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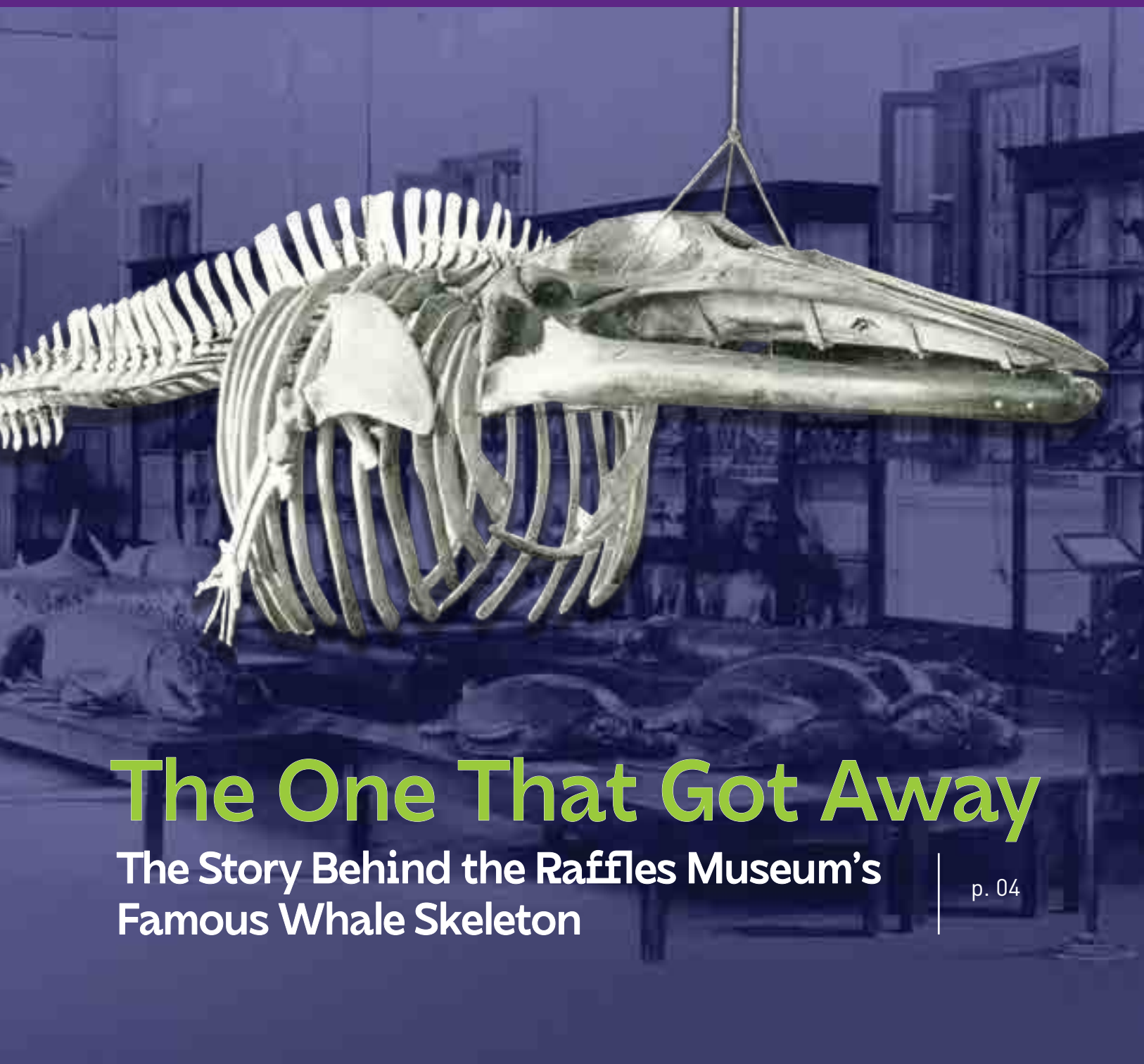

The One That Got Away

The Story Behind the Raffles Museum's Famous Whale Skeleton

p. 04

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Director's Note

Whales are magnificent, awe-inspiring animals. Their enormous size is a reminder of just how insignificant we humans are. So it is not at all surprising that a 13-metre-long skeleton of a whale became an iconic exhibit at the old Raffles Museum. Many older Singaporeans still fondly recall marvelling at the bus-length skeleton suspended from the ceiling. How the museum acquired this exhibit and why they had to let it go six decades later is the subject of this issue's fascinating cover story by Nathaniel Soon.

Whale skeletons aren't the only things that Singapore has lost over time of course. One of Singapore's oldest kampongs, Kampong Wak Sumang, had to make way for the development of Punggol in the 1980s. Hannah Yeo dives into the archives to uncover the 150-year history of this place and the interesting story of Wak Sumang, its charismatic founder.

While much of old Singapore has vanished in the name of progress, there are exceptions. The home of architect Lee Kip Lin, for example, has barely changed since it was built in 1973. Lim Tin Seng and Lee Peng Hui give us a tour of the modernist home designed by one of Singapore's illustrious architects.

Buildings aren't the only things that need to be preserved though. It is also important to preserve cultural products as well; movies like *Money No Enough* and *Forever Fever* are vital aspects of our more recent heritage. Chew Tee Pao explains how the Asian Film Archive restores these classic Singapore films.

Preservation, however, is not easy to do. While we can be thankful that Golden Mile Complex will be conserved following its sale to new owners, the community that made it unique will unfortunately never return. Justin Zhuang looks at the history of this architectural icon and examines how it acquired the moniker "Little Thailand".

And since you're here, don't miss our other stories: you can read how The Crescendos changed the local recording industry, learn about a comic book version of Operation Jaywick and rediscover the original white sands of Pasir Ris.

If you're fishing for interesting stories to read about Singapore, you've definitely come to the right place.

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The blue whale skeleton at the Raffles Museum. *Image reproduced from R. Hanitsch, Guide to the Zoological Collections of the Raffles Museum, Singapore (Singapore: The Straits Times Press, Limited, 1908), Plate VII. (From BookSG; accession no. B02806775B).*

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The One That Got Away

The skeleton of the blue whale hanging from the ceiling of the Raffles Museum's natural history room. *Image reproduced from R. Hanitsch, Guide to the Zoological Collections of the Raffles Museum, Singapore (Singapore: The Straits Times Press, Limited, 1908), Plate VII. (From BookSG; accession no. B02806775B).*

How the Raffles Museum Acquired a Whale Skeleton, Made It Famous, Then Let It Go Six Decades Later

The skeleton of a blue whale took pride of place at the former Raffles Museum for more than 60 years before it was gifted to the National Museum of Malaysia in 1974.

By Nathaniel Soon

Step into the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum and one of the first things that will catch your eye is a 10.6-metre-long skeleton of an adult female sperm whale, *Physeter macrocephalus* (Linnaeus, 1758), taking centre stage at the museum's gallery.

