文艺创作崭露头角的。

陈瑞献1943年于印尼苏门答腊附近的哈浪岛出生，之后到新加坡接受教育。在华侨中学就读时，他同时涉猎了中国五四作家的著作和西洋文学，奠下了深厚的文学基础。考进南洋大学现代语言文学系后，他除了专修西洋语文与文学外，更是细心研读中外名家的力作。他也在此时接触到现代主义文学（即作家自觉地摒弃传统的写作方式，而尝试运用新的表达手法），[1] 并深受启发，以现代主义手法进行创作，与当时占文坛主流的现实主义（即文学作品如实反映生活）背道而驰。[2]

1960年代，陈瑞献以笔名"牧羚奴"在新加坡和马来亚的多种报刊发表作品；当时文艺创作最重要的根据地便是《南洋商报》的文艺副刊《青年文艺》，其主编是已故名作家杏影；1964年到1966年之间，杏影选刊了陈瑞献的二十多首诗作，引起了文坛的注意。杏影过世后，继任的完颜籍也同样识赏陈的才华，大量刊登了他的文艺创作，令陈声名鹊起。[3]

关于自己的写作，陈瑞献曾经表示"我的文学作品……多反映现实的阴暗面，以及人类悲苦的命运"。[4] 有评论说他"以悲天悯人的胸襟体验人生，因此，一朵花、一片叶、一滴水在他的心灵中都能扬起无限的神思与悲悯"。[5] 他的中文文学创作种类丰富，各种体裁都乐意尝试，本文列举了其中三种：

诗歌

对陈瑞献来说，诗歌是他的缪斯，十五岁时便写了生平第一首诗。[6]   1960年代是新马华文文坛深受中国大陆现实主义影响的时期，然而他一开始便逆主流而行，倡导以现代主义来进行创作。[7] 诗人林也评论陈的诗作时表示"他在创作中所运用的晶莹意象、隐喻，也引起许多读者的诧异及欣赏"。[8] 陈于1968年出版第一部诗集《巨人》，完颜籍认为"他的《巨人》——在新华文坛上出版的第一本现代诗集，可以称得上是新华现代诗的奠立宣言"。[9] 陈的诗作风格多样，有的磅礴阳刚，有的则温柔婉约，好比这首《母亲的画》：

> 母亲画画
> 嫩枝和蓓蕾和花
> 如大泪珠和小泪珠
> 构一树梅
>
> 线条布着山菊香
> 海棠活在纸上
> 思路单纯
> 轮廓意趣单纯
>
> 母亲的画
> 往事的回音
> 一双孤女的慧眼
> 投向邻人手里的竹圆规
> 投向出头没头的绣花针
> 心是画笔
> 把形与象描入心房
>
> 指尖是笔尖
> 临临金不换草
> 画画佛莲
> 我没有金字塔
> 没有智慧女神庙
> 我什么都没有
> 而母亲的画
> 赐我万有一钥
> 开露浮宫
> 开敦煌 [10]

诗不算长，但盈溢着儿子观看母亲作画时的温馨与深情。儿子是绘画能手，看着母亲的画作时，却从简单的线条中看出了她单纯思路里充满着对往事的回忆——过往的形与像留存在她心底，而她正通过笔尖，一点一滴地描绘出来。

在这首诗里，无论是对往事的回忆，或是母子共享天伦的温馨，画里画外讲的无非都是一个"情"字。

小说

陈瑞献曾经说过他选择小说这种创作体裁是为了做多种实验。[11] 有评论说他善于依靠自觉来把握事物，追求新的感觉和对事物的新的感受方法，大胆进行小说文体和技巧的革新。[12] 在谈到陈的名作《平安夜》时，完颜籍认为这篇现代主义小说"表达方式很不同……虽然写实，但没有公式化地谴责这些现实主义作品中认定的坏人"。[13] 我们不妨来看看《平安夜》里的这一段关于酒吧情景的描写：

> 露露径自把酒、烟、杯子等等都提了过来，接着，她心细如尘地斟着，调着，又擦亮了火柴，把大减价的爱情点在酒客的烟端上。露露的工作这么简单，也这么复杂。她左闪右闪，避开何霸额前的疤，张四粗的青蜥蜴，以及那只随时都会啄食她的肝脏的大苍鹰。露露必须打情骂俏，无视于地狱的火炬，无闻于天堂之门传来的落锁之声。哈里路亚，露露活着。她也常常说她有一条灵魂，灵魂就是生命。[14]

作者借酒吧女郎露露为酒客斟酒点烟时避开他们身上疤痕和纹身的动作，细致而生动地描述她为了生活而不得不斡旋求存的无奈、无助，以及酒客们对她虎视眈眈的处境。但是，即便处境艰难，她依然生存下来；而最后一句话更是点出了她在面对磨人生活时的坚强不屈。

诚如完颜籍所说，没有公式化的谴责，只有对人物场景的精心描绘。然而正是如此看似平铺直叙的白描手法，反而更加彰显了人物的无力感。作者无需明言，其写作技巧已让他对露露的怜惜跃然纸上。

寓言

陈瑞献深受佛教哲理的影响，佛家经典《百喻经》里包含了一百则故事，陈便依照这个传统，在上世纪70至90年代间，以中英双语写了一百则寓言。他认为，寓言是强调言外之音的记述。它篇幅小，却融汇各种表现方式，而宇宙间的万物是它的题材。[15] 他写的寓言都很简短，有些甚至只是一句话。但正因为很精简，所以留给读者很多想象空间，让读者自己去感受其言外之意，例如这极短篇《草年》：

> 一草对一草说："明天，我们就成年了。"
> 割草机呼啸而过。[16]

寓言的解读因读者而异。本文认为《草年》说的是生命的无常和未来的无可掌握。正当小草们为自己的挣扎求存终于盼到成年的到来而感到欣喜时，殊不知灭顶灾难已然降临；而促使灾难到来的正是小草们的成年——野草长高了，需要修剪了。

这在极喜中面临极悲的尖锐对比，正是人世间悲欢无常的写照。作者以敏锐的眼光捕捉到这鲜明的对比，再以朴实无华的文字将之呈现在读者眼前，这其中包含了他对无常人生的悲悯情怀。

除了以上三种文类外，陈瑞献也写过散文、戏剧、评论，及翻译外国文学等。这些年来，他的文艺作品陆续结集出版，新加坡国家图书馆也收藏了不少。若您想进一步了解陈瑞献在文学上的艺术成果，请于2016年11月初至2017年2月底到以下的图书馆参观《悲悯人生：陈瑞献的文艺创作》巡回展：

2016年11月1日至12月29日于裕廊区域图书馆
2016年12月30日至2017年2月28日于中央公共图书馆 ◆

《解析自由心：陈瑞献稿本与创作》特展 将于2016年11月22日在国家图书馆大厦10楼展厅拉开序幕。展览将呈现100多件陈瑞献的艺术创作如绘画、雕塑、书法、篆刻、摄影、版画、多媒体表演艺术及写作，展品包括从未公开的稿本及相关文物。一部与展览同名的图录，也将同时出版发行。届时为配合展览，国家图书馆也将推出一系列活动，例如陈瑞献的特别导览和公开座谈会、每月一次的策展人导览等，欢迎公众踊跃参加。

Jessie Yak is a Reference Librarian with the Rare Collections team at the National Library, Singapore. She majored in Chinese language and literature at Beijing University and furthered her studies at the University of Cambridge. Jessie is interested in Chinese literature, the Chinese diaspora and the print culture of East Asia.

叶若诗为国家图书馆之参考咨询馆员，专责中文善本珍藏。她先后负笈北京大学与剑桥大学，专攻中国语言与文学。她对多个研究课题有浓厚兴趣，包括中华文学、海外华人，以及东亚的印刷文化。

注释
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10 牧羚奴著《巨人》，新加坡：五月出版社，1968年，页11-12。Call no.: RCLOS C811.5 MLN
11 方桂香编《陈瑞献谈话录》，新加坡：创意圈出版社，2004年，页57。Call no.: RSING 700.92 CRX
12 同2，页294。
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SAVING
PEARL BANK
APARTMENTS

Architectural conservation or real estate investment? **Justin Zhuang** ponders over the fate of a 1970s style icon that has seen better times.

Justin Zhuang is a writer and researcher with an interest in design, cities, culture, history and media. The co-founder of writing studio In Plain Words contributes to various architecture and design magazines, including *Design Observer* and American Institute of Graphic Art's *Eye on Design*. He is the author of *Independence: The History of Graphic Design in Singapore Since the 1960s* (2012), *Mosaic Memories: Remembering the Playgrounds Singapore Grew Up In* (2014) and the catalogue for the exhibition "Fifty Years of Singapore Design" (2016). For more information see http://justinzhuang.com

a 27-storey "green tower" of residences may one day rise up at the edge of Singapore's historic Chinatown. It will boast the Outram Park MRT station at its doorstep and Pearl's Hill City Park as its backyard. There will even be an infinity pool and a rooftop garden. But none of these will rival the most attractive aspect of this new development if it ever comes to pass: securing the future of the Pearl Bank apartments and giving it a fresh lease of life.

This is pioneer architect Tan Cheng Siong's unorthodox proposal to rescue what was once Singapore's tallest block of apartments. Having witnessed the now iconic 38-storey building he designed over 40 years ago undergo three unsuccessful en-bloc attempts in the last decade, and faced with a 99-year land lease that is almost halfway expired, Tan and a group of residents have taken the unprecedented step of voluntarily applying to the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) for Pearl Bank to be conserved.

Not only is this the first time a multi-strata private development has made such a request – almost all the 7,200 buildings given conservation status in Singapore thus far have been proposed by the government – Tan's conservation plan would entail demolishing part of Pearl Bank's existing five-storey car park to build a new block of 150 apartments.

In an interview in his office at Maxwell House, Tan made clear his views on conservation: as a result of a rising population and the pressure on land resources, high-rise living has become firmly entrenched as part of the societal, environmental and architectural fabric of Singapore. If people have come to accept this fact, why don't they learn to conserve their ageing high-rise buildings instead of tearing them down?

While Tan understands the pragmatism of maximising land values in land-scarce Singapore, his idealism is tempered by the practical business of living. While Pearl Bank is a vital piece of Singapore's architectural history, it is also home to the people who live there, several of whom are retirees with dwindling incomes. As a result of high maintenance costs and shrinking sinking funds, the apartment building has deteriorated over the years – plagued by broken-down lifts, leaking sewage pipes, peeling paint and even rat infestations.

Given its failed en-bloc sales attempts, Tan came up with a radical idea to secure Pearl Bank's future: seek conservation status for the property and then unlock its value by allowing a developer to construct a new block of apartments next to the original tower. The money from the sale of the new flats would then pay for the refurbishment

(Facing page) A dramatic view from a penthouse on the 38th floor of Pearl Bank apartments. This iconic block, completed in 1976, was the tallest apartment building in Singapore at the time. *Photo by Justin Zhuang.*
(Below) Tan Cheng Siong, the original architect of Pearl Bank, has come up with a conservation plan that entails demolishing part of the existing five-storey carpark and building a new block of 150 apartments. *Courtesy of Archurban Architects Planners.*
(Right) Pearl Bank was advertised as the "tallest apartment block in Southeast Asia" in the April 1976 issue of *Building Materials & Equipment Southeast Asia* magazine. On sale were penthouses as well as 2-, 3- and 4-bedroom apartments.

of the ageing building as well as top up what is left of its 99-year lease.

The result would be a modern appendage to his modernist marvel – a concrete materialisation of how architecture, property and conservation intersect in Singapore. "We thought this conservation [proposal] would be a binding force because it would bring them an extension of lease, [and] ... a new building," says Tan.

Rise of an Architectural Icon

If Tan's plan goes through, it will not be the first time he has offered a radical solution to urbanisation issues in Singapore. Pearl Bank first arose amid rapid modernisation of the city in the 1970s and 80s. Following the sales of land to private developers to build hotels, offices and commercial facilities, in 1969 the government released for the first time a piece of land in the city centre that was earmarked for private high-rise apartments. As with other land parcels offered for sale back then, the authorities had already visualised a plan for prospective tenderers: three rectilinear towers connected by a public square-cum-carpark at the foot of Pearl's Hill.[1]

"Luckily, I didn't look at it!" exclaims Tan when shown these plans during this interview – which he says he was seeing for the first time. "Otherwise, I may have followed it thinking this may be the winning design. You know how sometimes people get influenced for commercial reasons... the developer may say, 'Eh, copy this, it's a good thing. That's what they want.'"

Fortunately for the architect and his firm Archynamics Architects (which later closed and led him to start Archurban Architects Planners in 1974), the developer Hock Seng Enterprises had no such intentions when they approached his two-year-old firm to bid with them. Instead Tan found inspiration in the 85,500-sq-ft site resembling an airplane tail, drawing up a single tower that soared 561 ft above sea level – rivalling the city's highest peak, Bukit Timah Hill – to take advantage of the panoramic views of the south of Singapore and create what would become Southeast Asia's tallest apartment block.[2]

Pearl Bank's unique horseshoe shape was grounded in Tan's search for efficiency. Unlike a conventional point or slab block, this shape was economical in terms of materials used, offering the smallest wall-to-floor ratio.[3] The opening of the building's 270-degree sector shape – imagine the letter 'C'– also faces west to allow for ventilation and minimise the sunset glare into its bedrooms and living rooms located on the outer rim. To fit in the maximum number of

apartments yet ensure its estimated 1,500 residents could live comfortably inside, Tan devised an interlocking split design to divide the single block into 2-, 3- and 4-bedroom split-level apartments. These 288 units were generously spread eight apiece across each floor, which made it necessary for Pearl Bank to scale new heights – a groundbreaking example of high-rise, high-density living in a city where hitherto shophouses and walk-up apartments were the norm, and public housing flats just emerging.

The building's cost of $14 million dollars led the developer to reduce its land price in the bid, recalls Tan.[4] In spite of being the lowest bidder, Hock Seng Enterprises

won the tender because the government also considered the building design in its evaluation. "There was heavy calculation [by the developer] to ensure profit," says Mr Tan. "It is only fair that people don't invest in architecture. People invest in profit, for profit. We took a risk. He [the developer] took a risk. To be fair to him, he also saw the architectural value."[5]

When Architecture Becomes Property

To realise Pearl Bank in the shortest time possible, builders Sin Hup Huat employed the relatively new slip-form construction method on a residential development for the

(Below) Artist's impression of a show flat when Pearl Bank was first marketed in the early 1970s. *Courtesy of pearlbankapartments.com.*
(Bottom) A sectional perspective of a typical split-level apartment unit in a 1972 sales brochure. *Courtesy of pearlbankapartments.com.*

first time in Singapore. Instead of building one level at a time with a wooden formwork and waiting over a week for the concrete to dry before proceeding – a method known as "cast in-situ" – Pearl Bank's vertical walls were constructed by pouring concrete into a mould that was raised inch by inch as the bottom was partially set. As a result, "the vertical elements went up so fast that the horizontal elements, notably the in-situ split floors and staircases, experienced a hard time trying to catch up," explained *Building Materials & Equipment* magazine in 1976.[6]

Despite this, Pearl Bank was completed one-and-a-half years behind schedule. After piling started in mid-1970, progress was slowed by material and labour shortages due to a property boom in Singapore.[7] "[S]ince June 1970, every 10 days has brought an announcement of a new property development project," reported the *New Nation* in April 1971.[8] Shenton Way came into the scene with the 50-storey DBS Building leading the way, mega mixed-used buildings like Woh Hup Centre (now Golden Mile Complex) introduced the idea of work, live and play in a single development (today the template for property development) and Singaporeans upgraded to the high life as condominiums like the luxury Beverly Mai, the cutting-edge Futura as well as Pearl Bank redefined apartment towers as the new type of middle- and upper-class housing.[9]

This wave of modern developments in the early 1970s overstretched the construction sector so much that the government postponed land sales for almost five years.[10] Pearl Bank's completion in 1976 was not the end of its troubles. Two years later, the

developer Hock Seng Enterprises was put into receivership by its creditor, the Moscow Narodny Bank (MNB), burdened with still unsold units in Singapore's depressed residential property market.[11] Some 60 unsold apartments in Pearl Bank, including eight penthouse units, were eventually bought up by the government in 1979 as part of its move to stimulate the property market.[12]

Some three decades later, the property market returned to threaten Pearl Bank in a different way. By then, condominiums had become one of the 5 Cs – along with cash, car, credit card and country club membership – of life in Singapore. This culture of materialism combined with a bullish property market convinced over 80 percent of Pearl Bank's residents to put up their homes for sale when an "en-bloc fever" swept across the city in 2007. Anderson 18 ($478 million), Gillman Heights ($548 million), Grangeford Apartments ($624 million) and Leedon Heights ($835 million), were all successfully sold, with the record going to Farrer Court, its $1.339 billion the largest ever collective sale recorded in Singapore.[13] Pearl Bank somehow escaped the sales frenzy not just once but again in 2008 and 2011 – its last asking price of $750 million deemed too high by the market.[14]

The successive threats of en-bloc, however, galvanised a minority group of residents to save Pearl Bank. One of them is American architect Ed Poole who moved into a penthouse unit in 2000. His love for the architecture ("Pearl Bank is irreplaceable") and the over $600,000 he has spent renovating his apartment ("And it's still not done!"), drove Poole to hire a lawyer and rally his neighbours against the en-bloc attempts led by the "condo raiders".[15]

To transform the image of Pearl Bank, which had become known as a dorm for foreign workers and a haven for vice activity, Poole started the website pearlbankapartments.com and even opened up his home to the media.[16] It was after Tan was interviewed at Poole's apartment for the TV programme, *Listen To Our Walls,* in 2008 that the seed of the voluntary conservation proposal was laid. "We all talked of some crazy ideas as alternatives to en-bloc. Mr Tan then did this sketch, showing a new tower. We all just laughed it off as impossible," said Poole in a recent e-mail interview.

Conservation and Conversations

The sketch created over drinks became reality in 2012 when another penthouse resident and then chairman of Pearl Bank's management committee, Dr Lee Seng Teik, reached out to Tan to help upgrade the building and extend its lease. Only a
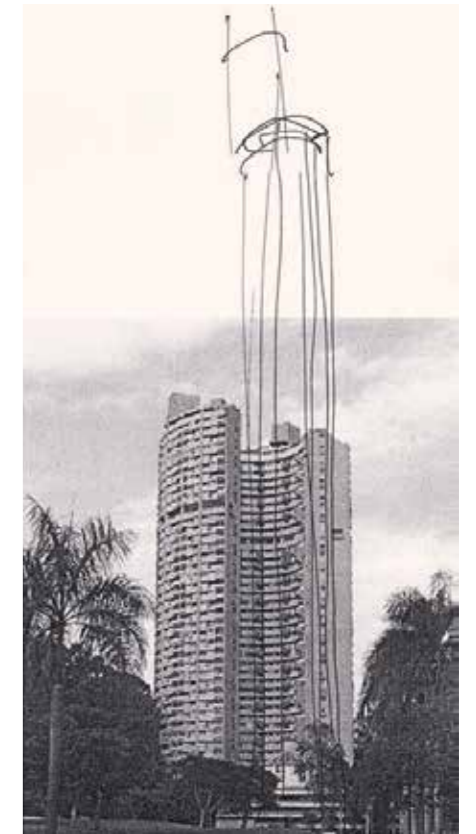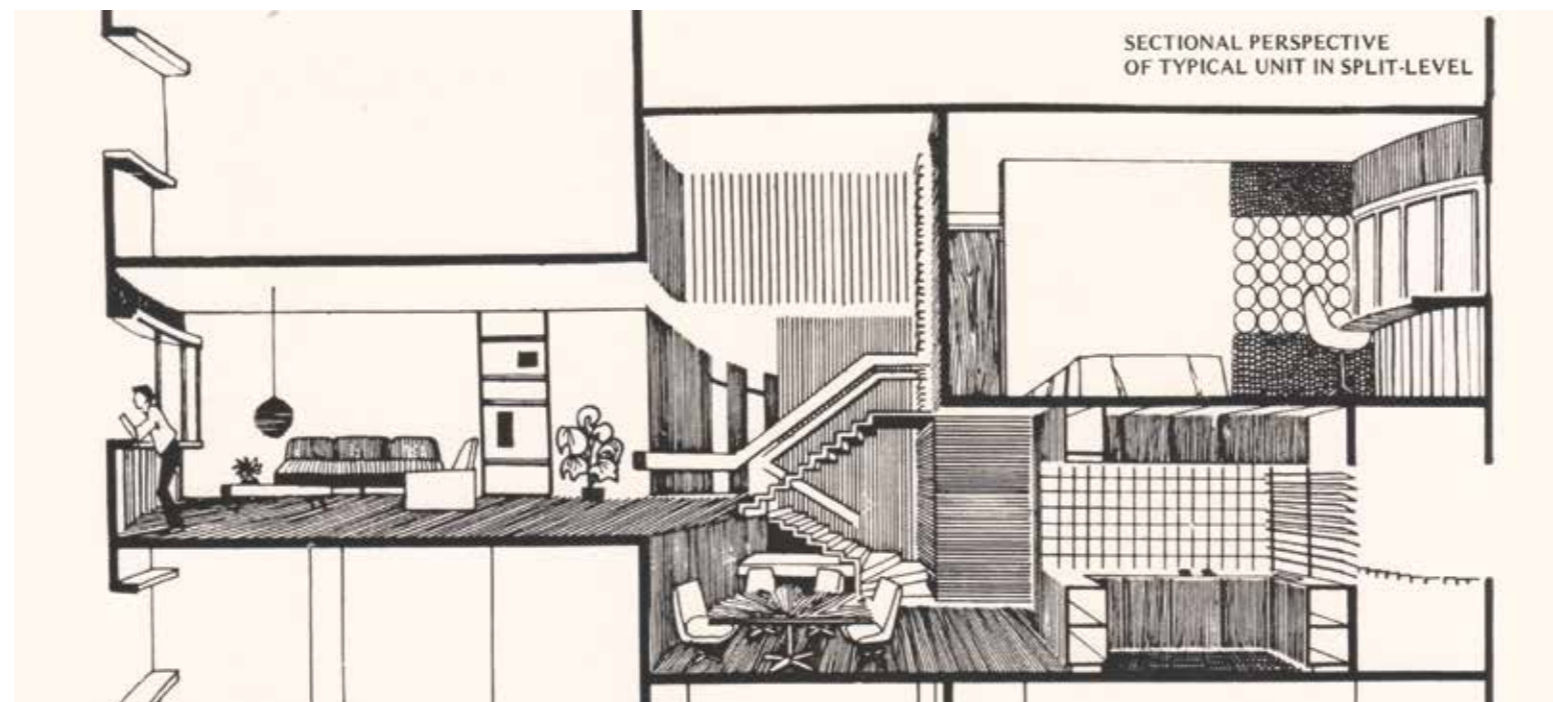
Architect Tan Cheng Siong sketched this new tower in 1980 when he was thinking of ways to save Pearl Bank. *Courtesy of pearlbankapartments.com.*

year before, another ageing 99-year lease condominium, The Arcadia, had asked for a lease extension but was rejected because it did not meet the conditions of "land use intensification or urban rejuvenation".[17] This was why the architect proposed to increase the gross floor area of Pearl Bank with a new tower. "They called me up and I said, 'If you really want to upgrade, you must be brave and do something to increase its value more,'" says Tan.

Erecting a new tower on the land parcel Pearl Bank occupies seems to fly in the face of conservation as a means of preserving a city's heritage. But as Singapore's national body in charge of conservation, the URA, explains on its website, "Conservation is much more than just preserving a facade or the external shell of a building. It is also important that we retain the inherent spirit and original ambience of these historic buildings as far as possible."[18]

This is the principle Tan uses to defend his proposal which he assures conserves the entire existing apartment block. "It does seem to change the look, but architecturally it's not changed," he explains. "You can't talk about preservation in architecture. It's conservation. And conservation means also you can adapt, reuse... but the whole meaning, the whole spirit behind still remains."

(Above left) A rendering of what Pearl Bank would look like if the current conservation plan goes through. It involves demolishing part of the existing five-storey carpark and building a new block of 150 apartments. *Courtesy of Archurban Architects Planners.*
(Above right) The rooftop garden of the new apartment block would connect to Pearl Bank's existing 28th floor where the communal facilities for residents are located. *Courtesy of Archurban Architects Planners.*

Residents like Poole agree that it's futile to conserve the building to its original form. Instead, the conservation proposal is an opportunity to raise much needed funds to fix some inherent architectural problems. On Poole's wish list: turning the existing eight-lift system into plumbing shafts to address the problematic sewage pipes and replacing it with a new high-speed core of lifts.

Unlike other conserved buildings in Singapore, Pearl Bank is a block of private apartments. A resident once summed up her woes: "No doubt the building is unique and historical, but living and dealing with the inconvenience is a chore."[19] One may argue that this is no different from residents who live in pre-Independence era conserved shophouses, except in this case, all owners of the 288 units in Pearl Bank have to come to a consensus on any decision regarding the fate of the building.

This is the case with Tan's plan too. While the merits of conservation will be assessed separately by URA, building a new block of apartments has to be agreed upon by *all* existing owners of Pearl Bank because it impacts upon their future ownership as governed by the Building Maintenance and Strata Management Act. Since the proposal was tabled in 2015, over 90 percent of residents have agreed to the new building. But it will be a "monumental task" to get everyone on board because some residents are too ill to make a decision and there are differences in opinion between the co-owners of some units, said Dr Lee.[20]

What irks the pro-conservation camp is that the same act requires only 80 per cent of residents to agree to collectively sell a development that is 10 years old or more – an issue they have appealed to the Ministry of National Development to address. At the time of press, the ministry has granted the residents more time to get the 100 percent consent required or to explore other proposals.