She had been found drifting off the coast of Jurong Island in July 2015. According to the museum, she had probably been hit by a ship as her dorsal hindquarters had a large wound, with broken backbones below the injury.[1]

Divers from the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore first secured the enormous specimen with ropes, before towing it carefully across the West Johor Strait to the Tuas Marine Transfer Station. There, museum scientists commenced the arduous process of examination, dissection and recovery of the whale for eventual display.[2]

Nathaniel Soon has a background in marine science and is a National Geographic Explorer. Through visual storytelling, he seeks to communicate science and connect people with our natural world.

About eight months later, on 15 March 2016, Jubi Lee (thus named because she had been found the same year that the nation was celebrating its golden jubilee) was officially introduced to the public at the museum.

"As an older Singaporean, I am overjoyed by the return of a whale to our natural history museum," declared Ambassador-at-Large Tommy Koh who was at the official launch.[3] What Koh, who was the museum's chairman, was alluding to was the fact that Jubi Lee's skeleton is not the first whale skeleton to be exhibited in a museum in Singapore. Between 1907 and 1974, a 13-metre-long skeleton of a blue whale had been a popular attraction at the Raffles Museum (later renamed the National Museum).[4]

(Top left) Removing the blubber from the carcass of the female sperm whale that was found drifting off the coast of Jurong Island in July 2015. *Courtesy of Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, Faculty of Science, National University of Singapore.*

(Left) A check of vertebral positions and accuracy of accompanying labels before moving the bones of the sperm whale to the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, 2015. *Courtesy of Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, Faculty of Science, National University of Singapore.*

Ikan Besar Skali

On 25 June 1892, the *Singapore Free Press* reported that the British steamer *Bengkalis* had spotted "a large whale" that was "stranded on the beach near the Kesang River, nine miles to the north of Muar".[5]

The whale was presumed to have washed ashore somewhere around Sebatu, about 30 kilometres south of Melaka, eight days prior. It ultimately drew its last breath on 23 June 1892. According to the *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, the "fish of monstrous size (*ikan besar skali*)" was found to have measured 44 feet (13.4 metres) long and was "rather offensive and swollen with gases from decomposition". The locals who encountered the specimen could not "call to mind ever having seen such a creature before".[6]

D.F.A. Hervey, the resident councillor of Melaka, presented the local *penghulu* (chieftain) with a *hadiah* (gift) in exchange for the whale remains, which Hervey decided to preserve and convey to Singapore. A *pagar* (barrier) had been constructed around the carcass to "prevent it from getting washed back into the sea while the labourers worked" to dissect and prepare the remains for transportation.[7]

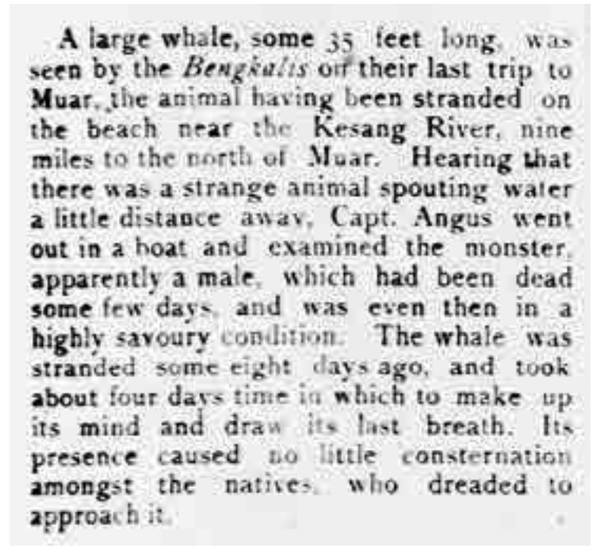
These arrived in Singapore later that year and was acquired by the Raffles Library and Museum (now the National Museum of Singapore) on Stamford Road. While the whale skeleton would go on to become one of the museum's most iconic exhibits, it took 15 more years for it to see the light of day.

Owing to a lack of space in the building, the whale skeleton was locked up in a shed behind the museum compound before it was displayed. Knowledge about its origin and biology was at the time comparably obscure, admitted Karl R. Hanitsch, the museum's curator and first director. Hanitsch and his staff quickly recognised that "more room" and "a number of much-needed alterations" were essential.[8]

Countless negotiations and debates ensued over the next several years. At last, a compromise was reached in 1904. The existing museum building was to be extended, with construction works commencing the same year and wrapping up in 1906.

Thereafter, "a massive reorganisation was undertaken", during which time the natural history specimens were refurbished and the large central gallery on the upper floor was designated as the home of the new zoological collection. Coinciding with the start of the Lunar New Year, the Raffles Museum reopened its doors to an "over-flowing by dense masses" of visitors on 13 February 1907.[9]

One particular exhibit stole the limelight. After years spent tucked away, the enormous skeleton of the beached whale finally made its public debut.



A large whale, some 35 feet long, was seen by the *Bengkalis* on their last trip to Muar, the animal having been stranded on the beach near the Kesang River, nine miles to the north of Muar. Hearing that there was a strange animal spouting water a little distance away, Capt. Angus went out in a boat and examined the monster, apparently a male, which had been dead some few days, and was even then in a highly savoury condition. The whale was stranded some eight days ago, and took about four days time in which to make up its mind and draw its last breath. Its presence caused no little consternation amongst the natives, who dreaded to approach it.

On 25 June 1892, the *Singapore Free Press* reported a sighting by the steamer *Bengkalis* of a large whale stranded on the beach near the Kesang River. *Source: The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser, 25 June 1892 © SPH Media Limited. Permission required for reproduction.*

Whale Skeleton Reels in Visitors

Fitted with steel ropes, the skeleton hung proudly from the ceiling of the newly refurbished natural history room at the Raffles Museum. Assembling and mounting it was no easy task, and Hanitsch credited the ingenuity and hard work of the museum's chief taxidermist Valentine Knight, his assistant Percy de Fontaine and their staff for finding workarounds in the process. The specimen had a couple of missing bones, including a scapula, the "hands", and various vertebrae and ribs.[10]

With assistance from John Hewitt of the Sarawak Museum and Edgar Thurston of the Madras Museum, the Raffles Museum team took measurements and drawings of existing whale specimens and used them to model these missing bones in papier-mâché. Only then was the full skeleton made available for viewing.[11]

Because this occurred before the advent of DNA technology, it took Hanitsch and his team several years before they could accurately identify the mammal. In an earlier report, Hanitsch had originally suspected the specimen to be that of a humpback whale, or *Megaptera boops* (Van Beneden & Gervais, 1880), but his subsequent morphological analyses would have been at odds with this earlier study. Further work allowed him to correctly identify the specimen as belonging to *Balaenoptera indica* (Blyth, 1859), which has since been synonymised as *B. musculus* (Linnaeus, 1758), more commonly known as the blue whale.[12]

…the "fish of monstrous size (*ikan besar skali*)" was found to have measured 44 feet (13.4 metres) long and was "rather offensive and swollen with gases from decomposition".

The whale skeleton sparked significant interest and excitement among visitors. When the exhibit was being set up, an elderly Malay man came by and offered a first-hand account of the beaching of the whale. "Bukan satu kapal. Satu ikan!" ("Not a boat. A fish!"). He was, however, wrong on both counts – it was neither a boat nor a fish.[13]

The whale spawned a tale that was peppered with riveting detail. "Malays… told their boys the true story of the monster whale whose skeleton hangs suspended near the turtles. How the poor beast was stranded near Malacca and a *pagar* built promptly around him when for three days his bull-like roars terrified the neighbourhood, then silence and in seven days a corpse."[14]

The giant skeleton also attracted international visitors from the wider scientific community. These included William Brigham, the American botanist and ethnologist and founding director of the Bernice P. Bishop Museum in Honolulu. Brigham, who had been on an inspection tour around the world, stopped by the Raffles Museum in 1912. He wrote about the whale in a "handsomely illustrated report". Australian fisheries expert David Stead delivered a lecture titled

Workers at the National Museum dismantling the blue whale skeleton in preparation for its transfer to the National Museum of Malaysia as a gift, 1974.
Source: The Straits Times © SPH Media Limited. Reprinted with permission.

"Life in the Sea" in 1922 to members of the Singapore Natural History Society, where he spoke passionately about whales and the biodiversity in the waters surrounding Singapore.[15]

The Raffles Museum gained an international reputation in the decades that followed, and its collections expanded significantly "as a result of expeditions in search of biological species, archaeological excavations and painstaking research".[16]

In 1924, the museum underwent upgrading works, and the whale exhibit, which had been in the public gallery, was temporarily removed. Museum staff took the opportunity to refurbish and bleach the specimen before it was shifted to a new location. Now hanging from the ceiling right above the museum's staircase on the second storey, the whale skeleton would remain at this spot for half a century, until the early 1970s.[17]

By 1948, a quarter of a million people had visited the Raffles Museum annually. It was slowly but surely emerging as a "historical landmark" far greater than the sum of its individual collections. "[T]he importance of [the] Raffles Museum stands out clearly when Singapore is the centre of a region which is, ethnologically and zoologically, one of the most intriguing in the world," wrote the *Singapore Free Press* in 1960.[18]

After Singapore achieved internal self-government in 1959, the government saw the opportunity to mobilise the Raffles Museum to serve the island's broader nation-building vision. Hence, in 1960, the existing institution was renamed the National Museum. While it inherited all the collections belonging to the old Raffles Museum, including the natural history exhibits, the new National Museum's focus was instead on Singapore's heritage and culture.[19]

The Singapore Science Centre, which began construction in 1971, inherited the natural history collection from the National Museum. However, the organisation's mandate never covered taxonomic collection and identification. Members of its advisory board began searching for viable storage options for the over 126,000 zoological specimens, including that of the blue whale, which they found too large to accommodate. Indeed, these exhibits were "not only exposed to the risk of considerable material loss or damage" but were also "in danger of being disposed of and relegated to other institutions".[20]

The blue whale skeleton that had been in Singapore for nearly a century and later gifted to the National Museum of Malaysia in 1974 is now on display at the Labuan Marine Museum, off Sabah. *Courtesy of Shih Hsi-Te. Images reproduced from Martyn E.Y. Low and Kate Pocklington, 200: Points in Singapore's Natural History (Singapore: Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, 2019), 478–79. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 508.5957 LOW).*

Whale Skeleton's Fate Sealed

The authorities had to confront the fact that the whale, which had made the Raffles Museum famous, represented "little of Singapore's own past". In the early 1970s, the fate of the blue whale, which had enthralled visitors at the old Raffles Museum for over six decades, was more or less sealed.[21]

In 1972, the Science Centre donated what remained of the natural history collection to the Department of Zoology at the University of Singapore (now the National University of Singapore; NUS), where it was named as the Zoological Reference Collection. Over the next 15 years, the specimens were moved to various locations, including a storage facility at Ayer Rajah, different departments in the university and Nanyang University, before ending up at its permanent home at the science faculty of NUS in 1987.[22]

On 6 May 1974, the *Straits Times* announced that the Science Centre would be gifting the whale skeleton to the National Museum of Malaysia (Muzium Negara) in Kuala Lumpur. In return, the

The skeleton of Jubi Lee at the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, 2016. The 10.6-metre-long skeleton is exhibited in a diving pose with her skull just a metre off the ground. *Courtesy of Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, Faculty of Science, National University of Singapore.*

Malaysians would train Singapore's museum staff on the "finer points of modelling and casting of exhibition specimens". "The specimen will be one of the main exhibits at our museum and we expect it to become a main attraction," said Syed Jamaluddin, then curator of Muzium Negara.[23] (Presently, the whale specimen sits as the centrepiece in the Labuan Marine Museum, off Sabah, since its transfer there in 2003.[24])

An outpouring of grief and regret followed the announcement. "It is like a personal loss to me. For as a child I never failed to look at it whenever I visited the museum. I have seen children looking at the vast structure with awe. It was one of the museum's finest and most impressive exhibits," wrote a reader to the *Straits Times*.[25]

The *New Nation* made the accusation that "local bodies were apparently not offered the opportunity to purchase the exhibits. Instead foreign organisations abroad were approached. The result is that a great section of the natural history collection which would have been the pride of any national museum is now out of the country… No amount of money can surely replace the sentimental attachment Singaporeans have for the items of historic importance".[26]

The assistant director of the Science Centre, R.S. Bhathal, wasted no time in offering a sharp rebuke. He clarified that the complete zoological collection, minus the whale, remained in the country.

NOTES

1 Audrey Tan, "A Whale of an Exhibit," *Straits Times*, 15 March 2016, 1. (From NewspaperSG)
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"The whale skeleton is not a pre-historic fossil which would be of great value to scientists who study pre-history…," said Bhathal. "[It] does not lend itself to the Centre's exhibits programmes [sic] and furthermore, there is just not the necessary space (which is needed so badly for the new exhibits)… to accommodate it… Eventually the Museum Negara approached the Science Centre for the whale skeleton. The Science Centre agreed to donate it to the Museum Negara in the spirit of goodwill and scientific co-operation."[27]

Of Celebrations and Cetaceans

In 1987, the National Museum celebrated its centenary. To mark this milestone occasion, a selection of "historic fauna" like the crocodile, orang utan and leatherback turtle, all of which once called the museum home, were brought back for three weeks from 29 September to 18 October. To the disappointment of many, the returning zoological exhibits did not include the blue whale. Richard Poh, who was then the museum's director explained: "Many people remember and ask about it, but unfortunately we can't bring it back for the exhibition as it is in Kuala Lumpur."[28]