The difference is perhaps an unintended legal expression of the gaps between architecture and home, public and private property, and even between conservation and redevelopment in Singapore. How can we lead modern lives in a building designed for earlier times? Are private residents expected to upkeep a public monument of a nation's history? How should we balance the often diametrically opposite values that concern heritage conservation and property investment?

The voluntary conservation plan for Pearl Bank provides a platform to facilitate discussions between residents, the state, the architecture community and the public. Surrounding the issue of conservation is the larger issue of what consensus looks like in Singapore today. Is it 80, 90 or 100 percent? Can it even be measured? It is a question that becomes all the more pertinent as Singapore becomes more crowded and diverse. Pearl Bank and the problems of high-rise living that ageing buildings bring with them is but a microcosm of what the city will face in the future.

"When you build super-high, it is super difficult: more people, more quarrels, more differences," says Tan. "Because of that we have to learn how to live together in a very positive and creative way." ♦

Notes

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As Good as Gold

THE MAKING OF A FINANCIAL CENTRE

Singapore's Central Business District didn't happen by accident. **Lim Tin Seng** recounts how a piece of prime land dubbed as "Golden Shoe" was transformed into a glittering financial hub.

Singapore's waterfront has seen a remarkable transformation over the last 50 years, marked by the soaring glass-and-concrete towers of Raffles Place and Shenton Way on the one hand to the vast expanse of shimmering Marina Bay on the other, framing the new extension of the Central Business District (CBD). Older skyscrapers such as One Raffles Place (formerly OUB Centre; 1986), UOB Plaza (1992) and Republic Plaza (1995) – all scaling 280 metres, the maximum height allowed in Singapore – hold their own against the shiny new rivals of Marina Bay, led by Marina Bay Sands and the Marina Bay Financial Centre.

All this is testament to the success of the city-state's urban renewal programme that began in the late 1960s – in a pocket of prime real estate known as the "Golden Shoe". Golden Shoe may seem like a rather grandiose label today but in post-Independent Singapore, it came to express the ambitious plans of a nascent city that had set its sights on being a major financial centre.

A Business and Financial Hub

The term "Golden Shoe" was the moniker given to the 80-acre shoe-shaped plot of prime land in the heart of Singapore's city centre. Designated as the future financial and banking hub of the city, Golden Shoe was gazetted in 1970 under the Controlled Premises (Special Provisions) Act of 1969 as a zone deregulated from rent controls, – in other words, allowing owners to repossess their properties for development purposes.[1]

Golden Shoe was divided into four distinct clusters: Raffles Place and Battery Road; Collyer Quay and Raffles Quay; Malacca Street, Market Street and Chulia Street; and Cecil Street, Robinson Road and Shenton Way. In the 1822 Raffles Town Plan (or Jackson Plan) – the earliest known map of the town of Singapore – the first cluster was designated for commercial activities, while the second, built on reclaimed land and an extension of Raffles Place, provided space for offices and godowns (warehouses) facing the waterfront.[2]

The third cluster, part of the original Indian enclave, was home to Indian trading houses and money lenders, or "chettiars", who occupied shophouses along Malacca Street and Market Street. Chinese businesses were also located in this cluster

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An aerial view of the Central Business District in the 1950s, covering a large swathe of the area earmarked as the Golden Shoe, including Collyer Quay and Raffles Place. On the far left is the octagonal-shaped Telok Ayer Market and in the foreground is Telok Ayer Basin, which would be reclaimed in the ensuing decades to build Marina Bay. *© Urban Redevelopment Authority. All rights reserved.*

(Above left) The Golden Shoe derived its name from its resemblance to an upturned shoe and its value as prime land. Development of the area was concentrated in four clusters: Raffles Place and Battery Road; Collyer Quay and Raffles Quay; Malacca, Market and Chulia streets; and Cecil Street, Robinson Road and Shenton Way.
(Top right) Raffles Place (formerly Commercial Square) was a key cluster in the Golden Shoe area. Since it was first demarcated in the 1822 Raffles Town Plan, the cluster has been and still is the centre for banking and commercial activities in Singapore. Shown here is a view of Raffles Place in the early 1960s with Robinsons (left), Chartered Bank (centre) and John Little (right). Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.
(Above right) Collyer Quay was another cluster that traditionally served as a commercial site. Built on reclaimed land, it was an extension of Raffles Place, providing spaces for offices and godowns. This 1960s photo shows Asia Insurance Building (left), Ocean Building (centre) and Alkaff Arcade (right). Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

on Chulia Street. The fourth cluster, where famous shipping lines and insurance companies once congregated, was built at different stages of the Telok Ayer Basin reclamation project, which links the commercial districts of Collyer Quay and Raffles Place to the Tanjong Pagar dock area.[3]

Interestingly, the Golden Shoe district was a heavily populated residential area at one time. According to a 1956 survey by the Singapore Improvement Trust (predecessor of the Housing and Development Board), there were about 180,000 to 200,000 shophouses in the central area. Many of these were in a decrepit state and packed to the gills with tenants. Although the official density rate was reported as 568 people per hectare, it reached as high as 1,700 in some areas, contributing to poor sanitation, congested streets and frequent outbreaks of contagious diseases.[4]

Given such conditions, there was an urgent need to get rid of the crumbling shophouses and relocate the families to proper housing estates. Additionally, decongesting the central area would free up valuable land space for the development of a modern business district, a prospect that was becoming more critical as post-Independent Singapore progressed towards an export-oriented industrialised economy.[5]

Government Land Sales Programmes

The government agency tasked to lead this massive undertaking was the Urban Renewal Department (URD; predecessor of the Urban Redevelopment Authority), which came under the Ministry of National Development. Armed with advice from the United Nations, the URD drew up a comprehensive urban renewal programme that sought "the gradual demolition of virtually the whole 1,500 acres of the old city" and replacing it with a "modern city worthy of Singapore's future".[6]

Cooperation between the public and private sectors was key to the success of the programme. The private sector would finance the construction of office buildings, good-class apartments, hotels and shopping malls, while the government would serve as the town planner – a role that involved the meticulous preparation of a grand master plan, development of infrastructure as well as the all-important function of acquiring, clearing and releasing parcels of land to the private sector through periodic land sales. In addition, the government also drafted building guidelines to ensure that planning and urban design objectives were met, and displaced residents were suitably rehoused.[7]

The renewal of Golden Shoe began with the launch of three government land sales programmes in 1967, 1968 and 1969, shortly after the URD completed its pilot urban renewal projects in Outram (Precinct South 1) and Golden Mile (Precinct North 1). To attract private sector developers, special concessions were offered. These included generous repayment terms, such as low down payments, interest-free loans with long repayment periods and property tax rebates. The sites were also sold with vacant possession – meaning the property must be in a state fit to be occupied upon completion – and whatever infrastructural support the developers required was provided within reason.[8]

On their part, developers had to ensure that their designs adhered to the planning parameters set up by URD, such as land use zoning, development intensity and its relationship with the architectural and urban characteristics of the larger physical environment.[9] It was not all about squeezing office blocks into every square inch of space: from the very start the authorities had a grand vision that balanced development with aesthetic considerations.

The response from developers was swift. The first buildings that emerged from the 1967 and 1969 land sales were, respectively, Overseas Union House and Change Alley Aerial Plaza along Collyer Quay. The former was an eight-storey building – standing on what used to be a carpark beside Clifford Pier – designed by SLH-Timothy Seow and Partners. The building, completed in 1972, housed a shopping mall, a multi-storey carpark and offices, with the Neptune Theatre Restaurant as its centrepiece.[10]

Its neighbour, the Change Alley Aerial Plaza, comprised a revolving tower and a glass bridge. The tower, which housed a restaurant and an observation deck, was located beside Clifford Pier and linked to Raffles Place by a bridge that doubled up as a shopping mall. Change Alley Aerial Plaza was designed by the architectural firm K. K. Tan and Associates. Completed in 1975, the building connected the main shopping centres in the area, which comprised Overseas Union House, the newly renovated Clifford Pier and the original Change Alley in Raffles Place.[11]

Singapore's First Skyscrapers

The 1968 land sales programme resulted in the so-called "three sisters" of Shenton Way: UIC (United Industrial Corporation) Building, Robina House and Shenton House. Completed in 1975, all shared a similar tower-and-podium building structure, thanks to a URD planning regulation which made sure that buildings sited further inland could still enjoy a sea view. There was, however, flexibility to allow some variation in design, most notably in the façade of the tower blocks. This tower-and-podium design was also used for the 22-storey Shing Kwan House across the road, also the result of the 1968 land sales programme. It was connected to the "three sisters" by a pedestrian-cum-shopping overhead bridge called Golden Bridge.[12]

The land sales programme in 1968 also gave rise to the 52-storey OCBC Centre. Designed by renowned architect I. M. Pei, it was located on Chulia Street on a site formerly occupied by China Building, Ho Ho Building and a restaurant. Completed in 1976, OCBC Centre was an important milestone in the development of Singapore's modern skyline.[13] Rising to a height of 201 metres, it was the tallest building in Singapore and Southeast Asia at the time of its opening in November 1976.

OCBC Centre also marked the first time foreign architects were engaged to design major development projects in Singapore. Local architectural firms now had to face off with foreign companies in pitching for building projects and this resulted in better designs and more competitive tenders. Foreign architects introduced novel designs and innovative construction methods. OCBC Centre, for example, has a structural design quite unlike other buildings at the time. It is made up of two semi-circular concrete cores with the office space suspended on three sets of huge lateral girders.[14]

The influence of foreign architects was demonstrated again when Overseas Union Bank (OUB) commissioned the award-winning Japanese architect Kenzo Tange to design its building. The site in Raffles Place, where the old Robinson's department store occupied, was released by URA in 1979. The result was the elegant OUB Centre (now One Raffles Place). Completed in 1987, the glass-and-steel tower is made up of two triangular prisms of different heights attached to each other. The tower is etched by a grid pattern of rectangles and window units, and clad with a specially treated aluminium alloy that allows it to change colour with the light it reflects. The tower rises above a retail podium that features a dramatic entrance

(Below) Singapore's skyline in the early 1970s was a conglomeration of low-rise shophouses interspersed with a few tall buildings, and many more in the making. Shown in this 1974 photo are Ocean Building (far right), UOB Building (centre) and the still under-construction OCBC Centre (left). Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.
(Bottom) By 1976, OCBC Centre had been completed, but crumbling old shophouses were still a feature of the Central Business District. Many of these met the wrecker's ball in the ensuing years as part of government land acquisition efforts. Ronni Pinsler Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

with an eight-storey-high cutaway. Rising to 280 metres, the 63-storey tower was the tallest building in Singapore at the time of its completion.[15]

To maintain the pace of development, the government located its financial institutions in Shenton Way.[16] Among the first were the Development Bank of Singapore (DBS) Building designed by Alfred Wong Partnership, and the Central Provident Fund (CPF) Building by the Public Works Department. The two buildings were completed in 1975 and 1976 respectively, and shared the same tower-and-podium structure as their neighbours.

The DBS tower was a 70-storey building with three sections, while the shorter 45-storey CPF tower was divided into four sections. When DBS Building was first announced in 1971, it was hailed as a symbol of Singapore's rise from "a small fishing village" to a modern nation – and the city's equivalent to monuments such as the Taj Mahal of India and the Great Wall of China.[17]

During the late 1980s, another two government financial institutions – the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) and the Treasury – were relocated to the southern end of Shenton Way across Maxwell Road to further cement the stretch as the financial street of Singapore. This was then followed by the Post Office Savings Bank when it commissioned a tower on the former site of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Building in 1996. The bank, however, did not complete its move to the 52-storey tower when it was completed in 2000 due to its merger with DBS in 1998. Instead, the tower, which is known today as Capital Tower, went on to serve as the headquarters of the Government of Singapore Investment Corporation (GIC), the sovereign wealth fund of the Singapore government.[18]

The 1969 Control Premises (Special Provisions) Act

Apart from government land sales, Golden Shoe was also shaped by private redevelopment projects. As most of the old shophouses in the area were privately owned, the URD employed a new strategy.[19] To incentivise landowners to redevelop their properties, the authorities introduced the Control Premises (Special Provisions) Act in 1969 to exempt them from rent controls. Due to a severe housing shortage, rent controls were implemented by the colonial government in 1947 to prevent greedy landlords from exorbitantly increasing rents beyond what had been imposed in 1939.

But while the British legislation protected tenants, the restrictions discouraged landowners from redeveloping or maintain-

ing their properties. These shophouses became neglected over the years, resulting in decaying facades that concealed even worse living conditions within. To motivate landowners, the 1969 Control Premises (Special Provisions) Act exempted them from rent control, thus enabling the owners to repossess their properties. In return, however, the landlords had to ensure that their premises would be redeveloped. Furthermore, the premises had to be located within a specifically gazetted zone or "designated development area" that came to be known as the Golden Shoe.[20]

Not unexpectedly, landowners welcomed the new legislation. Declaring it as a move that was "long overdue", the landowners looked forward to the prospect of ridding their tenants and refurbishing their dilapidated premises.

Business tenants, on the other hand were disappointed. Having enjoyed low rental rates for decades, many, including shopkeepers and five-foot-way traders along Change Alley and the Arcade areas, steeled themselves for the worst; in some cases rents were jacked up by nearly three-fold, from $350 to $1,000 a month. Others were worried about uprooting themselves and relocating to new areas that were less favourable for business. To manage the expectations of the affected parties, the government set up the Tenants' Compensation Board to review re-possession applications of landlords and to assess the amount of compensation to be paid to the evictees.[21]

The Rise of Private Sector Investment

Among the first private projects that were launched after the Control Premises (Special Provisions) Act came into effect were Ocean Building and Clifford Centre, adjacent to each other in Raffles Place. The 28-storey curvilinear Ocean Building was erected on the site of the former Ocean Building constructed in 1923, while the 29-storey podium-and-tower Clifford Centre replaced the old Clifford House. The developer of Clifford Centre also purchased an adjacent parking lot, Chan Wing Building and Airways Building to give the new development two frontages, one facing Raffles Place and the other Collyer Quay.[22]

Hot on the heels of these properties were projects like the Arcade and the Straits Trading Building. The Arcade, sandwiched between Ocean Building and Clifford Centre, on the site of the historic 1905 Alkaff Arcade, was a 19-storey office tower with three shopping floors. The 22-storey Straits Trading Building was located along Battery Road where the Medical Hall Building, Maynard Building and Gresham House used

to stand. Completed in 1972, the building was initially known as McAllister House as it was conceived by the McAllister Group to replace its headquarters in Gresham House. It was renamed Straits Trading Building after Straits Trading acquired the building in 1969.[23]

Another property that underwent similar redevelopment on Battery Road was Chartered Bank Building, which has been present on this site since 1916. After two expansions, the current construction, completed in April 1984, was renamed Six Battery Road and housed Standard Chartered Bank as its anchor tenant. The 43-storey tower and podium is clad with a brown granite exterior. P&T Group, its architect, also designed the adjacent Raffles Tower, which was developed on the former site of John Little department store in 1973. It was renamed Shell Tower

(Right) By the end of the 1970s, high-rise buildings had begun to reshape the Singapore skyline. Many of them were located in Raffles Place facing the Singapore River. Prominent bank buildings visible in this 1976 photograph include buildings belonging to OCBC, Hong Leong Bank, UOB, CPF and DBS. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*
(Below) This 1993 photo shows the transformation of Singapore's skyline that began in the 1980s and continued into the 90s, giving rise to skyscrapers such as the octagonal UOB Plaza and the prism-shaped OUB Centre (now One Raffles Place). *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

after Royal Dutch Shell became its anchor tenant,[24] and is today known as Singapore Land Tower.

The octagonal-shaped UOB (United Overseas Bank) Building next to Six Battery Road is another notable redevelopment by the private sector. It was built in 1974 on the site of Bonham Building, UOB's former headquarters. The building originally comprised a 30-storey office tower and a five-storey podium at the base.[25] In 1988, UOB paid some $130 million to purchase vacant land next to the building, and announced a $400-million expansion plan.

The massive project included the addition of a new 66-storey skyscraper and

a retrofit to the existing office block with a six-storey podium linking both towers. Kenzo Tange was engaged to conceptualise the project design, and he incorporated elements from the old office tower into the new development by adopting the same octagonal layout, and juxtaposing octagons and squares at 45-degree angles to each other. These were superimposed in a succession of geometrical rotations before tapering towards the apex. The two towers and podium were clad in granite and aluminium, and insulated with grey-coloured glass, making the building a visual stunner. The new UOB Plaza was completed in August 1992.[26]

One Building After Another

The 1970s and 80s saw a frenzy of private sector building construction in the Golden Shoe area: Hong Leong Holdings redeveloped the 28 shophouses it owned into a 41-storey skyscraper in 1977; the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank pulled down its headquarters in Raffles Place and replaced it with a 21-storey building in 1982; Island Investment and Agency demolished the Maritime Building (formerly Union Building) in Collyer Quay to make way for the 23-storey Tung Centre in 1985; and American International Assurance (AIA) redeveloped its headquarters on Robinson Road into a 25-storey tower in 1992.[27]

This trend continued into the 1990s. Singapore Airlines replaced its 26-year-old Robinson Road headquarters in 1994 with a 35-storey glass tower. Older properties in the area such as Denmark House and its neighbouring Finlayson House were jointly redeveloped into the 25-storey John Hancock Tower (previously Century Tower 21 and now 6 Raffles Quay), while Nedlloyd House by Hong Leong International Properties Investment became 1 Finlayson Green.[28]

Other private redevelopment ventures included the 37-storey Bank of China building constructed adjacent to the original premises in 1999, and the 32-storey Maybank Tower on the site of the bank's former headquarters in 2001.[29] Dwarfing over these two buildings is the obelisk-shaped Republic Plaza designed by Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa. Standing at 66 storeys and 280 metres high, the tower is the flagship building of City Developments Limited (CDL). It was completed in 1996 on an 8,500-sq-m site acquired by CDL through a combination of private transactions and government land sales.[30]

Caltex House (now Chevron House) and Hitachi Tower (16 Collyer Quay) are examples of projects developed using a similar model. Completed in 1993, the two interlinked buildings were built on a 1989 sale site and a private plot that was formerly part of Change Alley.[31]

Despite the steady pace of development, there were still many dingy shophouses in the Golden Shoe area that could not be redeveloped for one reason or another in the 1970s. Most of these properties were situated on fragmented plots, making them unsuitable for comprehensive redevelopment. Landowners also faced difficulties acquiring adjacent sites to amalgamate their holdings into sizeable parcels.

Given the high chance that these fragmented properties would not be redeveloped in a sustainable way, the government had to acquire them under the Land Acquisition

(Top) This panoramic view shows how Singapore's Central Business District has expanded beyond the Golden Shoe boundary to include the newly reclaimed 360-acre Marina Bay downtown precinct with its glittering maze of steel, concrete and glass high-rises. *Photo by Richard W. J. Koh.*
(Above) Reclamation works in the Marina Bay area began from the 1970s onwards, even as the Golden Shoe area was being developed. © *Urban Redevelopment Authority. All rights reserved.*

Act of 1966 for the explicit purpose of urban renewal.[32] From the two land acquisition exercises in the Golden Shoe area in 1975 and 1980, a total of 220 lots, amounting to nearly 36,000 sq m, were gazetted for acquisition. These lots ranged from 186 to 372 sq m, and most were located at Cecil Street, Market Street and Raffles Place.

Following these acquisitions, the sites were then amalgamated into bigger parcels before being released to private developers through land sales programmes. Some of the buildings that rose from these sales included Cecil House and GB Building in Cecil Road, and Tat Lee Bank Building and UOB Building in Raffles Place.[33]

Land was also acquired to cater for infrastructural improvements, and these ranged from small strips of land to large plots. The smaller acquisitions were utilised mainly for road improvement projects (Cecil Street, Collyer Quay and Battery Road), or the creation of bus bays.[34] Larger acquisitions, including the 1928 Mercantile Bank Building, were made for projects like the construction of the Raffles Place Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) station.

Blurring of Boundaries

As Golden Shoe developed into a modern business and financial hub, its boundaries became less distinct. To a large extent, this was attributed to the phasing out of rent controls, a process that began in 1988 and ended with total abolishment in 2001.[35] By then, plans to expand the business district into the newly reclaimed 360-acre Marina Bay downtown area were well underway.

Led by URA's Marina Bay Development Agency, the new downtown core was mapped out in the 1991 Concept Plan and put in motion following the sale of the first land parcel there in 2001.[36] Some of the key developments that arose in quick succession include One Raffles Quay; The Sail @ Marina Bay condominium; and the Marina Bay Financial Centre, comprising three office towers, an underground mall and two condominium towers. To bring life and recreation to this area, the casino-resort Marina Bay Sands, Marina Barrage and Gardens by the Bay were constructed.[37]

With new landmarks sprouting up in the Marina Bay downtown area, older buildings in the former Golden Shoe area responded with a new makeover plan. In Shenton Way, for example, Robina House, UIC Building and Shing Kwan Building were demolished and replaced with the One Shenton condominium, a residential-cum-commercial development called V Shenton and SGX (Singapore Exchange) Centre respectively.[38]

The DBS and CPF buildings were sold to new developers and are currently being developed into mixed-use projects comprising offices, serviced apartments and retail spaces. In Collyer Quay, Ocean Building was torn down to make way for the 43-storey Ocean Financial Centre, while the Change Alley Aerial Plaza, together with Clifford Pier and the former Customs Harbour Branch building (or Customs House), were conserved as a heritage precinct offering cafes and restaurants.[39]

Ocean Union House was also demolished and on its site now stands OUE Bayfront. In Raffles Place, a new Straits Trading Building was built on the site of the old building in 2009, while a second 38-storey office tower was added to the existing OUB Centre. When it was completed in 2011, OUB Centre was renamed One Raffles Place.[40]

An index ranking released by the London-based research firm Z/Yen Group in April 2016 revealed that Singapore has overtaken Hong Kong as the world's third-best financial centre, behind London and New York.[41] With the recent referendum in the UK to exit from the European Union, and London's somewhat shaky position as a financial hub, Singapore looks set to move up a notch in the rankings of world's best financial centres.

Given the unrelenting pace of redevelopment and renewal in Singapore's CBD area, the building hardware at least – cast in concrete and encased in shiny steel and shimmering glass, and often flaunting world-class architects and designers – seems ready to face the challenges of the next 50 years. ♦

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"If I showed up in a feminine dress like this, people don't believe I'm a sculptor!"[1]

– Elsie Yu

Soft Hands
but
Steely Hearts
Women and Their Art

A coterie of women sculptors in Singapore has successfully redefined this once male-dominated art form. **Nadia Arianna Bte Ramli** tells you more.

Whether the medium is granite, bronze, steel or clay, the art of shaping, moulding and chiselling the material into a sculptural work of art demands more than brute strength. Yet, some hold the view that the art form requires certain masculine qualities in order to bend, carve or shape even the most malleable of materials into what may be deemed a "feminine" sculpture. What does gender have to do with art? The question was raised by Susie Lingham in the *Text & Subtext* forum in 2000:

"In sports events, men and women's events are separated on the argument that men have more physical strength. But in art, is there a necessity to set up another ring for women artists to wrestle for relevance in the art world? Is this not a way of marginalising women?"[2]

Women sculptors around the world, including those in Singapore, have wrestled countless obstacles in order to pursue their artistic passions. From sourcing of materials and seeking funds and opportunities to exhibit their works, to struggling with competing priorities and the challenges of being an artist in a monetised capitalist society, these are all admittedly not gender-specific issues. They are issues that all artists face – regardless of gender.

In spite of these obstacles, women sculptors in Singapore, from Kim Lim to Kumari Nahappan, have carved out certain success from whatever materials they could lay their hands on. The fruits of their labour stand in public, private and commercial spaces – a testament to the grit and gumption as well as the creative talents of a small but influential group of women sculptors in Singapore.

From Decoration to Art

Records show that a pioneer exhibition of women's work was held in October 1931 at the Young Women's Christian Association in Singapore. Works of artistic merit were grouped together along with "useful" crafts. A newspaper notice for the exhibition states that it included "all kinds of sewing, embroidery, art work, photography, cooking… by the young married women who are just beginning to realise the delights of making artistic and useful things".[3] In those early days, art by women seemed to be largely decorative in nature and merely a leisurely pursuit by women with time on their hands.

In the 1930s, a European sculptor by the name of Dora Gordine lived and worked in Singapore and Johor. During her time here, she was commissioned to create three sculptures for the Municipal Building (later renamed as the City Hall until its recent reincarnation as the National Gallery Singapore [NGS] together with the Supreme Court building next door).

The sculptures were of three heads depicting an Indian, a Chinese and a Malay.[4] These bronze busts were crafted in the classical tradition of "universal and idealised human forms" in three-dimensional style.[5] The purchase of these art works for the Municipal Building was described as a watershed event: "the first time in the history of this Colony that the acquisition of a subject of pure art has been realised".[6]

Coming at a time when most of the sculptures in the colony took the form of busts or statues, and were largely commem-

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orative or decorative in nature, Gordine's works of "pure art" were indeed welcome acquisitions. Today, these sculptures can be found in the Singapore Gallery of the NGS.

Beyond the Western community of artists, annual art exhibitions such as those held by the Singapore Art Society drew local artists to the fore. On 22 September 1955, the society held the first art show by Malayan women artists: altogether 60 compositions from 42 women from Malaya and Singapore were selected from 120 artistic submissions. Mrs Dorothy Bordass, chairman of the organising committee, was hopeful that the endeavour would encourage artistic expressions of local subject matter by local talents:

"The number of entries and the excellent, creative quality of individual canvases indicate that Malaya's women artists are finding encouragement in self-expression in local subject matter. Art can offer Malaya's women rewarding careers. Very little has been done so far to encourage artistic expression… It is our hope that women artists thus will be encouraged to advance their talents."[7]

Art teachers and students were encouraged to showcase their talents by

taking part in exhibitions. One such teacher was Mrs A. Gunaratnam. A former teacher at Raffles Girls' School, one of her plaster sculptures fetched the highest price for an artwork at a 1950 Singapore Art Society exhibition.[8] Priced at $500, this was a very respectable sum of money in those days for an artwork by a relatively unknown person.