The book, *One Hundred Years of the National Museum*, by Gretchen Liu was also produced to commemorate the museum's rich history.[29] In reviewing the publication, Irene Hoe of the *Straits Times* recounted: "As a child, I remember going to the museum – as often as I could persuade anyone to take me – to see 'my whale', 'my tiger', and 'my snake', among other treasures of natural history which packed the place… 'My whale', for instance,… sat in storage until a European taxidermist assembled it, suspended it from the ceiling with a steel rope and set it in my memory indelibly."[30]

A groundswell of public interest for a proper museum dedicated to Singapore's natural history was materialising. In 1998, NUS established the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research to formally manage the Zoological Reference Collection. This institution, however, was more of a research centre with public display galleries.[31]

In May 2009, the museum set a record single-day turnout when it welcomed over 3,000 visitors during an event held in conjunction with International Museum Day. This prompted calls for a larger facility that could accommodate not only more people, but also the entirety of the museum's showcase. That same year, NUS revealed plans for a full-fledged natural history museum that would replace the existing research centre.[32]

Coming Full Circle

The Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum opened its doors on 18 April 2015. However, even after having departed these shores for over 40 years, the old whale exhibit had not been forgotten. Claire Chiang, the senior vice-president of Banyan Tree Holdings, had donated a handsome sum to the museum. She spoke fondly of her visits to the National Museum as a child. "Of course, there was no air-conditioning then, but I remember the gorilla, the whale. It was such a fantasy place filled with many cabinets of curiosities. There was always something to explore. And I missed that when the museum changed."[33]

"Jubi Lee is even better than the whale we gave away because it was found in our waters, because it belongs to a species seldom found in our waters, and because the skeleton is in perfect order."

The new museum was clearly still missing something: Jubi Lee's debut in local waters a few months later could not have been more serendipitous.

"Jubi Lee is even better than the whale we gave away because it was found in our waters, because it belongs to a species seldom found in our waters, and because the skeleton is in perfect order," said Ambassador-at-Large Tommy Koh.[34] A fitting ending to a whale of a story. ♦

16 Lydia Aroozoo, "'Redeeming' Malayan History… Its Intriguing Work at Raffles Museum," *Singapore Free Press*, 24 September 1960, 6. (NewspaperSG)
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32 Tan Dawn Wei, "Let's Have a Natural History Museum for Singapore," *Straits Times*, 14 June 2009, 26. (From NewspaperSG)
33 Deepika Shetty, "Giving Back to the Museums," *Straits Times*, 28 April 2015, 2–3. (From NewspaperSG)
34 Tan, "A Whale of an Exhibit."

GOLDEN MILE COMPLEX

Five Decades of an Architectural Icon

The collective sale and conservation of Golden Mile Complex will eventually restore a visionary building to its former glory, but the process will also mean the loss of a unique community that has developed there.

By Justin Zhuang

Acclaimed Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas described it a masterpiece of experimental architecture. Singaporeans were drawn to it for its atmosphere and the abundance of cheap Thai food. For Thais living in Singapore, it was a home away from home.

Golden Mile Complex, also known as Little Thailand, was sold in 2021 to a consortium which will redevelop the building. As it has been gazetted as a conserved building by the Urban Redevelopment Authority, its physical structure is likely to be preserved. However, the same cannot be said for its unique character. Its tenants – a mix of inexpensive Thai eateries, seedy bars and tiny shops selling Thai perishables – were given until May 2023 to move out. Now that they have dispersed, they are unlikely to return.

As an era in the building's history ends, it is timely to look back at its history, which goes back five decades.

Golden Mile Complex with its unique stepped terraced design as seen from Nicoll Highway, 2022. The building next to it is Golden Mile Tower. *Photo by Darren Soh*.

Justin Zhuang is an observer of the designed world and its impact on everyday life. He is the author of several books on architecture and design in Singapore. His latest book (co-authored with Jiat-Hwee Chang) is *Everyday Modernism: Architecture & Society in Singapore* (2023), the first comprehensive documentation of Singapore's modern built environment through the lens of social cultural and architectural histories.

Redevelopment of the Beach Road area for projects such as the Golden Mile Complex, 1967. *Source: The Straits Times © SPH Media Limited. Reprinted with permission.*

Building Golden Mile Complex

Officially opened on 28 January 1972, Golden Mile Complex was an urban renewal project by the government to "redevelop and rejuvenate the slum-ridden areas in the Singapore city centre".[1] In the 1960s, the site was home to squatter settlements, small-time furniture and rattan makers, and the Kampong Glam Community Centre.[2]

In June 1967, then Minister for Law and National Development E.W. Barker announced that the area would be one of 14 urban redevelopment projects which would be transformed – resulting in modern skyscrapers, luxury apartments, hotels and shops – to give rise to a "new look Singapore". These projects would involve the participation of private enterprises.[3]

Singapura Developments won the tender for the three-acre site that would eventually host Golden Mile Complex with a proposal for a building by the architecture firm Design Partnership (now known as DP Architects), which was then helmed by William S.W. Lim, Tay Kheng Soon and Koh Seow Chuan. The three men had convinced Singapura Developments to bid for the site in May 1969, offering the unusual proposition for a single building that would integrate shops, offices and apartments. Although the concept differed sharply from the government's original proposal for luxury apartments on the plot, Lim, Tay and another architect, Gan Eng Oon, proved their design could work with an economic feasibility study that included precisely calculated land and sale prices.[4]

The all-in-one design of Golden Mile Complex marked a significant shift from how city planners in Singapore then traditionally segregated areas into different zones for "live, work, play". In fact, it embodied Lim's vision for "megastructures" that would contain all the functions of a city within a building, which he believed to be the future of Asian cities.

"We must reject outdated planning principles that seek to segregate man's activities into arbitrary zones, no matter how attractive it may look in ordered squares on a land use map. We must reject arbitrary standards laid down that limit the intensive use of land," said Lim and Tay as part of an essay for the Singapore Planning and Urban Research Group that was published in *Asia Magazine* in 1966.[5] This vision was realised in Golden Mile Complex: a concrete megastructure that became one of the earliest mixed-use developments in Singapore and Asia.[6]

In January 1970, Singapura Developments began marketing the property and declared that "The Golden Mile Race Is On". All 64 apartments were snapped up within a month, and most of the offices and shops were sold by the time building works commenced in May 1970.[7]

The building was originally named Woh Hup Complex, after the parent company of Singapura Developments. Rising 16 storeys, the edifice was designed in the Brutalist style popular in Europe and North America from the 1950s to the 1970s.[8] It was constructed in a stepped terraced design held up by two end pillars that each adorned a star logo by Singapore's leading graphic designer William Lee.[9] Such a facade maximised waterfront views for the 64 apartments and maisonette penthouses spread across the topmost seven floors.

The next six floors housed 210 offices and studios to complete the tower that was seemingly pried apart in the middle. This sheltered a residential play deck facing Beach Road on the 10th storey while letting in natural light and ventilation into the office corridors and a three-storey podium. The latter comprised 360 shops that sat atop a basement carpark for 550 vehicles.

Completing the facilities was a four-storey residential car park at one end of the building that was topped with an open-air swimming pool overlooking the former Crawford Park. All these different functions were connected by corridors, including a "street" that ran through the podium of shops. The result was an interiorised environment designed to "encourage human interaction and intensify public life".[10]

A Hub of Modernity

Woh Hup Complex was part of a pioneering wave of shopping centres to open in Singapore in the early 1970s, along with People's Park Complex in Chinatown and Tanglin Shopping Centre and Specialists' Centre in the Orchard Road area.

Like many of the complexes built then, Woh Hup Complex was also a strata-titled development. This form of property ownership was introduced by the government in 1968 to allow individual owners to have a share of a land. It allowed property developers to quickly recoup their investment by tapping on a pool of buyers, and also enabled individuals to participate in the on-going modernisation of Singapore.[11]

Woh Hup Complex offered shop lots in various sizes, starting from a 144-square-foot lot for just $16,500.[12] The prices were lower compared to other shopping centres because the complex was at the city centre fringe. But its developer remained bullish about its prospects. "We offer easy parking, no frayed nerves while coming up here," said T.M. Yong, a director at Singapura Developments. "Our shop owners will most probably be able to offer goods at lower prices."[13] The earliest tenants in the complex were an eclectic mix of shoe retailers, beauty salons, photo studios, furniture suppliers, travel agents, eateries, restaurants and nightclubs.[14]

As one of the first buildings to offer modern office spaces in Singapore, Woh Hup Complex attracted many businesses too. Singapura Developments and its parent company Woh Hup as well as Design Partnership set up offices in the building.[15] The complex also became known for its many architecture and engineering firms, including OD Architects who were conceiving the masterplan for the National University of Singapore's Kent Ridge campus, Cardew and Rider Engineers who were working with Design Partnership on Marina Square, and several engineering firms involved in the construction of Singapore's up-and-coming Mass Rapid Transit network.[16]

But a decade after the complex opened, there were complaints of interrupted water supply, faulty air-conditioning and lifts, leaking roofs, rotting ceiling boards, rubbish piling up along the corridors, and broken or missing lights.[17] These were reported after Woh Hup exited the property market and sold Singapura Developments along with its properties to City Developments in 1981.[18] Woh Hup Complex was then renamed Golden Mile Complex.

The Rise of "Little Thailand"

By the mid-1980s, many of the building professionals had moved their offices elsewhere and Golden Mile Complex became better known as the haunt of foreign construction workers, specifically those from Thailand.

After work, particularly on Sundays and public holidays, homesick Thai workers thronged Golden Mile Complex to drink Singha beer, catch up on news back home by reading Thai newspapers, and listen to Thai music on cassette tapes. The draw for most was the various eateries selling Thai food at reasonable prices on the ground floor. Not only

A concept sketch of a megastructure by the Singapore Planning and Urban Research Group (which included William Lim and the other designers of Golden Mile Complex) published in *Asia Magazine* in 1966. It resembles what Golden Mile Complex looks like (facing Beach Road). *Image reproduced from Singapore Planning and Urban Research Group 1965–1967 (Singapore: Singapore Planning and Urban Research Group, 1968). 4. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 307.1216095957 SIN).*

did these establishments serve food just like home, they served them on tables and chairs "scattered in front of food shops" or along the corridors and the concourse – just "[like] a street corner in Haadyai or Bangkok".[19]

Golden Mile Complex was also the terminal for tour buses plying the Singapore-Haadyai route operated by travel agencies located in the complex and the neighbouring Golden Mile Tower. As the Thai clientele in the complex grew, it became referred to as "Little Bangkok" and "Little Thailand".[20] The Thai community injected new life into what was then a rapidly ageing Golden Mile Complex, and attracted even more shops to serve the community. A tailor in the complex reportedly expanded from one shop to seven to sell all things Thai, while a "100% genuine Thai style" disco named Pattaya opened in 1988 on the second floor.[21] There was even a 50-seat "cinema" that screened kick-boxing specials and Thai features at $3 a ticket.[22]

The Thai community injected new life into what was then a rapidly ageing Golden Mile Complex, and attracted even more shops to serve the community.

In 1986, the *Straits Times* reported that Golden Mile Complex "would be a ghost town but for the office workers, who appear at lunch time, and the Thais, who have made it their haunt". Dorothy, a secretary working in an architecture firm in the complex, told the *Straits Times*: "Before the Thais started coming here about four years ago, the place was very dead. Now, it's sometimes so noisy that you get a headache." Because fights would occasionally break out, she was not a fan of the place. "For Thai food, I'd rather go to Joo Chiat," she added.[23] Her sentiments were shared by many other Singaporeans who avoided Golden Mile Complex on Sundays.

As one shopowner explained: "Our Sunday business has been hit. Some customers stay away because of the Thai character of the place." A food stall operator added: "The Thais linger for hours, drinking beer and eating their favourite beef noodles. Sometimes, they fight among themselves over a few drinks."[24]

It did not help that migrant workers and the complex were often in the news for the wrong reasons. As part of the government's massive crackdown on illegal migrants in March 1989, 370 suspected Thai undocumented workers at Golden Mile Complex were nabbed in a single operation.[25]

National Icon or National Disgrace?

In 1994, Rem Koolhaas visited Singapore and marvelled at its development in his seminal essay "Singapore Songlines". He was particularly captivated by Golden Mile Complex and People's Park Complex, which he praised as "'masterpieces' of experimental architecture/urbanism".[26] On his next visit to Singapore in 2005, Koolhaas said: "These buildings were not intended to be landmarks but became landmarks. Yesterday, I went to see all the buildings again, and they are absolutely stunning, radical and amazing."[27]

While Koolhaas and many in the architecture fraternity saw Golden Mile Complex as the future, most Singaporeans regarded it as a relic of the past. By the 1990s, a slew of new shopping centres had sprung up near the complex, including Raffles City, Bugis Junction, Suntec City, Millenia Walk and Marina Square. Many felt Golden Mile Complex and other strata-title malls were simply no match for these single-owner developments that could plan a more attractive retail mix to woo shoppers.[28] A 1996 article in the *Straits Times* assessed that Golden Mile Complex was unlikely to change because of its ownership structure and should simply "fill [the] low-end gap".[29]

The disconnect between Golden Mile Complex's celebrated architecture and its decline came to a head in 2006. During a parliamentary session on 6 March, then Nominated Member of Parliament Ivan Png called it a "vertical slum". He was particularly irked by how each individual owner had added "extensions, zinc sheets, patched floors, glass, all without any regard for other owners and without any regard for national welfare", resulting in "a terrible eyesore and a national disgrace".