Mrs Gunaratnam was one of the very few women sculptors in Singapore then, having begun exhibiting her works since 1948. Her talent did not go unnoticed – she sat on the selection committee for a 1951 art exhibition, alongside local pioneer artist Liu Kang and the last British Director of the Raffles Museum in Singapore, Dr Carl Alexander Gibson-Hill.[9] One of her sculptured portrait busts, "Mavis – A Study" (1950), was described by the art historian T. K. Sabapathy as remarkable for the time, with her attention to both anatomical details and characterisation.[10] Mrs Gunaratnam's reputation grew, and her statues and sculptures were even bought by private collectors in India and England.

While women artists were progressively moving beyond the home and expanding their artistic horizons, some were still caught in a bind between domestic responsibilities and their artistic inclinations.

At a women-only art exhibition in 1975, held in celebration of International Women's Year, some artists believed that women had

finally achieved complete independence while others felt that, unlike their male counterparts, some women had to sacrifice their artistic ambitions and turn their attention to the home and the needs of the family first.[11] This tension between social responsibilities and individual expression is a continued source of conversation for women working on sculpture and heavy art installation works even until today.[12]

A Collective Consciousness

In 2001, a cross-cultural collaboration exhibition, "Women Beyond Borders", with its aim to establish a community of women's voices and visions, ended its world tour with its Singapore exhibition. Initiated by a group of American women artists, "Women Beyond Borders: Singapore" was primarily a women's project. It saw established women artists as well as female members of the public creating sculptures, specifically, transforming a pinewood box, measuring a mere 2.5 by 3 by 2.5 inches, into a work of art.[13] The exhibition's focus was "not on account that they are women that alone made such work invaluable, but because largely owing to the theme, they reveal nuggets of thoughts and insights on themselves as women".[14]

At the Singapore edition of the exhibition, now leading artists such as Kumari Nahappan, Yvonne Lim and Suzann Victor were but a few of the women who created small but powerful sculptures from the boxes they were handed out. This global inquiry of what it meant to be a woman through art drew attention to the larger liberties afforded to women across national boundaries, providing a united yet diverse voice for the effort.

A decade earlier, art by women and about women was also the focus of the landmark 1991 National Museum Art Gallery exhibition, "Women and Their Art", curated by Susie Koay. It was a defining moment for the women's art scene in Singapore, given that the last all-female exhibition was held more than 30 years ago. Diana Chua's sculpture of a female torso, "In Between No.11", wrapped in mirror shards beneath a veneer of gauze, veered away from the conventional sensuality of smooth torsos and curved, inviting forms. This juxtaposition between hard and soft, and male and female, was just one of the many artworks that redefined "the stereotyped image of the female artist as one who paints pretty things" to "a serious artist of serious issues".[15]

A growing community of women artists, though not necessarily feminist artists – there is a difference – was further shaped by art forums such as Huangfu Binghui's

Text & Subtext and artist collectives such as Women In The Arts (WITAS)[16] and 5th Passage Artists Ltd. While these initiatives were not art-form specific, women sculptors also benefitted from the focus on the representation and network of women artists they could tap into. With diverse dialogues and initiatives, women's art and issues took shape within the community.

Shaping Interests

Sculpture as an art form in Singapore has generally been a less-travelled terrain in comparison with other art forms such as painting and pottery. Sabapathy described the entry of sculpture into the local art world as "rather timid and inconspicuous", first appearing sporadically in the 1950s in expositions that were otherwise dedicated to paintings.[17]

At the opening of the first exhibition dedicated to sculptural works in 1967, then deputy Prime Minister Toh Chin Chye called on artists to "organise a little movement to kindle the country's interest in sculptured art" that "could give life and beauty to the vast bareness of the city".[18] Fast forward 15 years later to 1982, Sabapathy noted the continued interest in painting over sculpture:

"It has been 15 years since the first national exposition. This neglect is a symptom of the condition of sculpture here. There is little doubt that it is secondary to painting, which dominates the art world here. The demands of the art market have only served to entrance the primacy of painting. The portable picture is mobile and seemingly self-effacing in that it is absorbed into the wall. This

enhances it as a commercial product and commodity."[19]

Women sculptors were thus venturing into what was a relatively small space in the arts scene. The hefty cost of creating sculptural exhibitions may be (and still is) a strain for some. 1995 Cultural Medallion recipient Han Sai Por's "20 Tonnes – Physical Consequences" (2002) cost about $20,000 to create, while construction costs alone for Elsie Yu's "Towards Excellence" (1987) was a whopping $80,000.[20]

While government initiatives such as the Public Sculpture Masterplan 2000 (and the more recent Public Art Trust) have sought to ease these costs and allow artists to concentrate on their work, private organisations are also important stakeholders in promoting the appreciation of sculpture as an art form. City Developments Limited and

its biennial Singapore Sculpture Award is one such example of a private corporation shaping the visibility and appreciation of sculpture in Singapore.[21]

CapitaLand, one of the largest real estate companies in Singapore, has commissioned public art for display at its commercial and residential premises. Its first work of art was Han's large-scale sculptural installation, "Shimmering Pearls" (2000) at Capital Tower in the heart of the financial district.[22] With corporate commissions, sculptors are able to work more freely on a more ambitious scale. However, because such commissioned works tend to be awarded to well-known sculptors, new and emerging talents run the risk of being ignored, irrespective of gender.

Creating dedicated spaces to showcase three-dimensional art was the next step in engendering public interest and encouraging the art form. Sculpture

Square, which opened in 1999, served this very purpose. Its inaugural exhibition, "Provocative Things", highlighted conventional sculptural works and more abstract sculptural installations. Chng Seok Tin's "Kuantan Boat Song" (1999), with coconut husks cast in bronze, and Kumari Nahappan's "precisely.....360" (1999), an installation of found objects, made of both natural and man-made material, fell into the latter category.

In 2001, the formation of the Sculpture Society, led by Han, further advanced the development and appreciation of sculpture through a tight-knit community of passionate sculptors.[23]

Labours of Love

It cannot be denied that for sculptures that emphasise a certain size, some physical strength is called for when working with the material. In a society given to using gender-related terms, such works have been described as "masculine". Elsie Yu's "Joyous Rivers" (1987), with curves of architectural steel that mimic the flow of life-giving river, has a massive base area of 27.9 sq m and reaches 10 m at its highest point. When it was first unveiled at the opening ceremony of Clean Rivers Commemoration '87, the press viewed her work as "most masculine".[24] Even so, Yu's metal sculptures, such as her 1992 work "Soaring Vision", also embody a certain sense of the feminine, with their fluid lines and refinement.

The exploration of the feminine and masculine binary cuts through a number of sculptures, pushing the boundaries of what an artwork by a female artist would look like. Early ceramic sculptures by Jessie Lim, described as having a mix of the "natural and metaphysical", seem to question this binary:

"Some people tell me, 'your work was neither feminine nor masculine – you don't know who made it.' I like that. I like that they can stand on their own."[25]

Hard and heavy materials, such as granite and marble, are challenging for both

(Left) "Soaring Vision", a 13-metre high bronze and stainless steel sculpture by Elsie Yu once stood at the Marina City Park. This is Yu's interpretation of Singapore's aspirations. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*
(Below) Han Sai Por at work on one of her sculptures. She was awarded the Cultural Medallion in 1995. *All rights reserved, Han, S. P. (2013). Moving Forest. Singapore: Singapore Tyler Print Institute.*
(Bottom) Chng Seok Tin with sculptures from her "Life Like Chess" exhibition in 2001. Photo was taken in Marina Bay against the Central Business District. *Courtesy of Chng Seok Tin.*
(Top right) Jessie Lim's ceramic sculpture, "Infinity" (2012), is a departure from her spiral sculptural ceramics. *Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*

male and female sculptors to manipulate into their desired shape and form. However, granite is a favourite medium of Han Sai Por's and constitutes a considerable part of her oeuvre. Her works are often inspired by nature, but "… not a slavish representation of visual form", rather being able "to make the subtle and small large and true to the stature of life's enormous possibilities".[26]

Han's marble work, "Growth" (1985), shows sensitivity in controlling and manipulating the material, "effect[ing] these stone surfaces with subtle, tactile nuances".[27] Her working relationship with materials has been described as loving and sympathetic, as she seeks to understand the characteristics of the materials. Instead of controlling and "fighting" hard materials like stone – as male sculptors are wont to do – she works with the natural curves and edges of the stone, allowing the natural formations to inspire the shape and order of each art piece.[28] Han's recent works have included paper-pulp media and printmaking, while still exploring and examining nature, such as products of the forest, including seeds and pods.

Kim Lim, an early Singaporean female sculptor, has attempted to distil the essence of nature and time into her stone sculptures. Shunning labels, she once shared in a 1981 interview that given her Asian heritage and background, her inspirations are vastly different from the traditions of the minimalists:

"I am far more motivated by the organic and by nature. Although my work is entirely abstract and perhaps visually does not necessarily relate to natural phenomena, my inspiration is often derived from natural rhythms, such as the human pulse, or by visually rhythmic things, such as vertebrae."[29]

Her stone sculptures, "Flow" (1982) and "Gobi" (1982), which were shown in a 1984 exhibition at the National Museum Art Gallery, Singapore, were described as a "joint venture: the balanced results of the willed and unwilled forces upon raw materials".[30] Her quiet approach was ahead of its time, given that the Singapore art scene during this period was more about figuration or the representational, and other "colourful noises" of the time.[31] With this, Kim Lim etched her name as one of the pioneer contemporary women artists in Singapore.

For 2005 Cultural Medallion recipient Chng Seok Tin, sculpture was "regarded as something of a rebirth" as she expanded her artistic repertoire to the tactile art form following that untimely loss of sight in 1988.[32] Chng began as a printmaker but has had a hand in installation work as well. Constantly exploring different ways of "making art", Chng writes:

"Well then, what is art? What is good art? Are the works in world class art museums considered first class *objet d'art?* After travelling and seeing so much, I have become unsure myself! All I know is that I am devoted to art making, and I do not really care if my works adhere to the aesthetic standards of most people…If you intentionally pursue perfection in art, then art would become dull and useless!"[33]

Natural Themes

Some of the early artworks by Romanian-born Singaporean sculptor Delia Prvacki, who works with materials such as bronze, glass fibre reinforced concrete, and ceramics, included motifs of nature. With a body of work spanning over 40 years, Prvacki's works include quiet, intimate pieces as well as bold and dramatic public installations.

For Prvacki, art is more than just an expression of the natural environment. Her public sculpture project, "Plein Air" (2006), was interactive and integrative with its surroundings. The sculptures were meant to look like they were "deposited by the ebb and flow of the ocean" and "had to appear natural in the landscape, like they were born there".[34] Her earlier stonework, "Grass Movement" (1993), articulated the more untamed nature of beauty with the horn-shaped pieces growing wildly out of the ground.[35]

Her more recent installation "Mine and Rare Earths" (2010) dealt with the environment differently, exploring the relationship between raw materials and ores drawn from the earth and their impact on new technologies and the global economy.[36] "Under the broad themes of nature, the environment of the city and nation-building", the massive mural, "Singapore Tapestry" (2015), was a community-based artwork guided by Prvacki. Commissioned by the Land Transport Authority for Marina South Pier MRT Station, Prvacki pulled together the "divergent inspirations" of nearly 2,000 participants in this ambitious work of public art.[37]

Representations and abstractions of nature figure strongly in Kumari Nahappan's sculptures too. While she engages in painting, mixed media and installation art, it is Nahappan's larger than life bronze sculptures of vibrant red capsicums "Pedas-Pedas"[38] (2006) behind the National Museum of Singapore, the supersized saga seed "Saga" (2007) at Singapore Changi Airport Terminal 3 and "Nutmeg & Mace" (2009) at ION Orchard that the public are most familiar with.

Saga seeds feature prominently in Nahappan's works. Sculptural works such as "Multiples" (2000) and "Saga" (2007), which draw on the "potency" of saga seeds, "loop back to the artist's childhood… [and] … to the garden – a primary resource and locus for inaugurating her art".[39] The intense red colour of these seeds is characteristic of her oeuvre. Her early sculptures, such as "Maia Two" (2005), have deep red hues and are named after stars, which Sabapathy describes as "embody[ing] kernels of energy".[40]

Sculpture Today

While Sculpture Square has since ceased operations as a dedicated space for sculptures, the art form has found its place firmly

Romanian-born Singaporean sculptor Delia Prvacki posing in front of her sculpture titled "7 Days" (2006), a composite of seven pieces made of glass reinforced concrete (GRC) with metallic sub-frames and handmade mosaics. *Courtesy of Delia Prvacki.*

alongside other forms of visual arts in private and public art galleries in Singapore.

Commissions of public art also continue to ensure the visibility of sculptural art in the Singapore landscape. As part of Singapore's Golden Jubilee celebrations in 2015, three new public sculptures were commissioned to mark the occasion. Departing from her signature stonework, Han Sai Por, the sole female sculptor who won a commission, created a monochromatic sculptural installation called "Harvest" (2015), which took pride of place at the Esplanade concourse from August 2015 to January 2016.[41]

Sculptures, particularly public sculptures, are meaningful only when they are considered in the context of their surroundings. In much the same way, despite the seemingly static nature of their works, women sculptors in Singapore have always been adapting to their environments, carving a space for themselves and proving that it takes more than sheer physical strength to turn a hunk of granite into a sublime sculptural art form. ◆

(Left) "Nutmeg & Mace" (2009) by Kumari Nahappan is a two-tonne bronze sculpture installed at the outdoor space of Ion Orchard shopping mall in the heart of Orchard Road. *All rights reserved, Sabapathy, T. K. (2013). Fluxion: Art & Thoughts: Kurmari Nahappan. Singapore: Editions Didier Millet.*
(Below) Kumari Nahappan working on the patina for a sculpture in Ayutthaya, Thailand, 2006. *All rights reserved, Sabapathy, T.K. (2013). Fluxion: Art & Thoughts: Kurmari Nahappan. Singapore: Editions Didier Millet.*
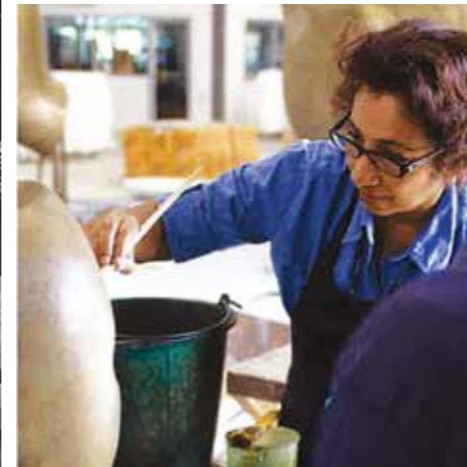
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Public Housing Private Lives

Incredibly, people living in some of the first one-room flats had to share their toilets and kitchens with strangers. **Yu-Mei Balasingamchow** tells you how far public housing has come since 1960.

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

I moved into a Housing and Development Board (HDB) flat for the first time in the late 1990s. It was a 10-year-old flat in a cosy estate in the east – nice and windy, receiving hardly any afternoon sun and within walking distance of an MRT station. Perhaps, most remarkably, from the common corridor outside my front door on the 11th floor, I had a partially unblocked view of the surroundings, which consisted mostly of low-rise buildings all the way to the sea, a glimmering slate-blue strip on the far horizon.

In the 17 years since, I've lived in five different HDB flats – all of which are or were older than that first one. Over years of viewing countless HDB flats of varying vintages, whether visiting friends or as a prospective tenant or buyer, I've often wondered what it is about the design and architecture of a flat that makes it feel welcoming and home-like.

I've also wondered about the social and environmental impact of high-rise living in an increasingly crowded island. Over one generation, from the 1960s to the 90s, we have been uprooted from homes mostly in or near the city centre and the Singapore River, and scattered all over a rapidly urbanised island.

We have been transformed from a people who lived in low-rise dwellings close to the land, organised in what urban development specialist Charles Goldblum termed a "relatively traditional Asian habitat", to a people who live in cookie-cutter and unapologetically modernist public housing, perfectly at ease with the idea of living 15, 20 or more storeys in the air.[1] Almost everyone moves house at least once in their lives; everyone knows how to use a lift and a rubbish chute; everyone is used to looking down at the tallest trees in the neighbourhood.

We are not alone. Hong Kong and major cities in South Korea and China have become just as densely packed with residential high-rises in the last few decades, if not more so than Singapore, while other cities across Asia and North America are sprouting residential skyscrapers in the same vein. Yet as psychologist Robert Gifford notes, "given the age of our species, living more than a few storeys up is a very recent phenomenon".[2]

Human beings have been clustering within urban settlements since the Neolithic Revolution about 12,500 years ago, but while we have been building massive monuments and landmarks for over a millennia, it is only in the last century or so that we have been living en masse in buildings taller than five storeys. Sociologists, psychologists, architects and urbanists are still mulling over the long-term implications of this phenomenon, which range from the behavioural and the political to the philosophical.

Building Fast and Furious: 1960–1965

In Singapore, high-rise residential housing took off when the HDB was formed on 1 February 1960 to replace the Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT), its colonial-era predecessor in charge of public housing. The HDB acted quickly to address the severe housing shortage: the oft-cited, hoary statistic is that within the first three years of its formation, the HDB had constructed 21,232 units – "just shy of the 23,019 units that SIT had managed in its 32 years of operations."[3] By the end of 1965, HDB's first five-year building programme saw the completion of 53,000 new flats, 3,000 more than its intended target.

Academic literature aside, people today tend to forget that HDB's apparent success during this period was in no small part due to its pragmatic focus on building "emergency" one-room flats, intended for rental only. As the nomenclature suggests, these were single-room units; toilet and

1-ROOM IMPROVED

CORRIDOR   ROOM   BA WC   KIT
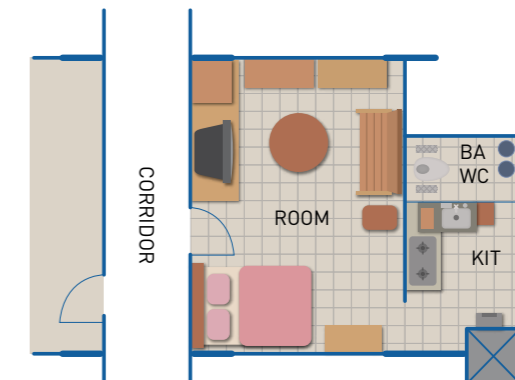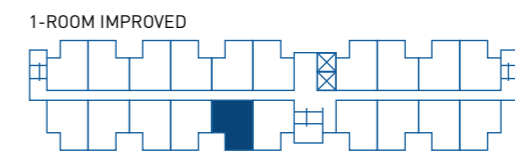
(Facing page) New flat dwellers waiting for then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew during his constituency tours of Tiong Bahru, Delta and Havelock housing estates in 1963. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*
(Top) Before people moved to high-rise HDB flats, some lived in decrepit shophouses like these on Hock Lam Street (c.1940s). When the occupants moved to HDB flats, they brought with them the habit of hanging laundry on bamboo poles suspended outside their windows. *Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*
(Above left) Typical 1960s block plan and floorplan of a one-room (Improved) HDB flat with a floor area of 32.8 sq m.
(Above right) HDB's early flats typically contained a row of one- or two-room flats along both sides of a long corridor. Such corridors were poorly ventilated, received little natural lighting, and magnified noise. *Courtesy of the blog ItchyFingers (https://myitchyfingers.wordpress.com/).*

kitchen facilities were sometimes communal. Imagine men and women from each floor sharing the same two toilets, or Chinese and Malay housewives cooking in the same communal kitchens. Difficult to imagine today, but this was the reality at the time, according to former HDB architect Alan Choe in an oral history interview with the National Archives of Singapore in 1997.[4]

Such flats were poorly lit and cramped, but also relatively easy and inexpensive to build – an important consideration at a time when housing was urgently needed for low-income families suddenly displaced by fire or floods. As Choe recalls:

"One-room apartments in those days were really basic. Today, they would be our slums... But that is how we started the public housing to achieve the target numbers. Because in those days target numbers were a more important priority than the niceties that we can afford today..."[5]

HDB's first five-year building programme also produced two- and three-room rental flats. These were distributed along a single corridor in blocks that were between five and 12 storeys tall. Although today we tend to think of the HDB "common corridor"

(Above) Newly erected two-room flats opposite Siglap Centre, the site of the former Siglap Market. The flats were built in 1963 to house residents of a *kampong* on the same site that had been razed by fire. The cluster of five blocks will be demolished soon to make way for a new housing project. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*
(Right) *Kampong* folks in the early 1960s loading their belongings onto a lorry and preparing for their move to high-rise living in HDB flats. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

as serving only one row of flats and looking out into open space, those early flats often contained a row of one- or two-room flats along *both* sides of the corridor. Although more economical to build, such corridors were poorly ventilated, received little natural lighting, and trapped or magnified noise.[6]

In 2008, I moved into a two-room HDB flat in a cluster of five-storey blocks at Siglap, just opposite Siglap Centre, the site of the former Siglap Market. The flats were built in 1963 to house residents of a *kampong* on the same site that had been razed by fire. There were shops on the ground floor and a single staircase in each block (with no lifts). About one-third of the units were HDB rental flats; the rest were occupied by a mix of long-time residents, who couldn't imagine living anywhere else, and newcomers like me.

Some of my friends were surprised that I had decided to rent such a small and barely renovated flat. I was simply charmed by the flat's privacy (it was a top-floor corner unit), its view overlooking the neighbourhood buzz at the corner of East Coast Road and Siglap Road, and its classic fixtures like decorative metal window grilles and the original timber-framed front door with recessed rectangle panels.

Moreover, it was a cosy neighbourhood, with only four blocks of five storeys each, and on a comforting human scale – a characteristic of first-generation HDB estates, which were often sited close to the city centre on whatever limited plots of land were available, not yet in sprawling new towns. Even the inconvenience of climbing up and down five floors to get to my flat made real, in terms of physical experience, the fact of high-rise living.

True, by 21st-century standards the flat seemed small (it measured just 41 sq m). But I was just one person; many accounts from the 1960s tell of large families moving into such flats or smaller, along with the possessions they had accumulated in more spacious *kampong* houses or shophouses.

Conceptually, of course, HDB residents in the 1960s had to make far greater adjustments to the new-fangled features of flat living. As Choe said in his interview, "In the past you lived in your own ground, you build your *attap* hut, you have grounds around, you grow your chickens, you grow everything. Suddenly you are put into a pigeonhole, one-room apartment, two-room apartment."[7]

Choe described new flat-dwellers who didn't know at first how to unlock their Naco window louvres and complained to HDB that these were faulty. Those used to living in a *kampong* had to learn new habits for dressing casually at home (since strangers might walk past the corridor and see the occupants in various stages of undress) or buying food at the market (instead of growing their own food). Still others told of residents who brought pigs and poultry from their *kampong* to their new flats, even teaching the bewildered animals to climb the stairs. There were also stories of elderly people who lived on higher floors and felt "trapped" in their flats as they dared not use the lifts for fear of breakdowns.[8]

Ultimately, the people who moved into HDB flats in the early 1960s – especially those who were resettled against their will – were often being uprooted from the only means of livelihood, lifestyle and community that they had ever known. Over half a century later, one cannot fully discount the

psychological and social disruption they must have experienced during the transition. That world seems all the more distant since the surviving blocks of one-room and two-room flats are not easy to spot today – obscured, overshadowed and outnumbered as they are by younger, larger and more attractive blocks. Many have been demolished and indeed, the flats at Siglap where I used to live will be razed this year to make way for a new housing project.

HDB as a Way of Life: 1965–1975

Although the HDB continued to build one-room and two-room rental flats until 1982, its priorities clearly shifted from the mid-1960s onwards "from speed and expediency to amenity and quality", as stated in its 1966 annual report.[9] Since the housing shortage had been resolved, HDB could focus on building larger flats with better designs in more optimally planned housing estates. The late 1960s to the 70s thus saw the emergence of not only a much wider range of flats to cater to people of different economic levels and household sizes, but also distinctive architecture such as the "point block" design which, at 20 and later 25 storeys, towered over the old rectangular "slab blocks".

As it experimented with new designs, the HDB was shifting to not only "build for shelter" but "build for good architecture", in the words of its former chief executive officer Liu Thai Ker.[10] When Liu first joined the HDB in 1969 as head of its new research and design section, he found that there were no design, building or planning guidelines to govern such things as how far one HDB

block should be from another, how many flats should be built in each block or neighbourhood (thus determining the density of the estate), or the mix of residential, commercial and industrial facilities in each estate.

Even the room sizes and designs of the early one-, two- and three-room flats were not strictly uniform. Flats sometimes contained awkward L-shaped rooms or long corridors, which residents complained were a waste of space. There were rooms or toilets that didn't ventilate directly into the exterior of the flat, which made the living environment less than salubrious.

Liu and his colleagues at HDB developed new guidelines to standardise the building types, floor spaces, the number of rooms within each flat as well as room sizes. They also applied principles of building science to address the practical realities of living in the tropics, taking into consideration the prevailing winds, angle of the sun, and various types of sun hoods and window hoods that could be built to shield the flats from the tropical heat. As Liu said in an

oral history interview with the National Archives of Singapore in 1996, "You cannot cut off everything – like morning sun and late afternoon sun, we have to accept. We [can] cut out the sun during the day, when it's very hot."[11]

Similarly, HDB architects studied how windows and roofs could be redesigned so that residents would not have to close all their windows when it rained. The latter was absolutely necessary in early HDB flats because the rain would enter and wet the flat interior (this used to happen in the kitchen of my Siglap flat). However, if all the windows were shut, the flats became stuffy and claustrophobic, particularly during the monsoon season when it pours heavily for hours on end.