"The appearance of Golden Mile Complex appals me whenever I drive along Nicoll Highway. It must create a terrible impression on foreign visitors arriving from the airport. How can we be a world-class city in a garden? The Golden Mile Complex is just the most extreme of how a strata-title property can deteriorate," he said.[30]

This came just after Golden Mile Complex was featured in *Singapore 1:1 – City*, a publication showcasing significant architecture and urban design in the city-state.[31] "That's a real joke!" said Png. "Can you imagine if that thing was standing on the Singapore River between OCBC Building and UOB Centre?" He added: "It just gives me goosebumps. It's so close to the city, yet it's so unlike Singapore – orderly, tidy, everything neat. It'll drag us down."[32]

Not everyone agreed with his criticism. Retiree Evelyn Ong, who moved into the complex in 2005, immediately booked her 11-storey apartment after seeing the breathtaking views. She said: "Once I stepped in and saw the view, I said book, book, must book." She bought her 1,000-square-foot apartment for about $310,000, and spent about $70,000 on renovations to make it look like a holiday resort. "I think I'm very lucky. It's so difficult to find such a nice view. Every day, I sit here (at my balcony) and I can see the beautiful lights at night." She agreed that more could be done to spruce up the building though.[33]

The local architecture fraternity pushed back against Png's comments. In August 2006, Calvin Low, a trained architect and journalist, kickstarted a monthly series on local architecture in the *Straits Times* and titled his first article "Golden Mile Still Shines".

"The architectural thesis that GMC [Golden Mile Complex] represented was revolutionary – not just for Singapore but globally, too. It stood as a concrete

(Top) The many Thai eateries on the ground floor in Golden Mile Complex, 2023. *Photo by Jimmy Yap.*

(Above) A Thai shop selling flowers and other items for worship and prayers, 2023. *Photo by Jimmy Yap.*

(Below) Statue of Phra Phrom, or four-faced Brahma, outside Golden Mile Complex, 2023. In Thailand, the god is prayed to for good fortune and protection. This statue is mistakenly referred to as four-faced Buddha in Singapore. *Photo by Jimmy Yap.*

(Bottom) A shop selling Thai food items, 2023. *Photo by Jimmy Yap.*

realisation of the architects' vision of a futuristic city-within-a-building that offered a whole, new integrated way of living in a modern, tropical, urban Asian context," he wrote.[34]

In November the same year, a collective of architects, designers and artists known as FARM launched "Save the Modern Building Series", a lineup of talks to raise awareness of the complex and other pioneering modern buildings such as Pearl Bank Apartments.[35] In November 2007, the inaugural architecture festival, Singapore ArchiFest 07 – organised by the Singapore Institute of Architects to celebrate Singapore's built environment – featured tours of the complex conducted by architecture students from the National University of Singapore.[36]

A Landmark Saved, a Community Lost

In August 2018, news broke that more than 80 percent of the owners of units in the complex had agreed to put the building up for an en bloc sale at $800 million. This came hot on the heels of the sale of another modernist icon, Pearl Bank Apartments,[37] just six months earlier. Heritage and architectural experts were dismayed at the news. "It will be a tragedy and a great loss to Singapore if the en-bloc sale results in the demolition and redevelopment of such an important urban landmark with such high architectural and social significance," said heritage conservation expert Ho Weng Hin.[38]

Although architects and academics petitioned for Golden Mile Complex to be conserved, residents were in two minds about it. The complex's long-time

The now-defunct swimming pool at Golden Mile Complex, 1980–99. *Akitek Tenggara Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

residents confessed they could no longer keep up with the building's maintenance needs. "The problem is that it's an old building, and when it rains, the water seeps through some of the walls. The building has water-proofing issues," said Ponno Kalastree, who had lived and worked there since 1989. He was among those who had voted for the sale and was planning to downgrade to a Housing and Development Board flat, but admitted that he would miss the place.[39]

To the surprise of many, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) told the *Business Times* in October 2018 that they have "assessed the building to have heritage value, and is in the process of engaging the stakeholders to explore options to facilitate conservation". "Modern architecture, dating from our recent past, is a significant aspect of our built heritage, and we have selectively conserved a number of such buildings. Where there is strong support and merits for conservation, we will work with the relevant stakeholders to facilitate the process," said the URA. This meant that the existing building could be retained while a new block would be added next to it.[40]

The tender closed in January the following year without any offer, and a second tender launched just two months later with the same terms and price tag of $800 million suffered the same fate.[41]

Almost one year after the two failed collective sales, the URA announced in October 2020 that it was officially proposing Golden Mile Complex to be conserved in light of its historical and architectural significance.[42] When it was gazetted a year later in October 2021, Golden Mile Complex became the "first modern, large-scale strata-titled development to be conserved in Singapore".[43]

The owners relaunched an en bloc sale in December that year at the same price of $800 million.[44] This time, the sale was successful and the complex was sold in May 2022 to a consortium comprising Far East Organization, Sino Land and Perennial Holdings. Although their bid was $100 million lower than the reserve price, the owners agreed to the sale within "a record time of 15 days".[45]

The redevelopment of Golden Mile Complex could serve as a model for how other similar buildings in Singapore can be conserved and enjoy a new lease of life for the future.

At the point of publishing this essay, the new owners have yet to reveal how they plan to redevelop Golden Mile Complex, though it is unlikely that any of the former tenants will return. The battle to conserve Golden Mile Complex has, ironically, cost the community who kept it alive when others moved on to swankier new buildings. But all, however, is not lost. The redevelopment of Golden Mile Complex could serve as a model for how other similar buildings in Singapore can be conserved and enjoy a new lease of life for the future. ♦

To see more photos of Golden Mile Complex, visit https://go.gov.sg/golden-mile-complex-photos or scan this QR code.

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MONEY NO ENOUGH, PASSION NEEDED TOO

Restoring Classic Singaporean Films

Money No Enough, *Forever Fever* and *The Teenage Textbook Movie* kickstarted a new era in Singaporean cinema, making them prime candidates for restoration.

By Chew Tee Pao

(Left) In *Money No Enough* (1998), three friends with financial problems start a car polishing business together. *Courtesy of J Team Productions and Asian Film Archive.*

(Facing page) *Money No Enough* features the use of Hokkien and Singlish. Starring (from left) Jack Neo (who wrote the screenplay), Mark Lee and Henry Thia, the film earned over $5.8 million in box office sales. *Courtesy of J Team Productions and Asian Film Archive.*

Film restoration is often thought of as a process that is necessary for older films, perhaps like those produced in the 1950s and 1960s by Cathay-Keris Films and the Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Productions. When films such as *Patah Hati* (1952) and *Seniman Bujang Lapok* (1961) were made, they were regarded simply as commercial entertainment and little effort was made to store them well. Today, they are considered classics and much time and effort has been spent to restore these prints and preserve them for posterity.

However, even films of a more recent vintage are candidates for restoration. Often, a movie is seen as a commercial enterprise, made with an eye towards ensuring relatively quick returns for investors. It is only with the passage of time that some of these movies become classics and end up as candidates for restoration.

Chew Tee Pao is an archivist with the Asian Film Archive. Since 2014, he has overseen the restoration of more than 30 films from the archive's collection.

Mee Pok Man

When it first hit local screens in 1995, few people probably recognised the importance of *Mee Pok Man*, the seminal debut feature of Singaporean director Eric Khoo. The film stars Joe Ng who runs a fishball noodle stall, and Michelle Goh, who plays Bunny, a prostitute. Among the many notable things about the film are its scenes of necrophilia. Significantly, *Mee Pok Man* helped local filmmakers believe that it was possible to make movies.

In 2015, the Asian Film Archive (AFA), with support from the Singapore Film Commission, carried out the restoration of *Mee Pok Man*. As the film elements were originally processed in a laboratory in Australia, the camera and sound negatives were kept there. These were subsequently brought back to Singapore, and *Mee Pok Man* became AFA's first restored local film from the 1990s revival era.

The restored work was screened at the 26th Singapore International Film Festival in 2015, during the film's 20th anniversary, in the presence of many cast

and crew members. The restoration of *Mee Pok Man* became the catalyst for the AFA to search for the film elements of other Singaporean works made in the 1990s.

The Iconic 90s Trio

In 2017, the AFA embarked on the hunt for surviving film elements of three other iconic Singaporean films – *Money No Enough* (Tay Teck Lock, 1998), *Forever Fever* (Glen Goei, 1998) and *The Teenage Textbook Movie* (Phillip Lim, 1998) – that were released in local theatres in 1998. These films were instrumental to the revival of Singapore cinema in the late 1990s.

Written by comedian and film director Jack Neo, *Money No Enough* is about three friends with financial problems who start a car polishing business together. In Mandarin, English and Hokkien, it was the all-time highest-grossing Singaporean film for more than a decade until the record was broken by Neo's own directorial work, *Ah Boys to Men*, in 2012.[1]

Forever Fever is significant because it was the first Singaporean film to be bought for worldwide commercial release by film distributor Miramax. The musical comedy stars Adrian Pang as supermarket

(Left) The poster of *Mee Pok Man* designed for its 20th anniversary in 2015. *Courtesy of Zhao Wei Films and Asian Film Archive.*

(Above) *Mee Pok Man* was filmed at a coffee shop called Hua Bee Restaurant on Moh Guan Terrace in Tiong Bahru. *Courtesy of Zhao Wei Films.*

Image comparisons showing the before-and-after restoration of *Money No Enough*. The burnt-in English and Chinese titles and subtitles were retained as removing them would require an astronomical amount of manhours and cost. *Courtesy of J Team Productions and Asian Film Archive.*

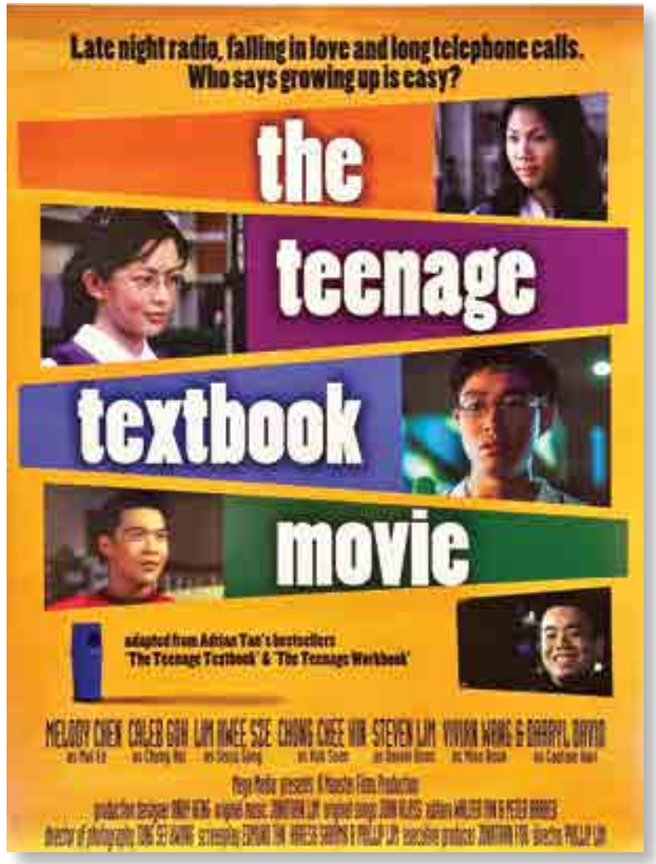
employee Ah Hock, who becomes interested in disco after he watches *Saturday Night Fever* (the 1977 film starring John Travolta). He enters a dance contest to raise money for a new motorbike. *Forever Fever* is notable for featuring iconic tunes by international group the Bee Gees, and American band KC and the Sunshine Band, which were performed by local artistes like John Klass and Najip Ali.

Meanwhile, *The Teenage Textbook Movie* is a lighthearted look at the lives and loves of a group of students from the fictitious Paya Lebar Junior College in Singapore. It was adapted from *The Teenage Textbook* and its sequel, *The Teenage Workbook*, two bestselling local books by Singaporean lawyer Adrian Tan. The movie topped the Singapore box office for weeks and was the first English-language local film to feature an all-Singaporean written soundtrack.

The AFA already had the 35 mm exhibition prints of these films in its collection and the intention was to restore the films using the original negatives. The original negative is of great value since it is the earliest generation of the finished film and contains the image in the highest quality. The challenge was that many local films that used 35 mm film stock and were theatrically screened in the 1990s had their negatives processed and printed in overseas film laboratories in Australia, India or Thailand. Filmmakers and production companies neglected to retrieve these negatives from the laboratories; over time, the original negatives and prints were either discarded or lost.

Despite being merely 25 years old, the picture and sound negatives of *Money No Enough* could no longer be found, and the restoration had to be carried out using two 35 mm release prints from the AFA's

Inspired by the 1977 American film *Saturday Night Fever*, *Forever Fever* launched the acting careers of Singaporean actors Adrian Pang (pictured here) and Pierre Png. *Courtesy of Tiger Tiger Pictures.*



The Teenage Textbook Movie (1998) was adapted from *The Teenage Textbook* and its sequel, *The Teenage Workbook*, two bestsellers by Singaporean lawyer Adrian Tan, who was then an undergraduate at the National University of Singapore. *Courtesy of Vue Networks and Asian Film Archive.*

collection. Both sets of prints that were donated to the AFA in 2008 were affected by physical wear such as scratches and torn frames, and had contaminants like dirt and dust. The restorer inspected both prints and utilised the copy that was in a relatively better condition for the digitisation. Some 215 hours were spent on digital restoration that included scratch removal, image stabilising, deflickering and colour correction.

With *Forever Fever*, the issues were different. The film laboratory that had processed the film had been bought over and all the original film, video and audio elements of the film were stored in multiple locations around Australia. The verification, consolidation and coordination of sending all these materials to Singapore took more than a year. The original film negatives exhibited physical wear and contained emulsion defects, glue marks and light scratches, but were overall in reasonably fair condition as they had been kept in a proper storage facility. More than 200 hours were spent on digital restoration, including stabilisation and de-warping.