HDB engineers found that if the rainwater ran uninterrupted off the roof, it would fall to the ground "like a bedsheet", as Liu described it, and this large "sheet" of water would be sucked through an open window.[12] However, if the rainwater first fell from the roof onto an inclined plane, it would break up into water droplets and then fall to the ground like scattered raindrops. These were less likely to be sucked through open windows, allowing residents to leave their windows open for ventilation when it rained.

Another perennial consideration in HDB planning was (and still is) how to have an estate layout that is attractive and

interesting, without exposing flats to the full intensity of the afternoon sun. The typical guiding principle is to orientate the building towards north-south, but as Liu pointed out, "Of course you cannot have 100 percent [of flats] facing north-south. You have a certain percentage facing east-west."[13] The question of how to mitigate the latter came to be incorporated into HDB's building plans; for example, low-rise blocks might be built along an east-west orientation, but would be shaded by trees or taller blocks to limit their exposure to the rising and setting sun.

As Singapore modernised and HDB estates became larger and more complex, the human factors that affect comfort and liveability also came to bear. By 1983, for example, Liu wrote that HDB's approach to environmental design and building orientation was sensitive not only to the angle of the sun and the wind direction, but also to the impact of external traffic noise. He described how high-rise buildings were shielded from road noise by locating low-rise buildings in front of them; the low-rise blocks in turn were shielded by "earth mounds" facing the road.[14]

Having low-rise buildings in a densely inhabited estate served another important function: to maintain a sense of human scale in the built environment. Liu added that while most HDB blocks ranged from nine to 13 storeys in height, every precinct would also have some two- to four-storey blocks. Although he did not articulate it as such, there seems to have been an awareness that while Singaporeans had become accustomed to living in high-rise blocks, the environment would nonetheless benefit from having building heights that conformed more closely to human proportions.

This is the sort of thinking that has since become familiar in the work of architect Jan Gehl and others like him. They argue that having a sense of human scale in the urban environment is precisely what draws people to engage and participate in public and community life, and develop emotional connections to a place.

In spite of the most well-intentioned building or planning guidelines of the time, not every HDB flat or estate could be built to optimise this contemporary notion of urban liveability. I count myself lucky that I've had the opportunity to live in two housing estates built in the 1970s that were favourably designed. In both cases, they were high-rise blocks: in Marine Parade, I lived on the 18th floor of a common corridor flat that was blessed with a partial view of the East Coast Parkway and the sea; in Queenstown I lived one floor higher, looking out at other flats. While researching this essay, I also learned that the Queenstown block at

(Left) The first HDB "point blocks" – at 20 or 25 storeys high – were built in the late 1960s. In this photo taken at Bendemeer Road in the 1970s, the "point blocks" tower over the surrounding rectangular "slab blocks". In between the point blocks is a row of low-rise shops. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*
(Below) A mix of low-rise and high-rise HDB flats in Toa Payoh, with a playground in the foreground, likely photographed in the late 1960s. Interspersing buildings of different heights helped to maintain a sense of human scale in the environment. *Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*

Mei Ling Street was one of the first two HDB "point blocks" ever constructed.[15]

Both flats were on a north-south facing, well-ventilated (even during monsoonal downpours) and nestled among densely inhabited clusters of another 15 or so similarly tall blocks. The estates had been designed to include markets, hawker centres, coffee shops and schools within their confines. Despite living so far above ground level, on quiet afternoons I could sometimes hear the faint sounds of children playing at the void deck or a bus passing by in the distance. And although I was surrounded by several thousand residents within a short walking radius, within the flat it felt quiet and private enough to be a personal refuge.

However, perhaps because of my own introverted nature, or because I was living on my own and working from home, one aspect of HDB life that I confess I neglected was getting to know my neighbours. This was in fact an initial cause of concern to urban planners and sociologists in the 1960s and 70s as Singaporeans were moved into ever higher and more densely populated flat environments. How would strangers from different cultures and backgrounds get along in such tight quarters? Would it lead to conflict or community? And could the design of buildings and neighbourhoods do anything to make living in HDB estates more pleasant?

Villages in the Sky

Given Singapore's small land area and the swelling population, building vertically seems intuitive today, but in the 1960s, the government's commitment to high-rise public housing went against global trends. Cities in the West had numerous cautionary tales of post-war modernist high-rise public housing gone wrong, from Pruitt-Igoe in St Louis and Cabrini-Green in Chicago in the US, to Trellick Tower in London.[16]

However, as sociologists like Gerda Wekerle have pointed out, "Pruitt-Igoe is no more representative than is the John Hancock Center of high-rise living", and much research about the problems of high-rise housing is specifically about "the problems created by concentrating multi-problem families in housing stigmatised by the rest of society."[17] On the other hand, after looking at the Singapore example, sociologist Chua Beng Huat has pointed out that rather than relying on "simplistic architectural determinism", "perhaps the problem with high-rise public housing is not with the built-form but with the financing, management and, indeed, the tenants themselves."[18]

The relationship between the built form and the people who live in the flats

has been examined since the early years of HDB. One distinctive feature that has received particular attention is the common corridor, which was originally designed as a practical, cost-effective method of connecting flats in a building, but took on other meanings after residents moved in.

Given the small size of the flats in the 1960s, which limited opportunities to socialise, the common corridor became a communal space among neighbours. It gradually became akin to that of a "residential street" where neighbours encountered one another informally and children could play safely near their homes.[19] In the 1970s, there were even stories of "a few enterprising older persons" who set up makeshift stalls in common corridors to sell sweets and nuts; these stalls in turn became focal points where residents (at the time mostly housewives and the elderly) would gather to chat and exchange news.[20]

Planning something as apparently straightforward as the length of the common corridor, therefore, became an important factor in engendering neighbourly relations. Writing in 1973, Liu Thai Ker described how in the new Marine Parade estate, the long common corridor was broken up into shorter segments of 60 to 80 ft (18 to 40 m) that could become "a safer and thus more useful place for the kids [to play]", and also "more intimate and popular as a social gathering place".[21]

Indeed, the question of juggling numbers to create a sense of local community and identity in HDB estates was critical in planning not only individual floors, but entire blocks of flats. Liu recalled in his oral history interview:

"How [do] you compose a block? In fact, at some stage we talked about the "courtyard in the sky". That means you group four to eight units of an apartment around a corridor... Instead of 20, 30 units sharing one corridor, you break it up into groups of four or eight. It's amazing how by having only four or eight families sharing a corridor, the sense of community is very strong.

... If you look at the whole block, you imagine that there are maybe a dozen or two, or a few dozen small villages, so to speak, in the sky, consisting of four to eight families [each]."[22]

Of course, despite these architectural interventions, neighbourly relations in the early years of HDB (and even today) were

not always rosy. In the first few decades, there were plenty of complaints from HDB residents relating mostly to social frictions that accompanied the sudden onset of high-density living. For example, a survey of HDB residents in 1972 found that a common complaint was about "rubbish thrown from upstairs" and noise. Even though every flat had its own rubbish chute, some residents left their rubbish along common corridors and staircases and even threw them out their windows.

There were also complaints about noise and, in particular, about children, who were accused of vandalising lifts and causing breakdowns. Moreover, families felt there were inadequate play areas for children in the housing estates. Parents tended to confine their children to playing inside their flats or along the corridor outside their flats within sight and to ensure that they did not fall in with "bad company".

Yet despite these problems, studies also found that after the first year or two of social adjustment, HDB residents came to value the "spacious, clean and pleasant environment of the new flats," as well as the convenience of electricity, running water and security.[23] The demand for HDB flats shot up. As Liu recollected, whereas previously people had written letters to the press to complain about being forcibly resettled into HDB flats, by the 1970s such letters were grumbles instead about why it took so long for them to get their flats.

A Sign of Home

I now live in a second-floor HDB flat in Toa Payoh. It was built in the 1980s, I am told, on the site of a former *kampong* that presumably had to make way for the expanding HDB new town. After decades of flitting between high-rise apartments, I am now living close to the ground, where chirping birds in the trees are sometimes at eye level from my window and the neighbourhood cat from the void deck occasionally trails me up the stairs to my front door.

Moving from high-rise to low-rise has reminded me that there are many aspects of HDB living that are fostered by the design of the flat and the neighbourhood, which people have come to take for granted. As Liu wrote in 1973, "The debate is not on high-rise versus low-rise, but on identifying the shortcomings and looking for compensating amenities."[24]

Perhaps the best image that captures how the design, actual use and symbolism of HDB flats come together is the now ubiquitous scene of laundry hanging on bamboo poles outside kitchen windows and flapping in the wind. Regardless of flat type, income level or cultural background, all HDB residents – save the few exceptions who own energy-guzzling clothing dryers – share a common practice: they dry their laundry in the sun, even though this means putting one's most intimate attire on public view. It also has implications for neighbourliness

A spectacular view of the upmarket The Pinnacle@Duxton HDB flats juxtaposed with older 1970s-style flats at Everton Park (photographed in 2016). *Photo by Darren Soh.*

– everyone knows that it's not polite to let one's wet clothing drip onto the neighbour's laundry downstairs.

This practice of hanging clothes on bamboo poles originated with shophouse dwellers in Singapore's city centre, long before the rise of public flats (just look at any archival photo of Chinatown or Singapore River neighbourhoods).

Interestingly, in his oral history interview, Liu presents his view on the "unsightliness" of laundry hung from HDB windows:

"If you look at it from the sociological or psychological point of view, I think the clothing hanging at the window tells people that this estate is alive, it's teeming with people. It's not aesthetically pleasing only by Western standard. But by Asian standard, it's fine, it's Asian.

You know, there have been many attempts [by] people [who] have been telling me to get rid of this clothes hanging. I was never interested because I felt that it is a sign of welcoming home. It gives you a warm feeling. I was never interested to get rid of it."[25]

Critics may characterise – or caricature – HDB life as compartmentalised, emotionless and dystopian, and HDB flats as drab, homogenous environments with equally colourless inhabitants. Yet somewhere between the imperatives of modernist efficiency and socialist-inflected social re-organisation, several generations of Singaporeans have not only adapted to live in these admittedly utilitarian structures, but created their own meanings in the space, beyond what the original planners and designers could have envisioned. ♦

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TIME-HONOURED
TEMPLE DESIGN

Sri Mariamman Temple is Singapore's oldest Hindu shrine. **Anasuya Soundararajan** and **Sri Asrina Tanuri** describe the architectural features of this landmark.

d "Do not live in a place where there are no temples" cautions an age-old Indian aphorism. In keeping with the sagely advice of his forefathers, one of the first things that Naraina Pillai did after his arrival in Singapore in 1819 was to establish a Hindu temple for his fellow countrymen.

In 1827, four years after the land was acquired, Sri Mariamman Temple, Singapore's oldest Hindu place of worship, finally stood proud along South Bridge Road. The nondescript wood-and-*attap* construction erected then was a simple affair compared to the splendidly intricate and colourful structure that attracts Hindu worshippers as well as busloads of tourists today.

Located in the heart of Chinatown, the temple's elaborate *gopuram*[1] has been a landmark for generations of Hindu wor-

shippers in Singapore.[2] In deference to its architectural and historical significance, the temple was gazetted as a national monument on 28 June 1973.[3]

Singapore's First Hindu Temple

The history of the Sri Mariamman Temple is closely intertwined with the arrival of the first Indians to Singapore, soon after Stamford Raffles established a British trading post on the island in February 1819.[4] South Indian migrants to Singapore, feeling displaced in a new land, brought with them the cultural and religious practices of the subcontinent, including the worship of Mariamman, the goddess of rain. In Hindu spirituality, the "mother" deity is known for her power to protect people from harm and to cure epidemic illnesses and diseases.[5]

It is not known which part of India Naraina Pillai originated from; he arrived in Singapore with Raffles on the latter's second visit to the newly colonised island in June 1819, and is the first recorded Indian immigrant in Singapore.[6] Prior to this, Pillai worked as a government clerk with the British East India Company in Penang. Good fortune favoured Pillai, and before long, he became a successful entrepreneur and community leader, and set up the island's first brick kiln at Mount Erskine (present-day Tanjong Pagar). He also persuaded several Indian bricklayers, carpenters and artisans from Penang and South India to join him in Singapore. Recognising his growing influence in the Indian community, the British appointed Pillai as leader of the Indian community in December 1822.[7]

Pillai was greatly respected by the early Indian settlers in Singapore, who sought his advice and consulted him on important matters. He, in return, strived to improve the lives of the newly arrived settlers.[8] Because religion and spirituality were so central to the lives of these Indian immigrants, one of the first things Pillai did was to apply to

the East India Company for land to erect a Hindu temple.

In response, the British authorities allotted a plot of land along Telok Ayer Bay, where Telok Ayer Street is located today. Pillai declined the offer because the location was too far away from sources of fresh water that are so vital for Hindu temple rituals. Never one to give in easily, he continued to petition the East India Company officials to allocate a new site.[9]

In 1821, the British Resident William Farquhar granted Pillai a site close to the freshwater stream near Stamford Canal. However, the Town Planning Committee had other plans for the area, and Pillai's hope of building a Hindu temple was once again dashed. It was only in 1823 that Pillai was finally given a suitable plot of land at South Bridge Road.[10] The site is marked as "Kling Chapel"[11] in the 1828 edition of the "Plan of the Town of Singapore", first drawn in 1823 by Lieutenant Philip Jackson, the Surveyor of Public Lands appointed by Raffles.[12]

The temple that Pillai first built in 1827 was a simple wood-and-*attap* (palm frond) structure. This was replaced in 1843 by a brick building, thought to have been erected by Indian convicts[13] and craftsmen from Madras (now Chennai), employed for their mastery in plasterwork.[14] The major part of the temple's present structure is believed to date back to another major reconstruction between 1862 and 1863.[15] The sculptures and ornamentations added during this period were created by skilled craftsmen from the Nagapattinam and Cuddalore districts of Tamil Nadu in South India.[16]

With each extension, repair and restoration over the subsequent decades, Sri Mariamman Temple has become a rich physical repository of architectural history,

its finely wrought structures and ornamentations belying the blood, sweat and grime of human toil over a period of more than one-and-a-half centuries.

The temple was last re-consecrated in April 2010, in accordance with the Hindu custom that requires temples to be restored to their original splendour every 12 years.[17] As it is today as with times past, each time the temple is renovated and re-consecrated, artisans and sculptors from South India are engaged to do the work.[18]

A Place for the Community

A Hindu temple is both a sacred and secular space. It serves as a place of worship as well as a venue of congregation for social and cultural functions such as celebrations of festivals and marriages.

During colonial times, Sri Mariamman Temple also served as a temporary shelter for newly arrived Indian immigrants. It provided them with lodgings until they found work and more permanent accommodations. Historically, the temple also served as the Registry of Marriages for the Hindu community. At the time, only temple priests were authorised to solemnise Hindu marriages in Singapore. The temple *panchayat* or council of elders also helped to solve marriage disputes when they arose. In addition, the temple acted as the Registry of Deaths for Hindus until the civil registry took over this function.[19]

Today, the temple has become a historical landmark even as it continues to serve generations of Hindu devotees. In deference to the temple, the two streets flanking it were named Temple Street and Pagoda Street, the latter taking the cue from the temple's pagoda-like *gopuram*. The temple is also

the focal point for Theemithi, the annual firewalking festival that has been held on its grounds since 1840.[20]

Temple Architecture

Most Hindu temples in Singapore resemble the temples of South India as they are modelled along the Dravidian style of architecture.[21] These temples are dedicated to various Hindu gods and goddesses, some with more than one deity presiding in each building of worship.

Statues of deities are placed in shrines within the temples. The temples typically feature sculptures and statues, and the inner walls are embellished with murals depicting scenes from Hindu mythology.[22] The architecture of the temples comprises three main elements: a *gopuram* or entrance tower adorned with statues; a *mandapam* or prayer hall for worship; and *vimanam* or domes that indicate shrines beneath them.[23]

The Gopuram

The *gopuram* refers to the pyramidal-shaped tower at the temple entrance and is an important feature in South Indian temples. Its great height serves a purpose, acting as a beacon for devotees from afar and allowing them to pray or meditate in preparation for their entrance into the temple.[24] The five-tiered *gopuram* of the Sri Mariamman Temple is perhaps its most striking feature and is a much-photographed icon on South Bridge Road.[25]

The five-metre-high *gopuram*, which faces east, is adorned with sculptures representing the divine trinity of Vedic mythology[26] – Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

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(Facing page) Sri Mariamman Temple, c.1900. The three-tiered *gopuram* was a slimmer and sparsely decorated structure compared to the present five-tiered tower that was rebuilt in 1936. *Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*
(Below left) Three of the four *vimanam* (domes) marking the location of the shrines that house the statues of Hindu deities sometime in the late 19th century. *Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*
(Below right) The *vimanam*, decorated with sculptures of Hindu deities and capped with small pinnacles, have become more ornate and elaborate over the years, with the last major facelift taking place in 2009. *Photographed in 2016 by the writers.*

These three gods are responsible for the creation, preservation and destruction of the world respectively.[27] Three-dimensional sculptures and carvings depicting the three gods and their many reincarnations embellish the four sides of the tower, presenting a stunning visual tableaux of scenes from Hindu religion and mythology.[28]

In 1936, the three-tiered gopuram was raised into its present five-tiers. In the 1960s, the *gopuram* was restored and decorated with the elaborate sculptures and carvings that you see today.[29] Photographs of the original three-tiered *gopuram* show a slimmer and more sparsely decorated structure compared to the present broader and more ornate tower. The sides of the old *gopuram* also appear to be steeper than the new one.[30] Beneath the *gopuram* is a pair of heavy, double-leafed timber main doors that open into the main hall of the temple.[31]

Craftsmen from South India drew their inspiration not only from Indian tradition, but also from the military traditions of colonial India. Hence, they incorporated Indian sepoys (soldiers recruited by the British in India), dressed in khaki uniforms and armed with rifles, into the collection of the sculptures carved into the *gopuram* as well as on the walls of the temple. In 1971, however, the sepoy statues on the *gopuram* were removed

during renovation works and replaced with figures clad in Indian traditional costumes.[32]

The Mandapam

The entrance of the temple leads to a main hall or *mandapam*, which is flanked by a series of square columns ornamented with statues of deities.[33] Along the north and south elevations of the hall is an arcade of trefoil arched openings. The main design elements of the *mandapam* are its colourful ceiling and the series of columns that give definition to the vast space.[34]

The ceiling of the hall is decorated with elaborate paintings, including that of a *mandala*, a circular diagram that symbolises the sublime state of Nirvana,[35] and Hindu gods such as Lord Ganesha[36] and Goddess Saraswathi[37]. On the walls along the temple columns and in the inner sanctums are hand-painted murals of various deities, always restored to their original vivid hues before each temple re-consecration.[38] The highly skilled painters, who hail from Tamil Nadu, have to lie flat on their backs to paint the intricate ceiling panels of the *mandapam*.[39]

The original *attap* walkway that connected the main entrance to the principal shrine of Sri Mariamman was destroyed in a fire in 1910. A permanent walkway,

which still stands today, was designed and completed in 1916.[40]

The Vimanam

A decorated dome known as a *vimanam* signifies the presence of a shrine or altar beneath it.[41] There are four such *vimanam*, and these are all located in the west elevation of the temple.

Each *vimanam* is an onion-shaped structure, decorated with colourful painted sculptures and capped with small pinnacles.[42] Below the main *vimanam* is the shrine of Sri Mariamman, the presiding deity of the temple. The other three *vimanam* are located above the shrines for Lord Rama, Lord Subramanya[43] and Goddess Drowpathai Amman[44].

Shrines

The main shrine directly facing the entrance of the temple is that of the principle deity Sri Mariamman. In front of her is a statue of Sinna Amman or Little Goddess. The statue is a small representation of Sri Mariamman installed in the original temple by Naraina Pillai in 1827. The shrine of Sri Drowpathai Amman, the goddess honoured in the annual firewalking ceremony, is the second most important shrine in the temple.

The shrine of Sri Mariamman, the presiding deity, takes prime position directly in front of the temple entrance, holding a trident in her left hand. At the base of the statue in front of Sri Mariamman is a tiny statue of Sinna Amman or Little Goddess, installed in the original temple by Naraina Pillai in 1827. *Photographed in 2016 by the writers.*

The temple also has shrines dedicated to the goddesses Durgai Amman[45], Periyachi Amman[46] and Kaliamman or Kali, the destroyer of evil forces.

Temple Grounds

There are two smaller and separate shrines scattered in the temple grounds honouring Lord Ganesha and Sri Aravan, a character from the Indian epic the *Mahabharata*. The viewing gallery on the left perimeter of the

temple is used by devotees to view the on-goings of temple rituals and festivals. Also within the temple grounds are a kitchen, staff quarters and a wedding hall with a separate entrance on Pagoda Street.

The entire temple complex is surrounded by a high boundary wall surmounted by figures of sacred cows placed at regular intervals. The cow, which is revered in Hinduism, symbolises Mother Earth, strength, abundance, selfless giving and the sustenance of life. ◆

Temple Milestones		
1827	Opens as a small wood-and-*attap* structure.	1984 — Construction of two-storey wedding hall; restoration of sculptures and paintings; extension of the *vimanam*; building of the new Sundara Vinayagar sanctum, which houses the Lord Ganesha deity, to replace the old one.
1843	Brick building replaces the wood-and-*attap* structure.	
1862 –1863	Major reconstruction of the temple takes place.	
1936	Major facelift, including construction of five-tiered *gopuram*.	1996 — Addition of elevated viewing gallery; construction of three-storey annex with a separate entrance on Pagoda Street; restoration and repainting of murals, statues and sculptures.
1949	Minor repair works carried out, including a fresh coat of paint.	
1960s	Restoration and decoration of the *gopuram* with elaborate sculptures and carvings.	2009 — Undergoes $3-million facelift; restoration of decorative statues, repainting of wall murals, waterproofing and strengthening of the roof, and the expansion of the administrative offices.
1971	Addition of new statues and murals; removal of some statues, such as those of the Indian sepoys.	

(Above) The original three-tiered *gopuram* (tower) was rebuilt in 1936 into its present five tiers. This is a 1970 postcard view of the *gopuram*. *Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*
(Right) The five-tiered *gopuram* (tower) as it looks today after the temple underwent a major restoration in 2009. *Photographed in 2016 by the writers.*

Notes

1 A *gopuram* is the pyramidal tower erected over the entrance of South Indian Hindu temples.
2 Liu, G. (1996). *In granite and chunam: The national monuments of Singapore* (p. 114). Singapore: Landmark Books. Call no.: RSING 725.94095957 LIU
3 Netto, G. (1961). *Indians in Malaya: Historical facts and figures* (p. 17). Singapore: George Netto. Call no.: RCLOS 331.62540595 NET
4 Soundararajan, N. S. (1971). The history of the Sri Mariamman Temple. In *Cinkappūr Srī Māriyamman Kōvil Makā Kumpāpiṣēka malar = Sri Mariamman Temple Maha Kumbabishegam Souvenir* (p. 65). Singapore: Sri Mariamman Devasthanam. Call no.: Tamil RCLOS 294.535095957 SIN
5 Hindu Endowments Board. (2014). *Sri Mariamman Temple*. Retrieved from Hindu Endowments Board website.
6 Uma Devi, G. (2009). *Resonance: Songs of our forefathers* (p. 49). Singapore: Preservation of Monuments Board. Call no.: RSING 725.94095957 RES
7 Sanmugam, E., et al. (Eds.). (2009). *Sacred sanctuary: The Sri Mariamman Temple* (p. 10). Singapore: Sri Mariamman Temple. Call no.: RSING 294.535095957 SAC
8 Sanmugam, 2009, p. 10.
9 Lee, G. B. (2002). *The religious monuments of Singapore: Faiths of our forefathers* (p. 72). Singapore: Preservation of Monuments Board & Landmark Books. Call no.: RSING 726.095957 LEE; Ong, C. S. (1971, September 11). Discovering Singapore. *The New Nation*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
10 Lee, 2002, p. 72; *The New Nation*, 11 Sep 1971.
11 The term "kling" or "keling", first mentioned in the *Sejarah Melayu* or *Malay Annals* written between the 15th and 16th centuries, was used in colonial Malaya

to describe people from the Indian subcontinent. Over time, the term has taken on derogatory connotations and is today regarded by Indians as offensive.
12 Uma Devi, 2009, p. 49.
13 Singapore was once a penal colony, and the first shipment of Indian prisoners to Singapore took place in 1825. See Tan, B. (2015, Oct–Dec). Convict labour in colonial Singapore. *BiblioAsia, 11*(3), 36–41.
14 Liu, 1996, p. 114; Sanmugam, 2009, p. 15.
15 Liu, G. (1984). *Pastel portraits: Singapore's architectural heritage* (p. 126). Singapore: Singapore Coordinating Committee. Call no.: RSING 722.4095957 PAS
16 Sanmugam, 2009, p. 13.
17 Liu, 1996, p. 114.
18 Lee, 2002, p. 72.
19 Uma Devi, 2009, p. 49; Sanmugam, 2009, p. 15.
20 Uma Devi, 2009, p. 49; Sanmugam, 2009, p. 15; Leong, W. K. (1998, October 8). Walking on fire for his dead parents. *The Straits Times*, p. 27. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
21 The Dravidian architectural style originated from the southern part of the Indian subcontinent and consists primarily of temples with pyramidal-shaped towers.
22 Khoo, B. L. (1972, November 24). Singapore's Hindu temples. *The New Nation*, p. 11. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
23 Uma Devi, 2009, p. 49.
24 Lee, 2002, p. 76.
25 Lee, 2002, p. 76.
26 Vedic mythology is derived from the Vedas, a large body of Indian scriptures that laid down the basis of classical Hinduism.
27 Oldest place for the Hindus. (1981, December 13). *The Straits Times*, p. 10. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
28 Lee, 2002, p. 76.

29 Uma Devi, 2009, p. 49.
30 Sanmugam, 2009, p. 13.
31 Liu, 1996, p. 115.
32 Lee, E. (1990). *Historic buildings of Singapore* (p. 65). Singapore: Preservation of Monuments Board. Call no.: RSING 720.95957 LEE; Sanmugam, 2009, p.17.
33 Lee, 2002, p. 76.
34 Liu, 1996, p. 115.
35 Lee, 2002, p. 76.
36 Lord Ganesha is the elephant-headed god who symbolises wisdom and prosperity, and is believed to be the remover of all obstacles. He is a major god in the Hindu pantheon and is worshipped at the beginning of all undertakings.
37 Goddess Saraswathi is the goddess of knowledge, music and the arts.
38 Yen, F. (2010, April 6). Sri Mariamman Temple unveils its new look. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from Factiva.
39 Tay, S. C. (2010, April 10). Brighter and better. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from Factiva.
40 Sanmugam, 2009, p. 14.
41 Lee, 2002, p. 76.
42 Liu, 1996, p. 115.
43 Lord Subramanya is the Hindu God of War.
44 Goddess Drowpathai Amman is one of the most important female characters in the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. She is sometimes portrayed as the Mother-Goddess.
45 Goddess Durgai Amman is the mother of the universe and believed to be the power behind the creation, preservation and destruction of the world.
46 Goddess Periyachi Amman is considered as the protector of children and mothers, and is associated with childbirth and pregnancy. She is recognised by her eight arms and fearsome appearance.

The Padang

Centrepiece of Colonial Design

This expanse of green fringed by grand colonial edifices in the city centre is a statement of British might, as **Lai Chee Kien** tells us.

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One of the more enduring legacies of the colonial era in Southeast Asia is the spatial design and metropolitan planning that Western powers left behind in the cities they occupied. Spatial design principles that developed in European cities were superimposed onto the landscapes of colonised Southeast Asian cities, replacing the indigenous land and water forms that existed for centuries. In Singapore, the Padang – the expanse of green opposite the National Gallery Singapore and bookended by the Singapore Cricket Club and the Singapore Recreation Club – is one such example.

The Padang in Singapore

The British occupiers of Singapore, led by Stamford Raffles, altered the coastal landscapes of the island soon after their arrival in 1819. Recognising the defensive advantages of a hill overlooking the colonial settlement and anchorage areas, Raffles commissioned a hilltop fort for military surveillance over the settlement plains.[1]

In 1823, Lieutenant Philip Jackson, whom Raffles had appointed as Surveyor of Public Lands, drew a new urban plan for the town under his direction. The Raffles Town Plan (or Jackson Plan as it was also known) – taking heed of the precedent set by the British in colonial Calcutta – showed a contiguous strip of artificial landscape extending from the sea shore to the closest inland hill, which comprised an open, manicured square protected by a battery wall and Fort Fullerton, with a botanical and experimental gardens in between, and Bukit Larangan or "Forbidden Hill" (subsequently renamed by Raffles as Government Hill).

The three man-made landscape elements designed by the British conspicuously displayed to its indigenous settlers how nature could be manipulated to form a flattened field (the Padang), a garden setting where trees and shrubs were regimented, and defensive structures arranged strategically on a hill.[2] The construction of structures on this strip of artificial landscape was deliberate: a church, a court house and government offices between the square and gardens, and Raffles' own residence on the hill.

In time, the enlarged rectilinear Esplanade – from the Latin word *explānāre*, meaning "to make level" – became the first semblance of a landscape interface between British colonials and native residents in Singapore. When the Esplanade (which was how the British referred to the Padang back then) was not used for military assemblies, drills and ceremonies, it served as a pitch for cricket, football and rugby matches. Through military, recreational and ceremonial uses, the Esplanade instilled and socialised concepts of colonial discipline and abidance among the British settlers. The space became a platform that displayed different sides of the British colonial officers: regimental and belligerent on occasion, but at other times, given to rest and recreation.

Edifices of Power Around the Padang

Around the Esplanade, or Padang, the construction of buildings along its edges further stamped colonial legitimacy and emphasised the class divide between the British and the local peoples. As in Prince of Wales Island (later renamed Penang), which the British had earlier colonised in 1786, the British East India Company worked closely with European traders to promote commerce.

One of the concessions the first British Resident in Singapore, William Farquhar, granted to traders was permission to occupy prime land along the fringes of the Padang – as in case of the Bousteads who built their family home there and the Sarkies brothers who leased the building that became the Raffles Hotel.[3]

These buildings went against Raffles' instructions that the northern banks of the Singapore River should be reserved strictly for government use. Together with John Crawfurd, the second Resident of Singapore, Raffles moderated Farquhar's generosity and began to lease land instead to the traders. On this basis, the houses of colonial merchants such as Robert Scott, James Scott Clark, Edward Boustead and William Montgomerie located around the Padang were to serve as temporary residences and hotels until the Town Hall, the Supreme Court and the Municipal Building (later City Hall) were eventually built to establish the government seat of power.[4]

The process of creating a visually consistent neoclassical facade around the Padang's edges was thus a gradual process that took place over a century rather than a swiftly executed plan. The construction timeline began with the Parliament House (1826–27) – originally planned as a private home for the Scottish merchant John Argyle Maxwell; St Andrew's Cathedral – first as a church (1835–36) then a cathedral (1856–61); Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall – first as the Town Hall (1855–62) and then Victoria Memorial Hall (1902–09); the Cricket Club (1860s); City Hall[5] – originally the Municipal Building (1926–29); and lastly the Supreme Court (1937–39).

In between all these constructions, on Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee Day on 27 June 1887, an 8-foot bronze statue of Stamford Raffles was unveiled at the Padang, facing the direction of the sea.[6] This was an acknowledgement of the contributions of Singapore's founder and served to further reinforce the might of the British Empire – the statue depicting Raffles with his arms folded in quiet assurance, as if surveying the physical manifestations of his legacy. Ironically, the statue was often struck by stray footballs kicked by overeager players when matches were held at the Padang, and the authorities decided to move it in 1919 to a more dignified site closer to Victoria Memorial Hall.

Although the Supreme Court was the last building to be built on the Padang's edge, its history predates all of the other grand structures around the field – dating back to 1823 when the English merchant Edward Boustead was given land to build his family home. The palatial house was subsequently turned into a series of hotels before it was demolished to build the Grand Hotel de l'Europe in 1905 which, together with the Raffles Hotel, was regarded as one of the finest lodgings in Southeast Asia. The hotel closed down in 1932 and the site was acquired by the government to build the Supreme Court.

The last Padang-facing structure to be constructed, the neoclassical Supreme Court, was erected at a time when the transatlantic art deco and modernist movements in architecture had already begun to influence architectural design all over Southeast Asia. Upon its completion in 1939, the green expanse of the Padang with its grand edifices of architecture on its edges evoked the colonial vision of power and discipline.

The periphery of the Padang where it met the sea, meanwhile, had become a colonial tree-lined promenade for the public. As a visitor in the 1850s remarked of the Esplanade: "The scene is enlivened twice during the week by the regimental band, on which occasions the old women gather together to talk scandal, and their daughters to indulge in a little innocent flirtation."[7]

An 1851 oil painting by John Turnbull Thomson, Government Surveyor of the Straits Settlements (1841–53). It shows a view of the Padang from Scandal Point, a small knoll above the shoreline which originally came up to the edge of the Padang. Gift of Dr John Hall-Jones. *Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*

(Above) The statue of Sir Stamford Raffles, facing the sea, was unveiled at the Padang on Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee Day on 27 June 1887. In the background is St Andrew's Cathedral. *Courtesy of Lai Chee Kien.*

(Above right) A view of the Grand Hotel de l'Europe (left) being built (later demolished to build the Supreme Court), several residential houses belonging to European merchants, lawn tennis courts on the edge of the Padang and St Andrew's Cathedral (on the right). Likely photographed in the early 1900s. *Courtesy of Lai Chee Kien.*

The commemorative aspect of Esplanade Park, as it was known by then, was further enhanced with the construction of the Cenotaph war memorial in 1922, and when Tan Kim Seng Fountain was moved there in 1925. After World War II, a war memorial dedicated to the hero Lim Bo Seng was erected at Esplanade Park. From 1953 onwards, Esplanade Park was renamed Queen Elizabeth Walk and became an important seafront promenade in the city.

From Public Square to Padang

The concept and use of an open space such as the Padang was tested elsewhere in the British Empire before its construction in Singapore. As the historian Robert Home has theorised, the public square was one of eight components of the "Grande Model" of British colonial settlement since the 17th century.[8] The geometric grid layout and the incorporation of an open square represented "the ultimate symbol of the imposition of human order on the wilderness." The extent of physical manipulation was apparent in places as diverse as colonial Savannah and Charleston in the US and Adelaide in Australia, where the creation of towns in the middle of plantations altered land, flora, fauna and human life irrevocably.

Singapore's Padang took inspiration from a type of urban field known as *maidan*, which was also found in places such as India and Penang. The term *maidan* has Persian roots, and was widely used in Islamic cities

as early as the 9th century to connote the setting of a formal rectilinear open space. In Persia, the *maidan* was conceived as part of the royal conurbation within the city.

The ruler who best articulated the concept of the *maidan* in designing urban space was Shah Abbas I of Isfahan (in modern-day Iran). During his reign, the nucleus of Isfahan was relocated to a new *maidan* measuring 440 yards long and 160 yards wide and named Maidan-i Naqsh-i Jahan. Built between 1597 and 1602, this *maidan* became the new centre of the first Shi'ite dynasty in Iran. According to Stephen Blake, spatially, the organised functions of state power, religion, commerce, education, recreation and commemoration were clearly expressed along the four margins of this space, and it became a new model in its time.[9]

A wide canal ran along the edges of Maidan-i Naqsh-i Jahan. Trees were planted between the canal and the perimeter – a 20-foot-wide grassy space that shaded shops as well as a dozen major gates and openings into the square. Outside this perimeter, the palace grounds, the bazaar, mosques, gardens, madrasahs and other public and commemorative architectural elements collectively articulated the shah's role as the purveyor of political might as well as economic and civic life. As Blake has described, the *maidan* was the site for the enactment of daily and seasonal imperial spectacles: polo, horse-racing, military parades, fireworks displays, mock battles, receptions of ambassadors, courtly audiences and religious festivals.

The idea of the *maidan* as a type of artificial lawn in India may have been transplanted from cities in the Middle East and pre-existed well before the arrival of the British.[10] After British troops recaptured Calcutta in 1757, Fort William at the centre of

the *maidan* was re-secured, and residential homes and other structures around it were demolished and cleared to form an esplanade.[11] The British constructed important public buildings near the edges of the *maidan* as visible signs of English order and progress in colonial Calcutta.

The Calcutta *maidan* combined various features of the Persian model with a British innovation: a walled fort constructed adjacent to or within the *maidan*. The same *maidan* model with a defensive fort was adopted in other Indian cities such as Bombay and Madras that the British also colonised. As Britain expanded its sphere of influence in the region, Burma, Malaya and Singapore were later established as English colonies to curtail French interest in Indochina and Dutch hegemony in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia).

The port cities of Penang, Malacca and Singapore (collectively known as the Straits Settlements) in the Malay Peninsula became part of this British colonial network. On the Malay Peninsula, the defensive form was first created in Penang after it was annexed by the British in 1786. The Padang was constructed alongside Fort Cornwallis at a strategic cape location with the Penang Cricket Club and government buildings at the other end.[12] The arrangement would be replicated in Singapore with the establishment of Fort Fullerton along Battery Road, until Government Hill was deemed to be a more strategic area and Fort Canning was constructed here in 1861.

The Padang in Post-Colonial Singapore

According to Ananda Rajah , the introduction of the annual National Day Parade in Singapore after Independence in 1965 is symbolic of the country's arrival as an imagined national and political community.[13] Over the last 50 years, three locations have hosted the annual National Day Parade: the Padang, the National Stadium and Marina Bay.

The stadium and the Padang each hosted the parade 18 times until 2007 when it was moved to the Float@Marina Bay with its floating platform and open-air stage. The Padang was again the venue for the parade in 2010 and 2015, while Marina Bay hosted the parade seven times before it returned to the new National Stadium in 2016.

Interestingly, there are implications for the various sites that have taken turns to host the parade. For instance, the decision to hold the newly independent nation's first National Day Parade at the Padang in 1966 can be seen as a subversion of colonial rule, appropriating a symbolically potent site that had represented British authority in Singapore for over a century.

The construction of the National Stadium in 1973 created an alternative congregation space for national spectatorship.[14] The key feature of the National Stadium is a manicured flat green field, much like the Padang, but with people, instead of buildings, filling the spaces of its periphery.

The staging of the National Day Parade at Marina Bay is of interest because the site is spatially analogous to that of the Padang. The layout and the constitutive elements are similar, although visually, Marina Bay is very different from the Padang, having been reclaimed from the sea, and creating Marina Reservoir in the process.

Looking at the four edges of the rectilinear reservoir, one can see that the old buildings along its historic edge near the Padang have been refitted and given new functions. Reminiscent of the *maidan* in Isfahan, the remaining three edges have been taken up by structures devoted to commerce (Marina Bay Financial Centre); recreation (Marina Bay Sands casino resort); and leafy gardens (Gardens by the Bay).

Seen as a whole, Marina Bay is a rectangular, flat piece of water surface

that has been artificially constructed, with its edges flanked by mostly new buildings that are key to Singapore's next phase of development as a global city. Spatially, it is a "liquid padang", serving similar functions but providing a view towards the city's future, especially since the colonial Padang and its period buildings have been mostly emptied of their original functions – most recently the amalgamation of City Hall and the Supreme Court into the National Gallery Singapore. Collectively, the old and the new "padang" evoke the giant leaps of time and progress that Singapore has made since Raffles first envisioned his town plan in 1822. ◆

Notes
1 Letter from Stamford Raffles to William Farquhar dated 6 February 1819, as cited in L. T. Firbank, *A History of Fort Canning* (no records), p. 16.
2 Lai, C, K. (2006, July). Botanical imaginations of Southeast Asia in the 19th and 20th centuries. *Singapore Architect*, (233), pp. 70–79. Call no.: RSING 720.5 SA
3 A new hotel in Singapore. (1887, September 21). *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, p. 4; Retrieved from NewspaperSG; Liu, G. (2006). *Raffles Hotel* (pp. 17–18). Singapore: Editions Didier Millet. Call no.: RSING q915.9570613 LIU
4 Lee, K. L. (1988). *The Singapore House 1819–1942* (pp. 148–149). G. Liu. (Ed.). Singapore: Times Editions. Call no.: RSING 728.095957 LEE
5 The former City Hall and Supreme Court buildings, both gazetted national monuments, were renovated and opened in November 2015 as the National Gallery Singapore housing the largest public collection of modern art in Singapore and Southeast Asia.
6 The statue of Stamford Raffles was commissioned by then Governor of the Straits Settlements Frederick Weld for Singapore in 1887, and designed and sculpted by Thomas Woolner. It was later transferred to its present location at the Victoria Memorial Hall. See Woolner, A. (1917). *Thomas Woolner, R.A., sculptor and poet: His life in letters* (p. 326). New York: E. P. Dutton & Company. Retrieved from Internet Archive.
7 Jayapal, M. (1992). *Old Singapore* (p. 25). Singapore: Oxford University Press. Call no.: RSING 959.57 JAY-[HIS]
8 Home, R. K. (1996). *Of Planting and planning: The making of British colonial cities.* (pp. 8–23). London: E. & F. N. Spon. Call no.: RART 711.409171241 HOM
9 Blake, S. P. (1999). *Half the world: The social architecture of Safavid Isfahan, 1590–1722* (pp. xvi–xvii). Costa Mesa: California: Mazda. Call no.: RART q720.95595 BLA
10 Anuradha Mathur, A. (1999). Neither wilderness nor home: The Indian maidan. In J. Corner. (Ed.), *Recovering landscape: Essays in contemporary landscape architecture* (pp. 206–208). Sparks: Princeton Architectural Press. Call no.: RART 712 REC
11 Chattopadhyay, S. (2005). *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, nationalism, and the colonial uncanny* (p. 46). New York: Routledge. Call no.: R 954.147 CHA
12 Garnier, K. (1923, April). Early days in Penang. *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1* (1 (87)), 5–12., pp. 5–6. Call no.: RCLOS 959.5 JMBRAS. The settlement grew from the cleared ground of the esplanade, a fort and a small bazaar, and within a year attracted families of different ethnicities to settle there, alongside the resident Malay populations.
13 Rajah, A. (1999). Making and managing tradition in Singapore: The National Day Parade. In K.-W. Kwok et al. (Eds.), *Our place in time: Exploring heritage and memory in Singapore.* Singapore: Singapore Heritage Society, pp.101–109. Call no.: RSING 959.57 OUR-[HIS]
14 Lai, C. K., et al. (2015). *Building memories: People, architecture, independence* (pp. 114–116). Singapore: Achates 360 Pte Ltd.

The concept of the Padang originated in Persia, where it was known as the *maidan,* a formal rectilinear open space in the city centre. During the reign of Shah Abbas I of Isfahan (in modern-day Iran), the nucleus of the city was relocated to a new *maidan* called Maidan-i Naqsh-i Jahan. Built between 1597 and 1602, this *maidan* became the new centre of the first Shi'ite dynasty in Iran. *Photo by J. P Richard / Shutterstock.com*

The Tiger Within

These fanged beasts are by turns both captivating as they are terrifying. **Patricia Bjaaland Welch** explores the tiger motif in the art and literature of Asia.

(Facing page) Western Zhou Dynasty (c.1050–771 BC) bronze tiger with deep grooves etched on its body to simulate stripes. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. *Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*
(Left) Hongli spearing a tiger. One of the many paintings of Prince Bao Hongli who ascended the throne in 1736 as the Qianlong Emperor (1735–96). Artist unknown; ink and colour on silk. Palace Museum, Beijing. *Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*
(Below) A 10 x 10 cm block-printed Chinese paper charm, one of a bundle. Printer and artist unknown. The four characters read "White Tiger, Divine Lord". *Courtesy of Patricia Bjaaland Welch.*

"Tyger, Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night" [1]

– William Blake

Patricia Bjaaland Welch is a retired university lecturer in symbology and Asian art history. Originally from the US, she has been a permanent resident in Singapore since 1995, and is a frequent contributor to publications on Asia. Her most recent book is *Chinese Art: A Guide to Motifs and Imagery* (Tuttle, 2007).

One of the reasons we draw is to capture and share an experience, or express our feelings – whether scratched into a cave's rocky wall or artfully painted with oil or watercolour. One of the reasons we look at art is because we want to be entertained, to see something captivating or exciting. It is for good reason that the tiger has become one of the most written about and depicted animals in literature and art. Enter the tiger as portrayed in Asia…

China

We know the ancient Chinese found tigers as terrifying and captivating as we do today. Among the earliest depictions of tigers are white jade carvings dating back at least 4,000 years. By the 9th century BC, we find tiger figurines cast in bronze, usually depicted crouching, their tails either hanging limply or curled up along their backs. These are brutish animals with "large heads and incised, almond-shaped eyes, bared rows of sharp teeth, inward-spiraling ears, oversized paws and claws"[2] and thick tails. Some figurines are etched with deep grooves on their bodies to represent the tiger's stripes. The similarities in the depiction of these animals in western China to objects found in the Altai Mountains of south Russia suggest an early exchange of art between China and her non-Chinese neighbours.

These early bronze and jade carvings of tigers were once buried with the dead as they were believed to offer protection in the afterlife. According to one source, "one of the oldest pieces of evidence for the protective nature of tigers was the discovery of two large figures formed out of seashells, one a dragon and the other a tiger, on each side of a corpse in a grave at Puyang in Henan province". [3]

Neolithic scenes of adrenalin-charged tiger hunts are captured in the rock art at Daxifengkou in the Helan Mountains of Ningxia[4] in China, the clear predecessors of the lean, athletic beasts of the later Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 220) caught lunging through the air, tails akimbo, their long, extended tongues emerging from open jaws. The Chinese consider the tiger to be the "king of wild beasts" as the markings on the animal's forehead resemble the Chinese character 王, which means "king".

The image of a head-in-the-air, prancing white tiger is one of the four directional animals (representing west and the seven constellations found there) of ancient China, together with a black tortoise entwined with a snake (north), a red bird (south) and a green dragon (east). These used to be painted on the interior walls of tombs and the sides of coffins to protect the dead from unknown evils as well as to ensure that the deceased remained properly oriented even in the afterlife.

Each animal was also associated with an element – for example the red bird represents fire, while the white tiger symbolises metal, which equates with power. During the Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BC), metals such as iron weapons that were buried in a king's grave were said to "metamorphose into a white tiger – king of all animals and lord of the mountains – three days after his burial, and to remain crouching on the grave to protect the king's spirit and dispose of demons."[5]

China's military preserved and enhanced the image of the fierce tiger as did the artisans who depicted them on the breastplates of warriors and war deities as a sign of military prowess and bravery. Bounding tigers, just like those seen in the Han Dynasty, were *de rigeur* decoration on the interior walls of military headquarters as can be seen in popular comic book versions of classical historical novels, such as *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (三国演义).

When Chinese ceramists were looking for inspiration for new designs to decorate their art works in the 17th century, they often turned to woodblock prints that depicted scenes from China's classics, such as *The Water Margin* or *Outlaws of the Marsh* (水浒传). One such tableau illustrates the story of Wu Song (one of the 108 "Heroes of Mount Liang") who defeated a tiger (武松打虎) with his bare hands when he ignored the advice of the local people and ventured into a dangerous forest on his own. The tree branch that broke when Wu Song attempted to use it as a club to fend off the tiger lies at his feet, making the scene instantly recognisable.

Tigers were the ultimate symbol of raw, untamed power in China, but then

(Below) A young boy's protective cap to fool evil spirits into thinking he's a tiger cub. The cap is made of orange silk embroidered in heavy black thread with appliquéd paws, eyes, mouth and tongue. Whiskers are curled wood shavings. On the back protective neck flap are embroidered the symbols of the Eight Immortals in Chinese mythology. *Courtesy of Patricia Bjaaland Welch.*

(Right) One of a pair of tigers on the ceiling of Mogao Cave #428 in Dunhuang, China. Photo by Wu Jian, Dunhuang Academy. *All rights reserved, Whitfield, R. et. al. (2015). Cave Temples of Mogao at Dunhuang: Art and History on the Silk Road. Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute.*

something happened. Sometime around the first century AD, lions were introduced from Central Asia. Their appearance coincided with the introduction of Buddhism into China, and tigers lost their esteemed position to the new cat in town – which became the powerful protector of the Buddha and the new religion. Lions now guarded palaces and temples, while tigers were relegated as protectors of the common people.

But still powerful, tiger images now appeared on scraps of paper as talismans; mugwort leaves that resembled tiger paws were used to ward off the plague; ceramic pillows decorated with or made in the shape of tigers became an aid against sleepless nights and nightmares; and young children were dressed in clothes adorned with orange and black stripes and donned caps or shoes decorated with tiger ears so that evil spirits would mistake them as fierce tiger cubs and leave them unharmed.[6]

When the "Five Poisonous Creatures" (centipedes, lizards, scorpions, toads and snakes) threaten, it was the tiger who was thought to protect one from harm. Embroidered insignia depicting the "Five Poisonous Creatures" and the tiger would be worn by members of the imperial court on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, the date associated with the summer solstice. Superstitious Chinese considered this to be the most dangerous day of the year when the *yin* force of nature returned, bringing with it darkness and cold. This was also the day when the emperor would perform annual sacrifices and prayers at the Altar of Earth, just as he would perform them on the winter solstice at the Temple of Heaven when the days were longest and coldest, and the *yang* forces of light and warmth needed entreatment to return.

The use of specific animal images on embroidered squares of cloth sewn onto the front and back of official uniforms to indicate rank within the Chinese military had existed in China for many years before becoming institutionalised during the Ming Dynasty in the late 14th century – the tiger sharing second place with panthers and behind the all-supreme lion. No longer the stalker, tigers were now seen sitting, often with one paw raised in a pose reminiscent of Central Asian felines, alert and curious but not leaping or hunting – their strength apparently dormant until summoned by the emperor. Both the Yongzheng (1723–35) and Qianlong (1735–96) Qing emperors commissioned paintings of themselves hunting tigers.

Tigers and Buddhist Monks

Buddhists regarded tigers as useful metaphors, and not just in the Jātaka tales that document the former lives of the Buddha. One of the most popular of these tales is the *Mahasattva Jātaka,* which relates how a young man (who would later be reincarnated as the Buddha) sacrifices himself so that a starving tiger mother and her cubs can eat.

More tiger paintings appear in the famous Dunhuang (or Mogao) caves along the fabled Silk Route, including a tiger energetically chasing a devilish-looking figure up a hill (Cave #159) and a frieze in Cave #428 depicting two sleek tigers with oversized comic-book claws. Unlike Indian drawings of tigers which often have elongated triangular faces, these tigers have small, ovoid, monkey-shaped faces with tiny button-like ears.

According to the scholar Helenor Feltham, "images of monks and tigers have a long history in Asian art and culture... [and] can be divided into representations of pilgrim/missionary monks, images celebrating harmony with nature and mastery of primal emotions, and transformative storytellers."[7] The best-known image of a wandering monk with a tiger is probably that found by Paul Pelliot – the famous French sinologist – in Dunhuang Cave #17 that dates to the Five Dynasties (907–960)/Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127) period, and today kept in the Musée Guimet in Paris. The vividly striped tiger – with fangs exposed and ears turned back alongside its strangely small and flat head – lopes alongside the monk, intent on its march.

More than one Buddhist *arahat* – protectors of the Buddhist teachings or *dharma* – such as Bhadra (in Chinese, Baduoluo), reputed to have been a cousin of the Buddha), or Zen master, were known to have kept tigers as pets. Feng Gan, the 9th-century Chan (Zen) Buddhist monk who introduced the two monks Shi De and Han Shan (later immortalised in decorative art as the Héhé Brothers holding a box and a lotus to represent spiritual peace), was said to own a pet tiger.

One of the most famous paintings of a monk with a tiger, and which also provides a key to understanding the metaphor of the tiger in Zen art, is the artist Shi Ko's masterful ink work of the Zen master Feng Gan sleeping on his tiger, a depiction that skillfully contrasts the smooth lines of the sleeping monk with the staccato-like brush strokes of the tiger's fur.

The tamed tiger is a popular motif in the Buddhist art of China and Japan,

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The Story of the Monk and the Tiger

One of the best known Zen stories is that of the Zen monk who encounters a very hungry and aggressive tiger while out for a walk. He tries to flee but the tiger races after him. Eventually, the monk finds himself on the edge of a steep cliff that drops into a rocky ravine. He has no choice other than inch himself over the edge, clinging onto a vine, to avoid becoming the tiger's meal. But just as he is beginning to hope that he is safe, he notices two small mice, one black and one white, gnawing on the vine. He turns his head, and there, within reach is a beautiful, perfect red strawberry. Holding onto the vine with one hand, he reaches for the strawberry with the other. As he bit into it, he was heard to exclaim, "How sweet this beautiful strawberry is." And in that moment, he thought life was bliss. The moral of this tale is about seizing happiness no matter what the circumstances are.

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whether it is depicted sitting by the side of an *arahat,* or accompanying him on his travels, or while alone in quiet contemplation. Ceramic masters in Arita, in the hills of the southern Japanese island of Kyushu, continue to produce exquisite porcelain models of the tamed tiger in the traditional form.

India

> "In what distant deeps or skies.
> Burnt the fire of thine eyes?"
>
> – William Blake

In India, on the other hand, a land where tigers once roamed freely and every village feared these dreaded stalkers, the image of the kittenish tiger is nowhere to be seen. Here, "the strongest animals, elephants, form the base of the pyramid of life. The earth is represented by jungle, full of lions and tigers."[8] This frieze frequently appears on many of the oldest Hindu temples in India, including the caves of Ajanta, Ellora and Elephanta in Maharashatra state.

At the 13th-century site of Konarak, dedicated to the Sun god (Surya), on India's Bay of Bengal, India's two great religions – Hinduism and Buddhism – are respectively depicted as lions and tigers, each attempting to subdue the other. Contests featuring these mighty beasts were said to have been staged several times throughout history, beginning from the days of the Roman Colisseum, with varying outcomes.

Perhaps this is why there is so much confusion over the goddess Durga when she appears in her most powerful form as Mahisasura Mardini or "killer of the Demon Mahisasura" (who is usually represented as a buffalo).[9] Durga is the supreme divine power, and her mount (either the tiger or the lion) is perfectly matched – the determined hunter and slayer. Occasionally, Durga and her mount are portrayed as such – she with arms flying, holding her arsenal of weapons, and with the tiger (or lion) racing, its mouth open and tail in the air.

More typically, however, we find Durga and her mount in a more restful pose – Durga seated in a position of "royal ease", the tiger (or lion) in profile or facing front, but with all four paws firmly on the ground. It's the quiet moment after evil is conquered, when both, calm and proud, are content and ready to receive the gratitude of their devotees.

Durga's consort, Shiva, also wears or sits upon a tiger skin that he has stripped from a tiger sent to kill him. While living as an ascetic and wandering naked through the jungle, he so aroused the local maidens that their jealous husbands conjured up a ferocious tiger to attack him. Shiva's victory over the tiger represents his power as the ruler and lord of all living things; the tiger's skin becomes a prayer mat for the ascetic. He has killed not only the tiger, but also all desires. This is why tiger skins are

The famous Tiger Head Cave (Bagh Gumpha), Cave #12 in the Jain cave complex of Udayagiri in Bhubaneswar, India. The opening of the cave is shaped like a tiger's open mouth. *Courtesy of Ruth Gerson.*
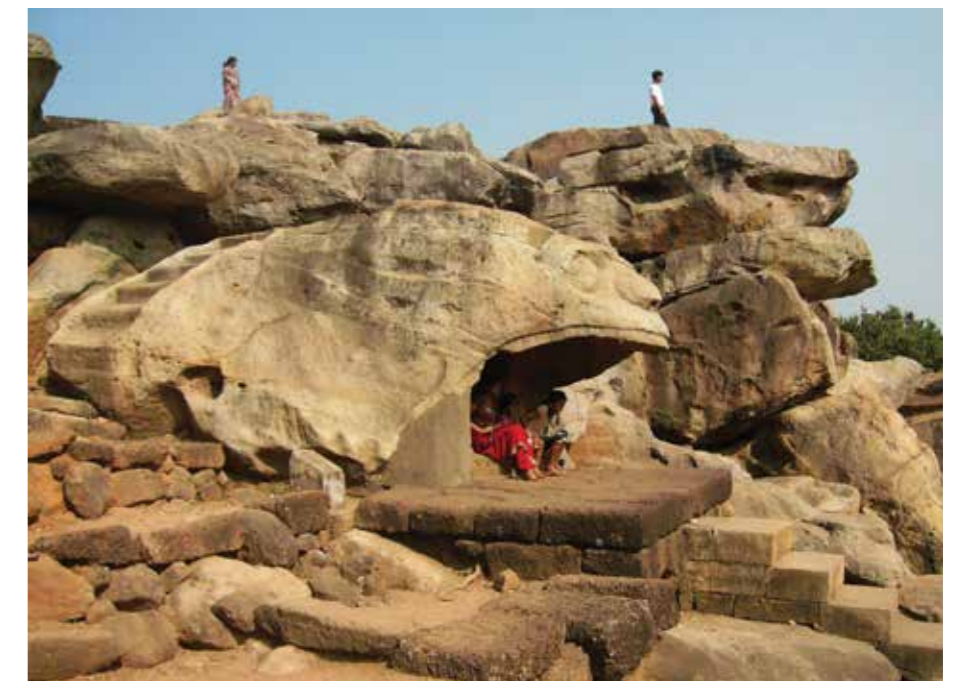
associated with both ascetics and deities in their destroyer personas.

Most Indian art that depicts tigers is religious in nature, with some famous exceptions. The founder of the Mughal Empire, Zahir-ud-Din Muhammad, is more commonly known as Babur (or Babar, Baber or Babür), which literally means "tiger" in Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Urdu. Scenes of birds and animals, including tigers, naturally abound in Mughal art. But probably the most famous (and kitschy) Indian depiction of a tiger is the 18th-century mechanical life-size toy tiger attacking a European soldier (see text box on facing page).

Tigers were much feared in the villages of India. Collections of thrilling stories revolving around man-eaters were usually heavily illustrated, as were later reminiscences of such famous hunters of man-eating tigers and leopards, such as those penned by Jim Corbett (1875–1955), who authored several works describing his kills. Many a young 20th-century reader developed a life-long reading habit from the tales found in Corbett's *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* (1944), or from staying up late at night to read Rudyard Kipling's story of the young Mowgli who kills the man-eating tiger known as Shere Khan (known to today's young people through the distorted Disney movie version).

"Brains versus brawn" is the moral behind many Asian legends and fables, usually about a tiger who is pitted against smaller and weaker animals such as a mouse deer or a jackal who inevitably wins the battle with its cleverness. Most of these stories are variations of an old Indian folk tale about a vicious tiger caught in a trap, and who is later released by a foolish but kind-hearted Brahman. The hapless Brahman is then seized upon by the tiger who threatens to devour the man unless he can find a creature who thinks he should not be eaten. Eventually, it takes a clever jackal to outwit the tiger and shut him back into his cage. Many of the illustrations accompanying such stories have become classic artworks, although their creators are often anonymous.

Tibet

Tibet shares many tiger images with India, although most ignominiously as flayed tiger skins tied around the waists or loins of wrathful demons in paintings and sculptures. Tigers that have managed to escape such fates are used as the powerful vehicles of wrathful demons. In their subdued state, tigers in Tibetan culture represent the triumph of the mind over anger into wisdom and insight.
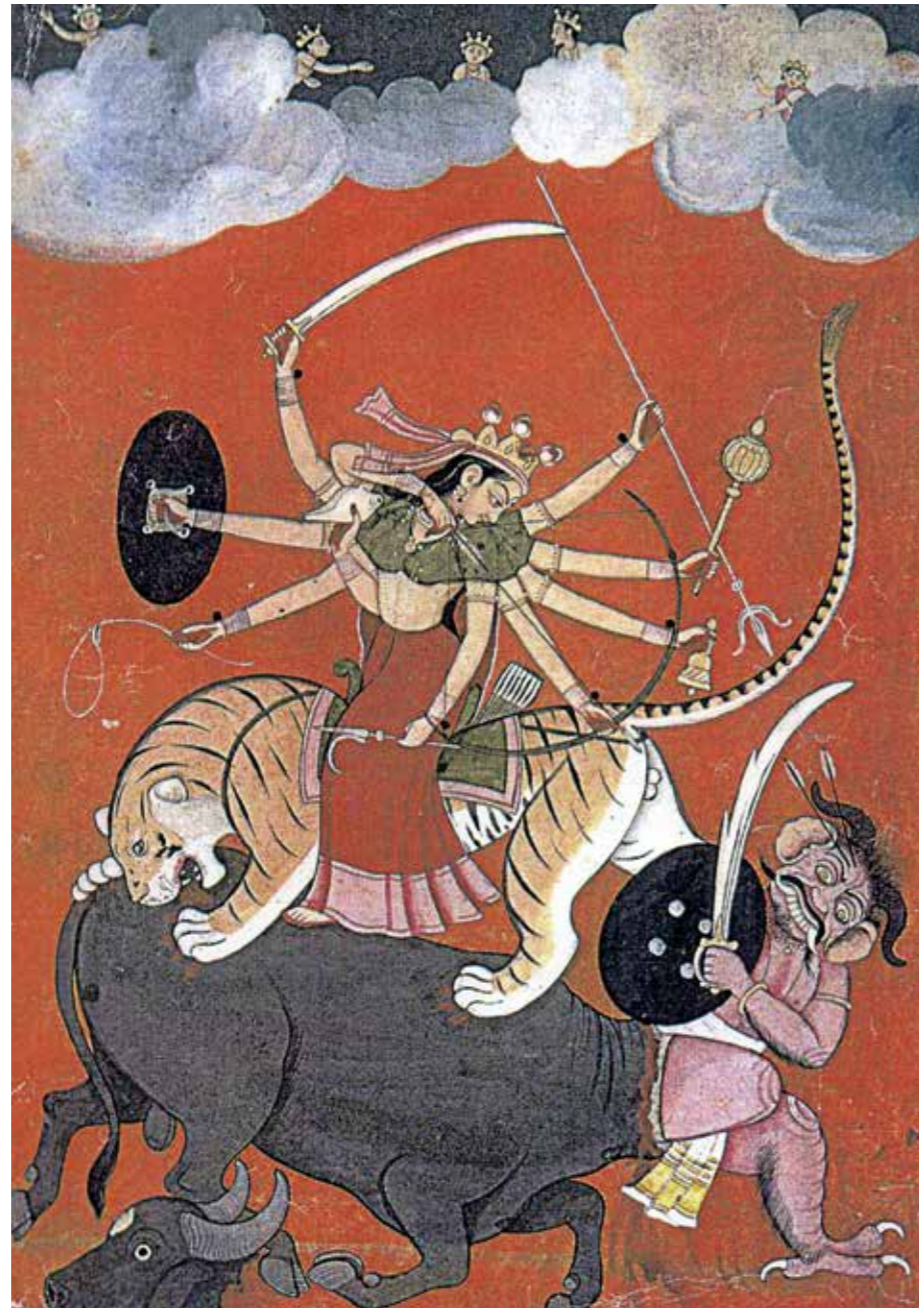
(Top) The Hindu goddess Durga fighting the buffalo demon Mahisasura. She holds the divine weapons (trident, spear, conch, etc.) given to her by the gods to empower her to slay the demon. Artist unknown; early 18th century. *Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*
(Above) "No, this is how I got into the cage. Let me show you", says the exasperated tiger. Illustration accompanying the story, "The Tiger, Brahman and the Jackal" from *Fairy Tales of India* by Joseph Jacobs. Illustrations by John Dickson Batten, 1892. *Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*

In Southwest China along the border with Tibet and also in Tibet itself, one often encounters brightly coloured murals on monastery walls – awash in primary colours – of a Mongolian lama (identifiable by his hat) leading a tame tiger on a chain across a valley or down a mountain range. The lama is said to represent Avalokitesvara (the embodiment of perfect compassion), the chain represents Vajrapani (protector of the historical Buddha), while the vividly striped tiger is Manjusri, who symbolises wisdom. According to Robert Beer, "this emblem also has a sectarian symbolism, with the lama leading the tiger representing the supremacy of the "yellow-hats" of the Gelugpa School of Buddhism over their "tamed" rivals, the "red-hats" of the old schools of Tibetan Buddhism."[10]

Thailand

There is a saying in Thailand, "The mosquito is more dangerous than the tiger", but that doesn't stop the Thais from invoking the spiritual and physical power of tigers in their daily lives and art. Tattoos depicting tigers, single or in pairs, are considered as powerful and protective talismans in Thailand and especially popular among *muay thai* boxers. These are tigers with outstretched claws, leaping or stalking, jaws open with bared fangs, who not only endow their owners with enhanced strength but also drive away evil spirits when applied properly by specially trained monks. A carved tiger's tooth is a coveted amulet among Thais, said to protect its owner and bring good fortune.

Statues of standing tigers (usually carved from wood or made from plaster)

(Below) Detail of a mural depicting a Mongolian lama leading a tamed tiger on a chain, seen on the wall of a small Buddhist monastery near Zhongdian in Yunnan, China. *Courtesy of Patricia Bjaaland Welch.*
(Below right) Tigers are among Thailand's most popular talismanic tattoo designs. *Courtesy of http://designs-tattoo.com*
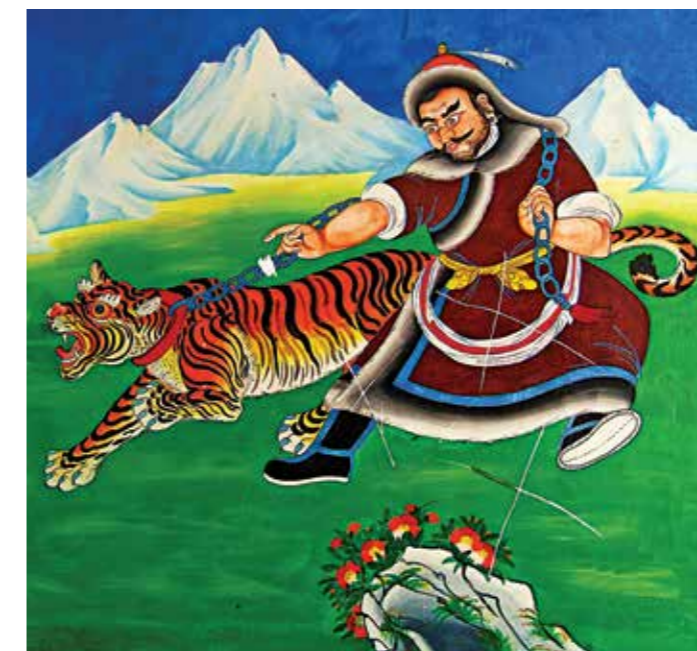
Tipu's Toy Tiger

Tipu Sultan, the owner of the famous mechanical toy tiger, was the ruler of Mysore, India from 1782 to 1799. Such mechanical toys were very popular in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, but none perhaps so gruesome as Tipu's tiger. Turn the handle of a musical organ hidden inside the wooden beast, and the dying soldier being mauled at the throat wails and flails his arm up and down. The toy was specially constructed for Tipu, it is said, to symbolise his abject hatred for British colonial rule in India. Tipu was fascinated by tigers and had many artefacts decorated with motifs of tigers, including an assortment of weapons, uniforms worn by his soldiers and even his throne. When he died fighting the British, his possessions were seized as loot by the victorious English soldiers. The mechanical tiger was first sent to the East India Company's India House in London, but was later moved to the Victoria and Albert Museum where it remains today as a curious attraction.

Tipu's Tiger was created for Tipu Sultan, ruler of Mysore, South India (1782–99), c.1793. The mechanical toy is made of wood, metal and ivory, and incorporates a musical organ. Artist unknown. © *Victoria and Albert Museum, London.*

are often found on the grounds of Thailand's Buddhist temples where they serve as symbolic spiritual protectors, but there is a darker side to Thailand's "tiger temples". Until very recently, some of these temples bred and raised tigers to sell their parts and skins, and accepted fees from tourists to enter their cages and be photographed with them.

Myanmar and Vietnam

Thailand and Myanmar (Burma) share a common belief in assigning each day of the week its own icon. In Thailand, this takes the form of different depictions of the Buddha, but in Myanmar, the differentiation is made by assigning an animal from the Burmese zodiac to each day (with two animals for Wednesday, the birthday of Buddha). A tiger represents Monday, and contrary to China, the direction east.

Most tiger figurines in Myanmar are carved from wood or made from plaster moulds, and somehow manage to look both ferocious and friendly at the same time. The gaping mouths show sharp fangs and teeth, yet the lips seem to curl back to form a smile. Traditional Burmese lore recommends that tiger's claws be placed around an infant's neck as protection against infantile ills, and tiger's milk as natural immunisation against infections.[11]

Because tigers are believed to embody Monday's personality traits, they are moody and cunning enough to serve as decorative mounts for figurines and sculptures of *nat* spirits in Burmese folk religion. On the other hand, the overly confident tiger is often duped by clever little rabbits, who are almost always the heroes of Burmese animal folktales.

Vietnam, strongly influenced by Chinese culture, adopted the model of the five directions, but instead of using four different animals and a central motif, substituted these with five coloured tigers – the traditional orange and black striped tiger in the centre, surrounded by white, black, red and green tigers. While the tiger in the centre crouches, the surrounding four stand on four feet, tails erect.

Singapore

While tigers do not figure prominently in the art and literature of Singapore, they have certainly left their pawprint on its folklore and culture. One of the first encounters took place in 1835 when the Government Superintendent of Public Works, George D. Coleman, and his team of Indian labourers were supposedly attacked by a tiger while conducting a survey in the outskirts of the town. The event was later captured – complete with the tiger springing mid-air as Coleman jerks backwards and the

labourers scatter in all directions – in an iconic painting now on display at the National Gallery Singapore. Visitors seem drawn to it and invariably step in closer to study the scene.

Early settlers in Singapore were terrified of the many tigers that once inhabited the island. Tiger attacks became so commonplace in Singapore by the middle of the 19th century that a bounty was given out by the government for every tiger killed. The tiger that was shot under the billiard room of the Raffles Hotel in August 1902 was apparently a circus beast that escaped from captivity and accidentally made its way to the iconic hotel.[12] Reputedly, the last wild tiger on the island that roamed the Choa Chu Kang area was killed in October 1930.[13]

It was the drawing of a prowling tiger on a 1920s Straits Settlements 50-dollar note that helped influence the Burmese Chinese entrepreneur Aw Boon Haw to relocate his family's medicinal ointment business, trademarked Tiger Balm, from Burma to the port city of Singapore. Boon Haw, "the gentle tiger", together with his younger brother Boon Par, "the gentle leopard", had inherited their father's business upon his death in 1908.

The first Tiger Balm factory in Singapore was located on Neil Road and as the business grew – undoubtedly helped by the Chinese belief in the power and medicinal efficacy of tigers – Tiger Balm became a

(Above) A Vietnamese woodblock print depicting the five tigers that represent the Daoist cosmological symbol of the "five points of the compass" or the five elements – earth, wind, fire, water and metal, 2001. The artist is Le Dinh Ngien, one of the last printmakers of the Hang Trung style. *Courtesy of the Asian Civilisations Museum, National Heritage Board.*
(Above right) The Burmese *nat* (spirit) Ma Swe Oo – the country girl killed by a tiger sent by a spurned suitor – sits in a small shrine in upcountry Myanmar. She was a weaver, and as a spirit, is the patroness of weavers. *Courtesy of Patricia Bjaaland Welch.*

(Above) This print depicts G. D. Coleman, Government Superintendent of Public Works, and a group of Indian labourers being attacked by a tiger while conducting a survey in the outskirts of the town in 1835. Fortunately, the tiger crashed into Coleman's surveying equipment and ran away, leaving everyone unscathed. *Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.*
(Left) Members of the Straits hunting party with the tiger they had shot at Choa Chu Kang village in October 1930. From left: Tan Tian Quee, Ong Kim Hong (the shooter) and Low Peng Hoe. *Tan Tuan Khoon Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

household name. When Boon Haw built a mansion on one of the highest hills in Pasir Panjang for Boon Par in 1937, it included a large garden called Haw Par Villa (or Tiger Balm Gardens) that was open to the public. Over time, an educational theme park was added with tableaux representing traditional Chinese mythologies and folk tales.

The brothers have long since passed on, but Tiger Balm and Haw Par Villa remain. Taken over by the Singapore Tourism Board in 1988, the park was one of Singapore's most iconic landmarks for many years. Today, Haw Par Villa has its own Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) stop on the Circle Line.

Singaporeans today are more used to tigers as brand icons than lurking threats. Take, for example, Tiger Beer. Who doesn't recognise the bright blue design with a circle enclosing a black-and-orange striped tiger? The brand is virtually sold around the world but it began life as Singapore's first locally brewed beer in 1932. Originally marketed as a "tropical lager" targeting young men, today it has repositioned itself, claiming to be "an iconic embodiment of the Asian city on the verge of a breakthrough."[14]

So what is it about the allure of tigers that so captivates us in Asia? It could be that the tiger represents those elements of our human makeup that define us all – sometimes the beast, sometimes the hunter, but at other times hunted and tamed, and occasionally even the gullible chump. ♦

Patricia Bjaaland Welch will be giving a talk on this subject on 25 November 2016, 7pm, at the Asian Civilisations Museum. The talk is open to the public.

Notes
1   Opening lines of the poem "The Tyger" by the English poet William Blake.
2   So, J. F., & Bunker, E. C. (1995). *Traders and raiders on China's northern frontier* (p. 116). Washington D. C.: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery. Call no.: RART 745.0931 SO
3   Yang, X., & Yang, Y. (2000). *Chinese folk art* (pp. 19–20). Beijing, China: New World Press. Call no.: R ART 709.51 YAN
4   Bradshaw Foundation. (2011). *The rock art of Inner Mongolia & Ningxia.* Retrieved from Bradshaw Foundation website.
5   Feltham, H. (2012, October). Encounter with a tiger traveling west. *Sino-Platonic Papers*, 231, 14. Retrieved from Sino-Platonic website.
6   Even the fearsome *dvarapala*, a door or gate guardian of temples, apparently wore tiger hats as evidenced by a figure in Grotto #3 at the Maijishan Grottoes in Gansu province.
7   Feltham, Oct 2012, p. 5.
8   Bothwell, J. (1961). *The animal world of India* (p. 177). NY: Franklin Watts. Not available in NLB holdings.
9   Henry Cousens notes "in old Hindu ornament… the more rare an animal, the less true is its

delineation…no doubt due to the rarer animals being less available as models, and less often seen, if seen at all…The lion, for instance, is far less true to life than the homely, domesticated elephant or bull, and often it is difficult to tell whether a certain form is intended for that animal or a tiger." Tigers of course, are indigenous to India and would have been a much more familiar sight. See Cousens, H. (1903–4). The makara in Hindu ornament. *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report*, pp. 227–8.
10 Beer, R. (2003). *The handbook of Tibetan Buddhist symbols* (p. 65). Boston: Shambhala. Call no.: 704.94609515 BEE-[ART]
11 Khin, M. C (1984). *A wonderland of Burmese legends* (p. 120). Bangkok: Tamarind Press, 1984, Call no.: R 392.09591 KHI
12 A tiger in town. (1902, August 13). *The Straits Times*, p. 4. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
13 A tiger visits Singapore. (1930, November 8). *Malayan Saturday Post*, p. 38. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
14 Tiger Beer. (2006). Retrieved from Tiger Beer website.

S R Nathan

50 Stories from My Life

The late S R Nathan published seven books in his lifetime, but his most accessible is probably *50 Stories from My Life.* These two selections offer contrasting glimpses of the man who was President of Singapore from 1999–2011.

How I Met My Wife – and Finally Married Her

My wife and I have enjoyed a long and happy marriage. The story of our courtship and engagement is one of persistence against the odds. It began during the Japanese Occupation.

You could say that I married the girl next door, but it took me 16 years to do it. During my childhood in Muar, the adjoining shophouse was occupied by a family headed by one K. P. Nandey, a man with a fiery disposition who tended to smash plates when in a temper. Later, during the Occupation, when I was back in Muar alone, I became friendly with one of the sons of the family. One day, when visiting him, I caught sight of his sister standing at the window of their house. Her name was Urmila, or "Umi" for short.

Before long, while running errands on my bicycle for the Japanese soldiers, I started regularly to go out of my way so that I could pass the front of the house. I only possessed one good shirt at that time. It was mauve in colour, and it made quite an impression on Umi, or so she tells me.

Umi's parents would not have seen me as a suitable match. My family origins are Tamil. They were Bengali, and they would no doubt have preferred a Bengali suitor, ideally a nice lawyer or doctor. So I started to leave her notes. She would leave her reply, and I would sneak by and collect it.

In due course the family decided to move to Johor Bahru, by which time I was already living there myself. To ingratiate myself I borrowed a truck from my Japanese employer and moved their household possessions overnight. From then onwards, Umi's father looked on me a little more kindly.

My relationship with Umi's brother soured – he did not approve of my interest in his sister.

In 1952, Umi applied for a teacher-training course in Britain that would take her away for two years. She was awarded a place, and was all set to leave in August, two months before my own university course started. I think her father was happy to get her away from me for a time.

Her leaving was very painful. She was set to fly from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur, where she would meet up with her Malayan fellow-students before flying on to London. Since we could not meet openly in Singapore, after she took the flight to Kuala Lumpur, I travelled up there myself, where we met and then parted tearfully. We had a photograph taken, showing us together, and vowed to keep in touch by letter.

I was deeply saddened, and cried all the way on the flight back to Singapore. My mother consoled me later, saying: "Don't be sad. Leave it to God. If he wills, all will turn out according to both your wishes." And it did.

While she was away in the UK, we kept up with weekly airmail letters. I was always anxious, as I was afraid she might come into contact with someone better than me. It did not happen. She was as steadfast as on the day when we parted.

When Umi returned, her father invited me to go with him to Kuala Lumpur to meet her at the airport, although the journey back to Johor Bahru on the train was a little tense. We could not communicate openly in her father's presence.

Finally, early the following year, I plucked up the courage to approach Umi's father, and told him I wanted to marry her.

I thought he would be furious. In fact, he was not. He did not want us to get married immediately. His elder daughter had gone to university. He asked me to wait till she graduated. Umi was impa-

tient, unwilling to carry on as we were for four more years. My own mother was adamant – Umi's family had treated me well and I must not let them down. 'You have already waited 12 years – you will just have to wait another four!' So we did.

Finally, in December 1958, the wedding took place – in fact, two weddings. Umi's sister got married at the same time. And Umi and I have been together ever since. ◆

Flying with Hijackers

Sometimes even civil servants must be willing to face danger, as I discovered after terrorists hijacked a vessel in Singapore harbour. Fortunately, the incident ended without bloodshed.

In 1974, when I was director of the Security and Intelligence Division at the Ministry of Defence, hijackers seized the *Laju*, a small ferry owned by Shell, the oil company. By the time I reached the Marine Police headquarters, the *Laju* was being shadowed by a police patrol boat. Finally, it came to a halt, surrounded by police, customs and Singapore Maritime Command vessels.

The hijackers put a message in a bottle. They announced they were the "Japanese Red Army and Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine". They threatened to kill their hostages unless they were allowed to leave Singapore for an "Arab" country. At that stage we did not know who the hostages were, or how many there were.

(Facing page) Umi and I secretly kept in touch in the early days of our relationship.
(Right) I saw Umi off at the Kuala Lumpur airport, from where she took a flight to the UK for her teacher-training course.

We learned subsequently that there were four terrorists. Two of them were Japanese and two Arab. Earlier, they had set off explosive charges against four oil tanks on Pulau Bukom. They had unexpectedly been spotted, and had had to make a rapid escape. They had run to the Shell jetty, where they had hijacked the *Laju*, which was waiting to take passengers. These would have included children crossing from the island to Singapore to attend school. Fortunately, they had not actually boarded the vessel. Five crewmen were being held hostage.

Negotiations were begun, mostly by loudhailer, by Superintendent Tee Tua Ba, head of the Marine Police, stationed on his patrol boat. The terrorists asked for the Japanese ambassador to be summoned. When we didn't respond, they sent a radio message: "Sunset time is blowing up time." Finally, when the ambassador appeared, and after some negotiation, they turned against him, threatening that if the Japanese police were involved, blood would flow.

That night, two of the crew escaped by jumping overboard. This gave us much valuable information on the armed status of the hijackers and the number of local hostages still on board.

Lengthy negotiations followed, involving the hijackers, the Singapore authorities, other Arab missions and the Japanese embassy. We were unwilling to fly the hijackers out on a Singaporean plane because that would only have encouraged other terrorists to see Singapore as an easy terrorist target. Proposals to fly them out on a Japanese plane came to nothing. Tense

discussions lasted several days, with no solution in sight.

The sixth day brought a new development. Supporters of the terrorists had stormed the Japanese embassy in Kuwait, taking the ambassador and 15 staff hostage. They threatened to execute their hostages, starting with the Second Secretary (one of the diplomatic staff), if the Japanese government did not send a plane to Singapore to pick up the *Laju* hijackers.

The Japanese government finally offered to send a JAL plane. Although we did not tell the *Laju* hijackers about the embassy seizure in Kuwait, they finally agreed to be flown out to Kuwait. We insisted they give up their weapons. At last they agreed to give up their arms and explosives at the airport, before boarding the plane. They were to be accompanied by unarmed teams of Singaporean and Japanese officials.

Dr Goh Keng Swee, Defence Minister at the time, instructed me to lead the team of Singapore officials. Our mission was to hand over the Singapore hijackers to the Kuwait authorities to help resolve the situation at the Japanese embassy in Kuwait. As I said goodbye to my family, I did not mention the risks that lay ahead. We were afraid that the terrorist organisation might not let us leave Kuwait, using us as bargaining chips for the release of people in captivity in Israel or somewhere else.

As we neared our destination, I had to spell out to the authorities in Kuwait in a radio message the conditions on which we had undertaken the journey: "…13 senior officials of Singapore government must alight from the plane before the

terrorists in Kuwait are taken on board. Singapore officials will leave plane and proceed straight back to Singapore. Until this is agreed and guaranteed by Kuwait government, the doors of the aircraft must necessarily remain closed. … Japanese crew and 2 senior officials will remain on board and go with the terrorists to final destination.'

When we landed, the aircraft was surrounded by tanks, armoured vehicles and soldiers carrying automatic weapons. For hours, we negotiated with the Kuwaiti authorities. I was asked to disembark from the plane and take my message in person to a Kuwaiti government minister, who was driven onto the tarmac in his limousine. Long arguments followed, involving the Kuwaitis and the Japanese ambassador to Iran, who had been brought to the scene to represent the Japanese government.

The terrorists who had stormed the Japanese embassy in Kuwait arrived at the airport – and boarded the aircraft fully armed with revolvers and hand grenades. Talking to the Japanese diplomat in Bahasa, which he understood, I persuaded him to insist that they be disarmed before the plane proceeded to its next destination. It was settled that they would keep their side arms but without the bullets – these would be kept in the hold. The Kuwaiti minister would not allow me to speak during their negotiations.

At last came the development we had all been waiting for. The Kuwaiti foreign minister arrived, and told me and my fellow Singaporeans to leave the aircraft. For several hours we were afraid that the hijackers might insist that we
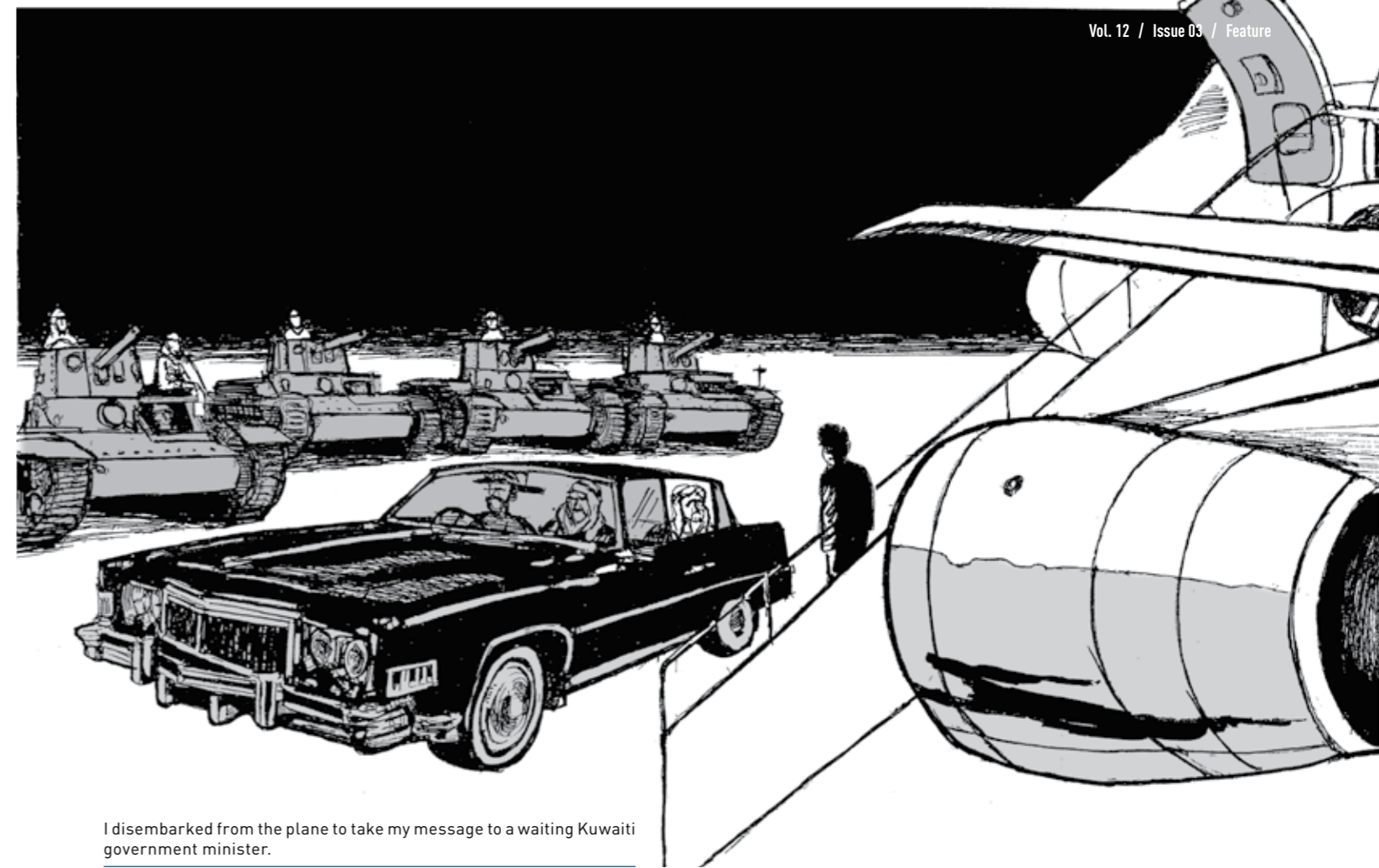
I disembarked from the plane to take my message to a waiting Kuwaiti government minister.

be returned to the aircraft as hostages, so we made ourselves scarce. However, that night we were flown safely by Kuwait Airways to Bahrain, and returned home from there on Singapore Airlines. Both groups of terrorists were flown on later to South Yemen.

The whole episode ended without bloodshed. It was good experience for me, the various ministries involved, the security service, the police and the military. While the decision to give the *Laju* hijackers safe passage out of Singapore attracted some criticism, we believed it was right. We wanted to minimise any likelihood of a terrorist group picking a quarrel with Singapore and seeking retaliation. In government you often have to make difficult decisions about serious problems with little accurate information at your disposal, and under great time pressure. ◆

The hijacked ferry *Laju* was closely monitored.

S R Nathan: 50 Stories from My Life captures major milestones in the personal and official life of the late former President of Singapore (b. 3 July 1924–d. 22 August 2016). Written with a younger audience in mind, and illustrated by Morgan Chua, a former political cartoonist with the *Far Eastern Economic Review,* the book will appeal to anyone interested in Singapore and its history.

S R Nathan: 50 Stories from My Life (paperback, 184 pages) is published by Editions Didier Millet and retails at $19.90. It is available for loan and reference at the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library and branches of all public libraries (Call no.: RSING 959.5705092 NAT).

Other Publications by S R Nathan

S R Nathan in Conversation with Timothy Auger
Editions Didier Millet, 2015
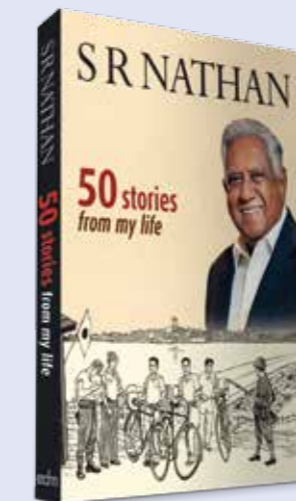Call no.: RSING 959.5705 NAT

The Crane and the Crab
Epigram Books, 2013
Call no.: JRSING 428.6 NAT

An Unexpected Journey: Path to the Presidency
Editions Didier Millet, 2011
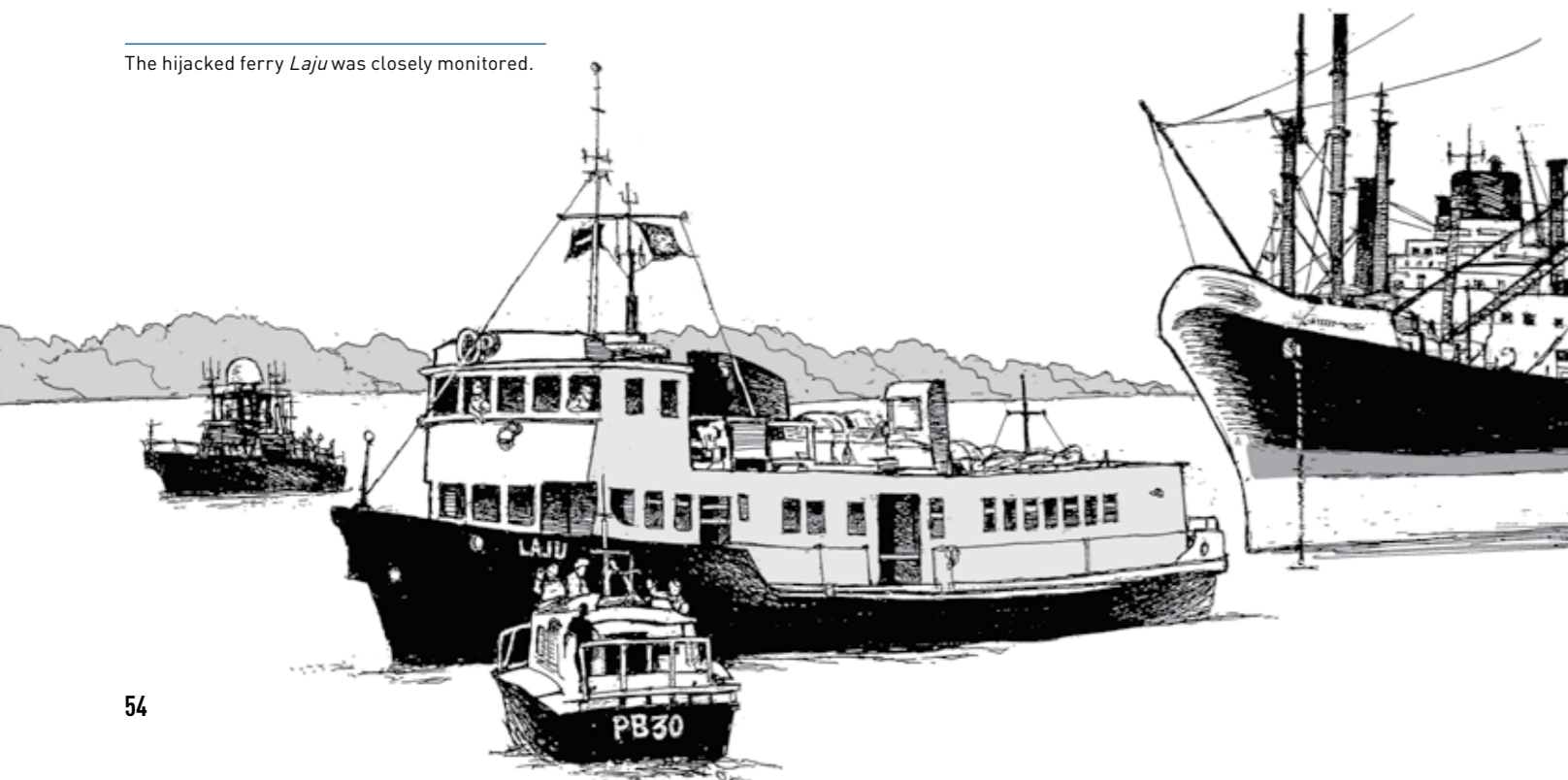Call no.: RSING 959.5705092 NAT

Winning Against the Odds: The Labour Research Unit in NTUC's Founding
Straits Times Press, 2011
Call no.: RSING 331.88095957 NAT

Why Am I Here?: Overcoming Hardships of Local Seafarers
Centre for Maritime Studies, National University of Singapore, 2010
Call no.: RSING 331.7613875095957 NAT

Singapore's Foreign Policy: Beginnings and Future
MFA Diplomatic Academy, 2008
Call no.: RSING 327.5957 NAT

Building Faith

Wartime Churches in Syonan-to

Christian POWs interned during the Japanese Occupation found ingenious ways to worship. **Gracie Lee** looks at a book documenting these makeshift churches in war-torn Singapore.

"Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

– Matthew 11:28

Gracie Lee is a Senior Librarian with the National Library, Singapore. She works with the Rare Materials Collection, and her research areas are in colonial administration and Singapore's publishing history.

Published in Britain in 1946, *The Churches of the Captivity in Malaya* was written by the Assistant Chaplain General of the Far East, Reverend John Northridge Lewis Bryan,[1] to show how churches provided "spiritual and moral uplift" to Christian Allied soldiers interned in prisoners-of-war (POW) camps in Singapore during the Japanese Occupation (1942–45).

The 72-page book, released a year after the end of World War II, chronicles 20 churches, a synagogue, a memorial altar, a memorial cross and a cemetery that were established by POWs in Singapore and elsewhere. It is beautifully illustrated with 27 watercolour paintings, black-and-white sketches and photographs contributed by ex-internees. Short descriptions of each church accompany the illustrations.

The book, containing a foreword by Frederick L. Hughes, Chaplain-General to the British forces, and an introduction by Major-General Arthur E. Percival, Commander-in-Chief of the Malaya Command, serves as a valuable historical and visual record of the many churches that were built, dismantled, moved and rebuilt by POWs during the three-and-a-half years when Singapore was known as Syonan-to (Light of the South).

It is a handy resource that complements the numerous oral and written accounts on individual POW experiences. The book was in fact used to identify the artist of the Changi Murals, Stanley Warren, when the paintings were "re-discovered" in 1958. It was also used by then Singapore Tourist Promotion Board in the design of the Changi Chapel during the 1980s.

While the Changi Murals in the former St Luke's Chapel in Roberts Barracks and the Changi Chapel[2] at the Changi Museum are the two most recognisable ecclesiastical POW sites in Singapore today, this book reminds contemporary readers

that there were many more of such churches built by POWs during the Japanese Occupation. Only a small fraction of these – many of which were rough makeshift places – are represented in this book.

This book also provides a useful overview of the organisation, design and evolution of POW churches, which emerged shortly after the fall of Singapore in February 1942. These churches were sanctuaries that provided spiritual support and hope to internees who suffered from starvation and oppression under the Japanese Imperial Army. Bonded by a common purpose, internees from various Christian denominations, ranks and nationalities pitched in to build churches at detention camps in Changi, Sime Road, Adam Park and elsewhere in Singapore.

The resourceful POWs managed to achieve much with the little they had, and came up with ingenious ways to hold church services. Some churches were adapted from the ruined remains of buildings or erected from salvaged materials,

while others were simply open-air assemblies that were spartanly furnished with handmade furniture. Some of the more unusual places include a rifle-range, cinema, garage and even a refrigeration building.

Church altars were designed by POWs who were trained architects, and Christian paraphernalia and furniture were fashioned from a motley assortment of materials. For instance when candles were no longer available, light bulbs from torches were mounted onto candlesticks and powered by electricity. Flower vases were made from shell cases, candlesticks from ladies' hatstands, and choir stalls from the swinging doors of bungalows. Internees who laboured outside the camps picked wild flowers for the altar. The bread eaten during the Holy Communion rite[3] was made from rice flour, maize flour or tapioca, while watered down blackcurrant jam, boiled raisins and even *gula melaka* (palm sugar) were used in place of wine.

Time and again, POWs were forced to abandon these makeshift churches when the Japanese authorities evacuated camps or redeployed POWs to other detention sites. Undeterred, the internees started new churches wherever they went even as their freedom was curtailed as the Occupation continued and the atrocities they suffered increased over time.

Here are examples of some POW churches featured in the book.

1. St David's Church was erected to minister to the internees at the Sime Road POW camp. The wall murals on either side of the altar were created in charcoal by Stanley Warren, best known as the painter of the Changi Murals at St Luke's Chapel at Roberts Barracks. The mural to the right of the altar depicted the scene from the "Nativity", while the one on the left featured the scene from "The Descent from the Cross". Today, a power substation occupies the site of the former St David's Church.
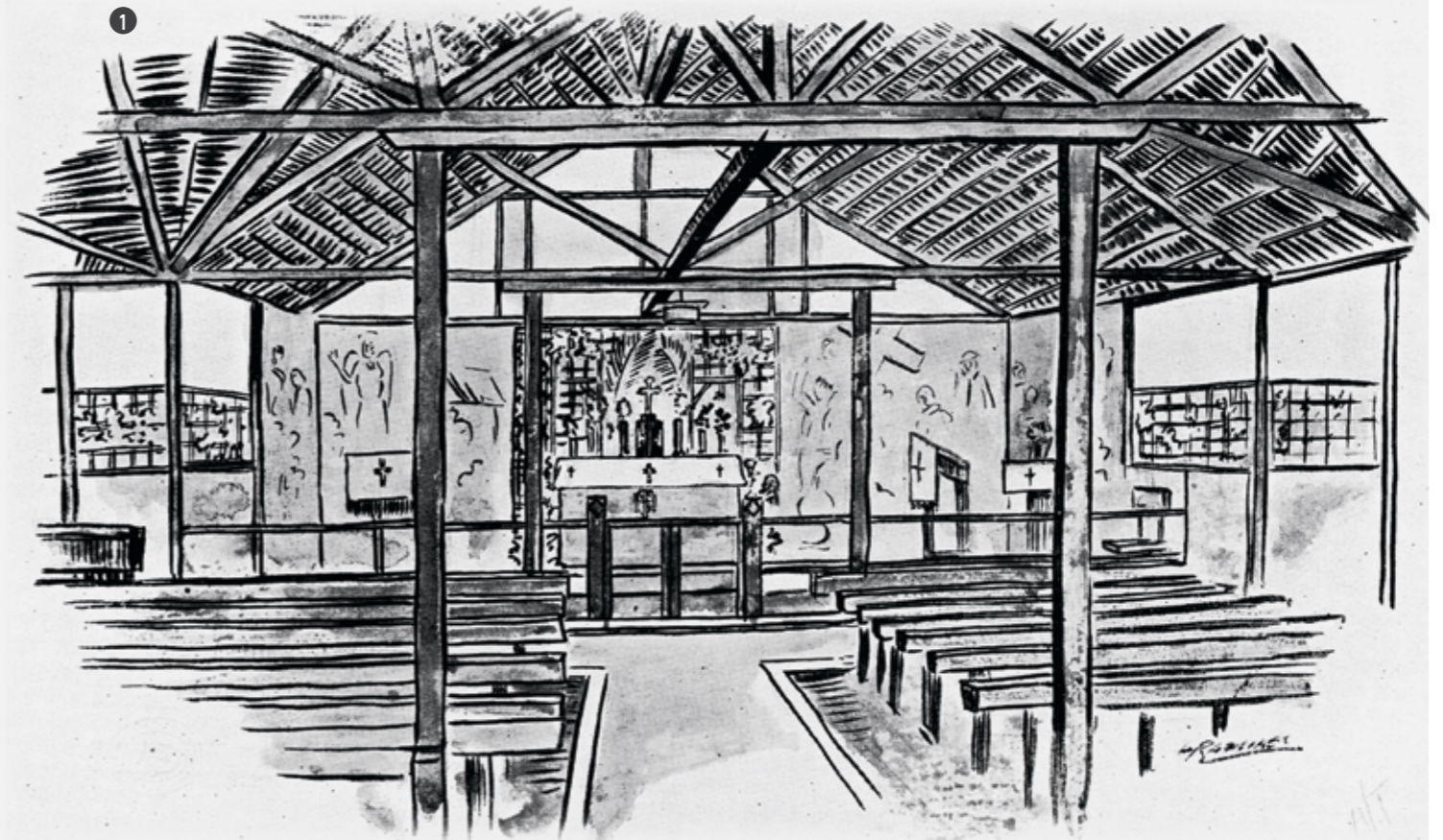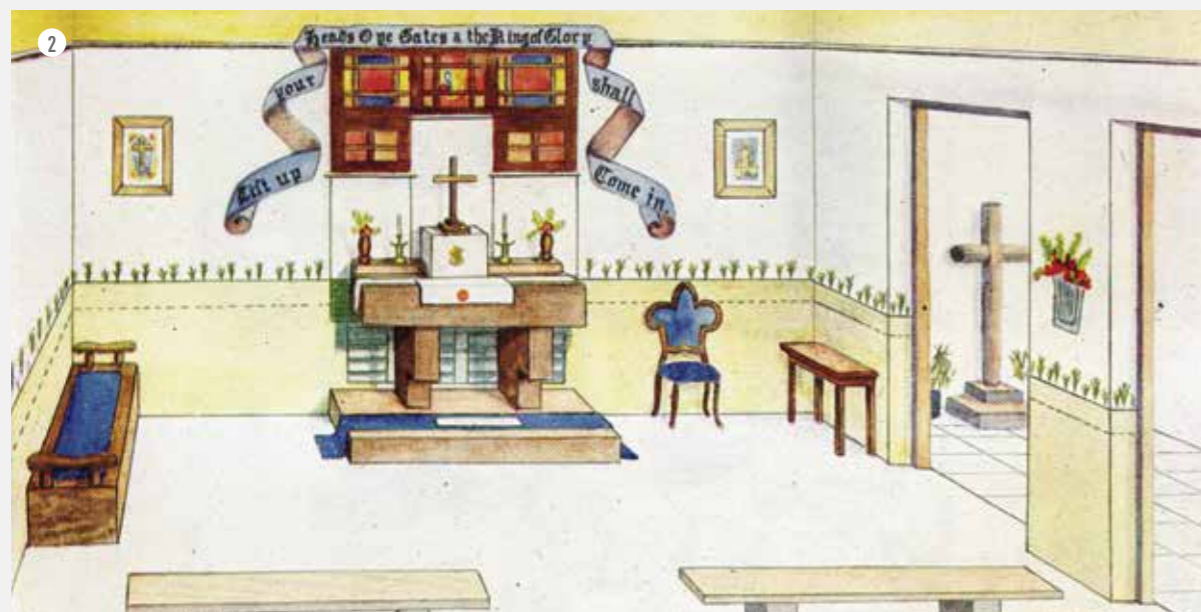
2. Adam Park Church (also known as St Michael's Chapel) was established on the upper floor of a bombed house in Adam Park (now No. 11 Adam Park) and opened on Pentecost Sunday on 24 May 1942. The altar cross was taken from the mortuary chapel at Alexandra Hospital, and the stained glass windows above the altar were constructed from glass pieces and transparent paper. In April 2016, the press reported the discovery of the remains of the church's wall murals with the Bible verse, "Lift up your heads, O ye Gates and the King of Glory shall Come in". The murals were drawn by Captain Reverend Eric Andrews, the camp interpreter and padre, using yellow clay and Reckitt's Blue[4]. Adam Park served as a POW camp during the Japanese Occupation.

3. In April 1942, many POWs were dispersed to camps around the island. One such camp was set up at the Great World Amusement Park. To meet the spiritual needs of the servicemen, the Church of the Ascension at Great World opened on Ascension Day on 14 May 1942. The church was formed by combining four shop units, including a Chinese beauty parlour. Furnishings were scoured from empty shops in the amusement park and adapted for use. This may explain the hint of chinoiserie present in the interior of the church.

4. The architecture of St George's Church, located near the Changi Gaol, is typical of open-air POW churches of the time. Built in 1944, this was the third iteration of St George's Church – the first was near Changi Village and the second in Kanburi (or Kanchanaburi), Thailand. In this particular construction, the church had a rudi-mentary "A" frame roof measuring 14 ft by 10 ft that functioned as a chancel and shelter for the altar. On the altar was a brass cross, known as the Changi Cross. It was fashioned from a 4.5 Howitzer shell in 1942 and followed the church during its various relocations. The rest of the church was exposed to the elements and enclosed only by an *attap* fence. The church also had permanent benches that could seat 200 people. Shrubs, creepers and tropical flowers were planted to beautify the sanctuary. In April 1945, the church moved for the fourth and last time to the officers' area of Changi Prison. The altar cross currently resides at the Changi Museum.

5. St Paul's Church, which opened in June 1944, was constructed inside Changi Gaol, between the Punishment and Isolation blocks. The pulpit, altar rails, lectern, cross and memorial tablets were recycled from the dismantled churches in the Selarang area. The church was the venue for the first Confirmation[5] service after the liberation of Singapore in September 1945.

All images are from The Churches of the Captivity in Malaya *by John Northridge Lewis Bryan and published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (1946). The author wishes to thank the society for granting permission to reproduce the images in this article.* ♦

Notes

1   Bryan, J. N. L. (1946). *The churches of the captivity in Malaya*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. Call no.: RCLOS 940.5472595 BRY

2   The open-air Changi Chapel in the Changi Museum is a representative replica of the many chapels that were built by POWs during the Japanese Occupation. It is often mistaken to be an exact copy of an original war-time chapel, also named the Changi Chapel, at the Royal Military College in Canberra, Australia. The chapel in Australia was first built in 1943 at Sime Road Camp and re-assembled by Australian forces at Changi Camp in 1944. After the war, the chapel structure was dismantled and taken to Australia. In 1988, it was restored as a memorial to Australian POWs. In contrast to the chapel in Australia, Changi Chapel in Singapore is a simpler structure made from wooden planks with a high "A" frame roof covered with *attap* (palm) leaves. Its thatched hut design is an archetype of the many make-shift open-air churches built at the time.

3   Holy Communion is a Christian sacrament in which consecrated bread and wine are partaken as the body and blood of Jesus Christ or as symbols of Christ's body and blood in remembrance of Christ's death.

4   Reckitt's Blue is a laundry whitener that contains traces of blue dye.

5   Confirmation is a Christian sacrament or rite where adolescents or adults, having been baptised as infants and now reached the age of reason, affirm their Christian beliefs and become a full member of the church.

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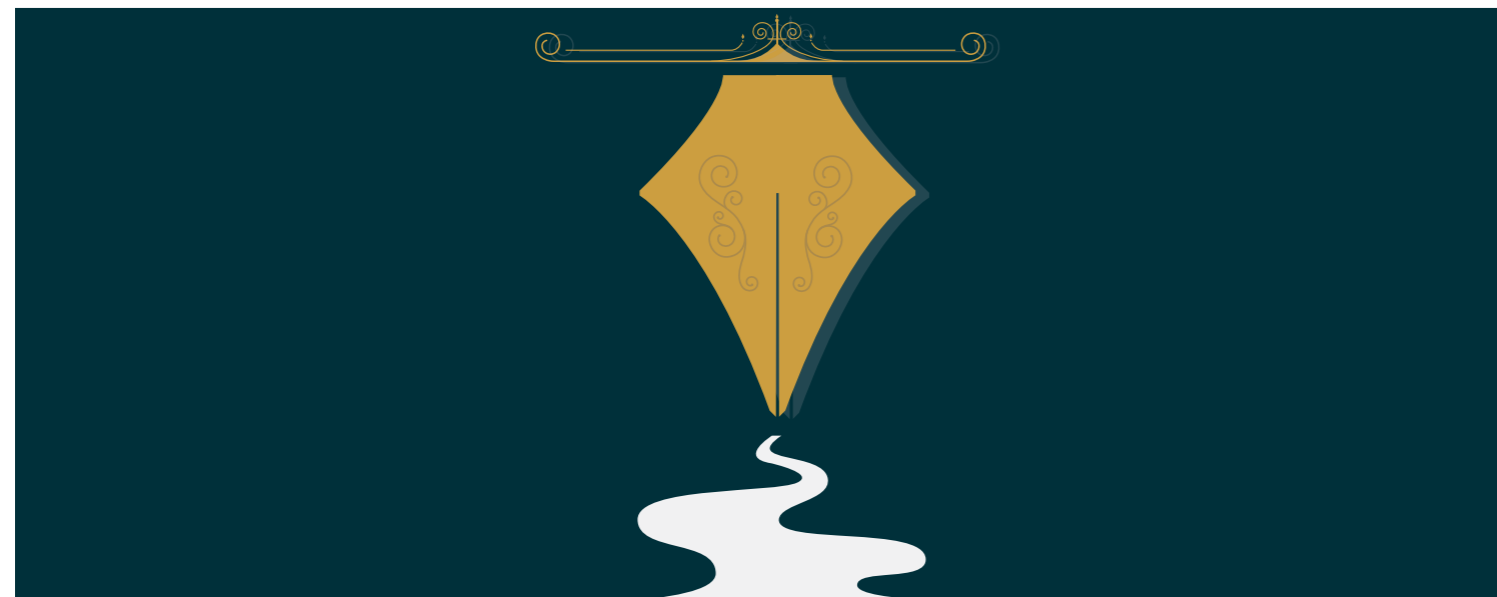
LAW
of
THE LAND

A permanent exhibition on Singapore's constitutional history – from its founding in 1819 to Independence in 1965 – opens at the National Gallery Singapore. **Kevin Khoo** details some of its highlights.

To raise awareness of how legal history illuminates major milestones in the story of our island-nation, a new exhibition, "Law of the Land: Highlights of Singapore's Constitutional Documents", opens on 19 October 2016 at the former Chief Justice's Chamber and Office at the National Gallery Singapore.

Organised by the National Archives of Singapore (NAS), the permanent exhibition explores the history of Singapore's constitutional development from its founding as a British settlement in 1819 to its emergence as a sovereign republic in 1965. The exhibition features rare documents from the collections of the NAS and the National Library that capture key moments in Singapore's constitutional history.

The Constitution of the Republic of Singapore (the Constitution) is the supreme law of the land that all other Singapore laws conform to. It prescribes the important distribution of authority between the three arms of the state: the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. The Constitution also safeguards fundamental rights Singaporeans enjoy, such as equality before the law, equal protection of the law and the freedom of religion, among others. The Constitution has been called a "pragmatic document" that has provided the framework for social, political and economic development to help Singapore thrive.[1]

A New Legal System

The beginnings of Singapore's modern constitutional development is tied to the arrival of Stamford Raffles in 1819.[2] One of the first things that Raffles did was to promulgate a series of six regulations that were published in 1823.

The legal ideas in this nascent set of laws were based on English law, adapted to accommodate the customs of Singapore's indigenous and migrant communities. Unfortunately, these regulations were essentially illegal, as Raffles did not have the authority to enact laws and intended his regulations to be provisional until a formally authorised legal code was established.

These provisional regulations were in force at least up to 1826[3] – the year Singapore became part of the Straits Settlements together with Malacca and Penang – and although they provided for a basic legal system applicable to all in the Singapore settlement, in practice most disputes for non-Europeans were handled by headmen who settled cases according to their community's customs and social mores. Europeans came under the direct jurisdiction of the British Resident's Court.

Reception of English Law

English law was legitimately received into Singapore through a royal charter dated 27 November 1826. Known as the Second Charter of Justice, this charter was a letters patent, or public royal command, that bore the sovereign authority of the British Crown. The Second Charter established a Court of Judicature for the Straits Settlements – comprising the Prince of Wales' Island (Penang), Malacca and Singapore – and introduced a formally authorised and unified legal system based on English common law to replace the previous system that relied on community headmen.

The problem with the Second Charter was that there was only one Recorder (as judges were then known) who had to travel to all three territories. This issue was resolved when a Third Charter of Justice was proclaimed on 10 August 1855. It reaffirmed the reception of English law and provided for a second Recorder to be based in Singapore, in keeping with the increase in trade and population here.[4]

The Crown Colony Constitution

A major constitutional milestone was reached in 1867 when the Straits Settlements was declared a British Crown Colony with a new constitution that granted the colony its first legislature. The Legislative Council was constitutionally delegated with "full power and authority" to establish local laws, ordinances, taxes and institutions as well as approve government appointments.

In practice, however, the British Governor wielded control over most of the colony's affairs: he initiated legislation, had the power to veto bills
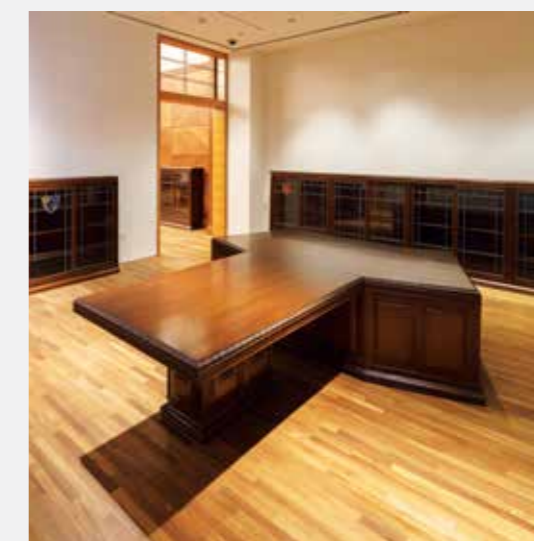
Kevin Khoo is an Archivist at the National Archives of Singapore. His current responsibilities focus on archival research and content development.

1. Raffles' regulations reaffirmed Singapore's position as a free port and created a basic set of laws for matters such as registering the transfer of land and prohibiting slavery and gambling. He also provided for the appointment of magistrates to hear civil and criminal cases. Raffles penned an accompanying "Minute" in 1823 where he discussed the principles underlying his regulations. The minute has provided historians with the clearest exposition of the ideas guiding Singapore's early legal development. This document is a contemporary copy, transcribed in 1823, of the first page of Raffles' "Minute". *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

2. This document with elaborate decorative borders is the original Third Charter of Justice, issued in 1855. Together with the Second Charter of Justice (1826), it marked the formal introduction of English law into Singapore. The Third Charter also marked the first appointment of a professional judge based in Singapore. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

and also had the deciding vote when legislature was evenly divided – his considerable powers limited only by the British Colonial Office in London. Until the 1920s, the majority of the legislature members were nominated senior civil servants from the colony's administration.

The Crown Colony constitution also paved the way for crucial judicial reforms that initiated the separation of the Straits Settlement's executive and judicial arms, which had overlapped since Raffles' time. The Governor ceased to be a judge and the reforms gave new autonomy to the Courts in deciding matters of the law. The office of the Chief Justice also originated from these reforms: in 1868, the Recorder of Singapore , Peter Maxwell Benson, was appointed as the Chief Justice of the Straits Settlements in recognition of Singapore's importance as the centre of government and commerce within the Straits Settlements.[5]

From Colony to Self-Governing State

When the British returned to Singapore after the Japanese Occupation (1942–45) ended, they dissolved the Straits Settlements on 1 April 1946 and made Singapore a standalone Crown Colony with its own constitution. The British also decided to gradually introduce democracy into Singapore to satisfy growing demands from the people for greater say in the government. In 1948, a new constitution came into effect, which for the first time, provided for six elected seats in the legislature. This introduced democratic elections in Singapore and the first Legislative Council election was held on 20 March 1948.[6]

In April 1949, the British also permitted an election for members of the Municipal Commission (renamed the City Council in 1951), a government body in charge of municipal services such as sanitation, health, water and roads. The Commission became the first public institution to be installed with a popularly elected majority – 18 out of its 27 members were elected, taking local

political participation another step towards self-governance. (The remaining nine commissioners were nominated and appointed by the British colonial government.)

The 1950s saw the rumblings of a political awakening in Singapore as well as major constitutional changes that finally brought an end to British colonial rule. The first major development was a review of the constitution by the Rendel Commission appointed in 1953 (with the Rendel Constitution coming into effect on 8 February 1955). Among the key changes recommended and implemented was a system of automatic registration of voters and the formation of a 32-member Legislative Assembly where, for the first time, a majority of 25 representatives were elected by the people. In the ensuing election held on 2 April 1955, the Labour Front emerged as the dominant party by winning 10 of the 17 seats it contested. Its leader David Marshall was appointed as the first Chief Minister of Singapore.

The second major development took place in 1958 when Singapore attained self-government. The Singapore Constitution Order-in-Council 1958, which replaced the 1955 Rendel Constitution, was the culmination of intense efforts by local political leaders to agitate for political autonomy for Singapore. In 1956, Marshall led the First All-Party Mission (with representatives from the Democratic Party, Labour Front, People's Action Party, Progressive Party and the Singapore Alliance) to London to negotiate for self-government. When the talks broke down, Marshall resigned and his successor, Lim Yew Hock, who led the second and third All-Party Missions to London in 1957 and 1958 respectively, was able to successfully achieve self-government for Singapore.

The Constitution of 1958 outlined three key objectives: it provided for a fully-elected 51-seat Legislative Assembly; replaced the post of British Governor with a locally appointed Head of State (the Yang di-Pertuan Negara); and created the office of Prime Minister. The British, however, retained control over Singapore's defence and foreign affairs, and had a large say in its internal security.[7]

By this time the People's Action Party (PAP) had risen to the political forefront. Following the victory of the PAP in the election held in May 1959, Lee Kuan Yew was sworn in as Singapore's first Prime Minister on 5 June. In December that same year, Yusof bin Ishak became Singapore's first local-born Head of State.

Merger and Separation

Singapore's size and the lack of natural resources or hinterland had long underpinned the belief that it could not survive as an independent state. Merger with Malaya had been raised as early as 1955, first by David Marshall and then by Lim Yew Hock, but the Malayan Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman was not receptive to the idea. The PAP government


under Lee Kuan Yew sought merger with greater urgency. Apart from the fact that the PAP had promised a merger in the 1959 election, there were other reasons why securing a hinterland was so vital towards sustaining Singapore's economy.

However, Lee was similarly rebuffed as the Tunku was concerned with the rise of pro-communist radicalism in Singapore and the question of how Singapore's large Chinese population would impact Malaya's racial balance. But in May 1961, the Tunku acknowledged the possibility of merger when speaking to foreign correspondents who were holding a meeting in Singapore.

By then, the Malayan leader was convinced that it was easier to control the rising communist threat from Singapore through a merger. Merger was also made more palatable with British support for a new federation that would include the Borneo Territories – North Borneo (Sabah), Sarawak and Brunei. On 16 September 1963, the Federation of Malaysia, comprising the former states of Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak and North Borneo (Sabah), was born, with Brunei opting out of the merger. Singapore was now constitutionally independent from Britain.[8]
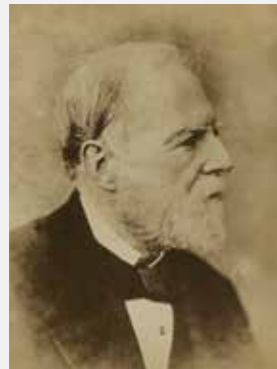
Merger did not significantly change the provisions relating to the legislative and executive bodies in Singapore. Singapore was granted
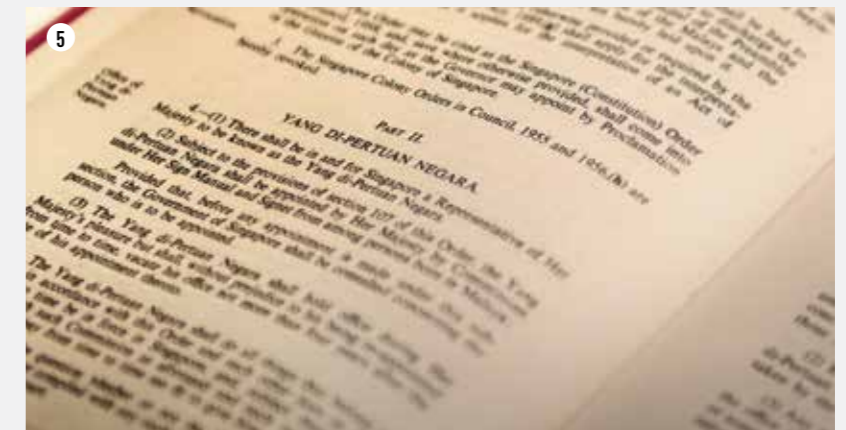
a new 1963 State of Singapore Constitution and retained much autonomy in the newly constituted Federation of Malaysia. Singapore's executive and legislative branches of government retained control of the island's day-to-day administration except in the areas of foreign affairs, defence and internal security. However, the failure to achieve economic concessions for Singapore and other political issues quickly marred relations between the Singapore government and the federal government of Malaysia. The political tussles became racially charged, resulting in fatal riots in Singapore in July and September 1964. Separation

became a necessity. The merger had barely lasted 23 months.[9]

Finally – a Sovereign Republic of Singapore

"WHEREAS it is the inalienable right of a people to be free and independent"

– Proclamation of Singapore, 1965

On 9 August 1965, Singapore was proclaimed an independent and sovereign republic. The Proclamation of Singapore was drafted by Edmund W. Barker, the first Minister for Law, and signed by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. It outlined the new country's aspirations, declaring Singapore to be forever a "sovereign, democratic and independent nation founded on the principles of liberty and justice, and ever seeking the welfare and happiness of her people in a more just and equal society".

One of the first constitutional issues addressed in the immediate post-Independence years was the need to ensure that the communal tensions that led to the riots of 1964 would never be repeated. A constitutional commission was formed under Chief Justice Wee Chong Jin to examine the constitution and introduce safeguards to protect minority rights. This led to the formation of the Presidential Council in 1970, which was renamed the Presidential Council for Minority Rights in 1973.[10]

As the government moved swiftly to ensure the survival of Singapore on numerous fronts, from defence to the economy, the new nation had to make do in its first decades with a composite constitution comprising the Republic of Singapore Independence Act, amendments to the 1963 State of Singapore Constitution and certain imported provisions from the Federal Constitution of Malaysia. A consolidated Constitution was issued only in 1980.

Although the basic framework of the Constitution has remained to this day, it has evolved over time to meet challenges and changing needs. Some key changes include the entrenchment of Singapore's state sovereignty in 1973; the restoration of a two-thirds majority for constitutional amendments in 1979; the introduction of an elected presidency in 1991; and amendments that have created a uniquely Singaporean legislature through the introduction of the non-constituency Member of Parliament (1984), the Group Representation Constituency (1988), and the Nominated Member of Parliament (1990).

These amendments highlight how Singapore's Constitution has evolved and is likely to continue doing so in the years to come as it strives to remain an effective guardian of the nation's aspirations outlined in the 1965 Proclamation. ◆

(Below) Newly appointed Minister for Law, Edmund W. Barker, in his office at the Ministry of Law, 1964. He drafted the Proclamation of Singapore proclaiming Singapore an independent and sovereign republic on 9 August 1965. The Proclamation was signed by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*
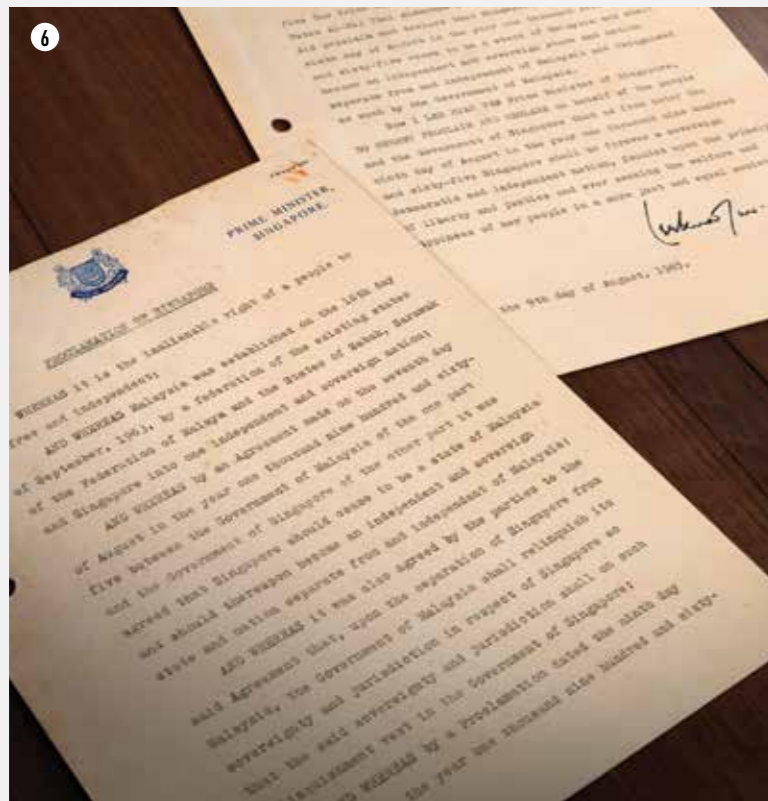
6.   The Proclamation of Singapore is a landmark document that publicly declared Singapore's separation from Malaysia and its beginnings as an independent and sovereign republic. The Proclamation was first read via a Radio Singapura broadcast at 10 am on 9 August 1965 by radio anchor Steven Lee. As recalled later by Lee Kuan Yew in his memoirs, he was simply too busy with the many things that had to be done in quick succession after the separation to personally read the Proclamation on radio. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

Notes

1   Tan, K. Y. L. (2015). *Singapore chronicles: Constitution* (pp. 110–111). Singapore: Institute of Policy Studies: Straits Times Press. Call no.: RSING 342.5957 TAN
2   Tan, 2015, p. 7.
3   Straits Settlements Records, L17: Raffles – Letters to Singapore at National Archives of Singapore; Tan, K. Y. L. (2005). A short legal and constitutional history of Singapore (pp. 29–31). In K. Y. L. Tan. (Ed.), *Essays in Singapore legal history.* Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic and the Singapore Academy of Law. Call no.: RSING 349.9597 ESS
4   Chionh, M. (2005). The development of the court system (pp. 98–104). In Y. L. Tan. (Ed.), *Essays in Singapore legal history.* Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic and the Singapore Academy of Law). Call no.: RSING 349.9597 ESS
5   Turnbull, C. M. (1989). *A history of Singapore, 1819–1988* (pp. 76–83). Singapore: Oxford University Press. Call no.: RSING 959.57 TUR-[HIS]; Chionh, 2005, pp. 104–107.
6   Turnbull, 1989, pp.216–234.
7   Lee K. Y. (1998). *The Singapore story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (pp. 177–267). Singapore: Times Editions: Singapore Press Holdings. Call no.: RSING 959.57 LEE-[HIS]; Hickling, R. H. (1992). Origins of constitutional government (pp. 26–35). In R. H. Hickling. (Ed.), *Essays in Singapore law.* Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications. Call no.: RSING 349.5957 HIC
8   Kwa, C. G., Heng, D., & Tan, T. Y. (2009). *Singapore, a 700-year history: From early emporium to world city* (pp. 157–174). Singapore: National Archives of Singapore. Call no.: RSING 959.5703 KWA-[HIS]; Turnbull, 1989, pp.251–285.
9   Lee, 1998, pp. 540–663; Turnbull, 1989, pp. 251–285.
10 Tan, 2005, pp. 48–54.

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