The film that presented the biggest challenge was *The Teenage Textbook Movie*. The film negatives had been stored in less-than-ideal conditions. As a result, they accumulated a considerable amount of moisture, and the emulsion of every reel was stuck to the next wound base, creating stains and marks. Broken perforations and scratches were exhibited throughout the print, which had to be repaired before the scanning process. Of the

(Left) When *The Teenage Textbook Movie* was screened in cinemas in 1998, one could get a copy of the limited-edition original movie soundtrack at a special price of $7.90 with any purchase at Burger King. *Courtesy of Vue Networks.*

(Above) The Nokia 5110 advertisement featuring the stars of *The Teenage Textbook Movie. Courtesy of Vue Networks.*

(Above) Actress and host Melody Chen (right) made her debut feature lead performance in *The Teenage Textbook Movie* (1998) as Mui Ee. The film also stars Caleb Goh (left), who coincidentally made his debut performance in *Forever Fever* in the same year. *Courtesy of Vue Networks and Asian Film Archive.*

(Right) The producer of *The Teenage Textbook Movie* donated an extensive collection of related materials that include the original shooting script, continuity Polaroids, production call sheets and posters to the Asian Film Archive. *Courtesy of Vue Networks.*

three, *The Teenage Textbook Movie* took the longest to restore: over 1,000 hours were spent on digital restoration, including scratch removal, stabilising, deflickering and colour correction.

All three films – *Money No Enough*, *Forever Fever* and *The Teenage Textbook Movie* – were restored in tandem by different film restoration laboratories. After months of hard work, the films were presented in November 2018 at the Cathay Cineplex in partnership, and with support from, the Singapore Film Commission at "Singapore Classics Reignited", as part of the Singapore Media Festival.[2] The films were screened in their intended aspect ratio of 1.85:1 through digital cinematic projection for the first time, 20 years after their releases in 1998.

The restoration process allows audiences today to experience the films as they were first shown. But there are other benefits as well. Jack Neo told the *Straits Times* in 2018 that he was moved to tears while watching the restored version of *Money No Enough*. "Some of my good friends who were featured in the movie have since passed on," he said. "But I also cried because it brought back so many memories. Just look at all those huge mobile phones that we used in the movie – I would call this a period film."[3]

Sometimes, in the midst of getting the different film elements together, other treasures are uncovered as well. While restoring *The Teenage Textbook Movie*, the AFA came across a collection of paraphernalia and production-related materials that provided insights into the making of the film. This included the Nokia 5110 advertisement that featured the stars of the film posing snazzily. There was also a limited-edition original movie soundtrack on CD, which fans at the time could buy for just $7.90 with any purchase at Burger King.

Due to the less-than-ideal film storage conditions, the negatives of *The Teenage Textbook Movie* accumulated a considerable amount of moisture, and the emulsion of every reel was stuck to the next wound base, creating stains and marks. Broken perforations and scratches were exhibited throughout the print. *Courtesy of Asian Film Archive.*

They Call Her… Cleopatra Wong (1978) stars Singaporean Doris Young, who went by the stage name Marrie Lee. The film was restored and presented by Asian Film Archive in 2021. *Courtesy of Crystalsky Multimedia Marketing, Inc. and Doris Young.*

The Forgotten Femme Fatale

These films from the 1990s are vital milestones in Singapore's filmmaking history as they represent a new era in moviemaking here after the Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Productions and Cathay-Keris Films ceased operations in the late 1960s and early 1970s respectively. For close to 30 years, the local film industry had been largely dormant until *Mee Pok Man* showed the way forward.

The industry did display minor flickers of life in the decades between these two eras though. There was at least one important film that was partly made in Singapore: a 91-minute movie by BAS Film Productions in 1978 titled *They Call Her… Cleopatra Wong.*

Inspired by the films of Bruce Lee, *They Call Her… Cleopatra Wong* incorporated elements from both Western spy and Asian martial arts genres. The film was directed by the late Bobby A. Suarez (1942–2010), a Filipino filmmaker who went by the pseudonym George Richardson. It was a multinational production involving producers from Hong Kong, Singapore and the Philippines.

The film stars a then 18-year-old Singaporean, Doris Young – who went by the stage name Marrie Lee – in the titular role as a sexy Interpol secret agent, who did many of her own stunts.[4] (Marrie Lee was created to capitalise on the fame of the late Bruce Lee; some people even thought she was Bruce Lee's younger sister.[5]) Dubbed a "female James Bond" by the Asian press, Cleopatra Wong teams up with her Filipino counterpart to bust a counterfeit currency syndicate.[6]

In a 2003 *Straits Times* interview with Quentin Tarantino, the Oscar-winning Hollywood filmmaker revealed that the film had been a major influence for him, especially for the *Kill Bill* series (2003–04). "One of the movies that was made in Singapore in the 1970s that I loved was Cleopatra Wong. Cleopatra Wong was a gigantic inspiration," said Tarantino. He loved the movie so much that he got a friend to paint for him a huge canvas of Wong in her nun outfit and toting a quadruple-barrelled shotgun; the painting graced the foyer of his living room. "So as you walk through the door, you're facing a gun barrel by Cleopatra Wong," he said. "There was even one time when I was writing Kill Bill that I was thinking of putting a character in a nun's outfit."[7]

In 2008, the AFA planned to collect and preserve the film's materials but were told by the filmmaker and Young herself that the original film negatives and prints of the film had been discarded as they had deteriorated and had become unsalvageable. Only video copies of the film on digital betacam tapes survived.

In 2017, the AFA decided to see if other prints could be found. The film had travelled extensively to parts of the Middle East, Europe and North America as evidenced by variations of the film's promotional posters in different languages. Knowing this, the AFA put out a call to members of the International Federation of Film Archives around the globe in search of surviving film elements.

The call uncovered the existence of several prints residing in the film archives of Austria, Denmark, Italy and Switzerland. In consultation with the organisations caring for these materials, the AFA decided to digitise a 16 mm print with burnt-in Danish subtitles with the original English soundtrack loaned from the Danish Film Institute, and a German-dubbed 35 mm release print loaned from Filmarchiv Austria.

The restoration was laborious as the colour for both sets of prints had faded greatly and were also affected by shrinkage and heavy scratches. But the greatest challenge was discovered when the prints were compared with the existing video copy of the film. The AFA realised that there were frames missing from the 35 mm print that it had planned to use. Fortunately, the 16 mm print came in handy for recreating the missing frames and shots.

The German title of the film from the 35 mm scans was digitally removed and a new English title was recreated using the original scans of the 16 mm as a reference. The 16 mm print was also used to fill in what was missing from the 35 mm print, including the entire end credits. *Courtesy of Crystalsky Multimedia Marketing, Inc.*

The restoration of *They Call Her… Cleopatra Wong* took two years and was completed in 2019. However, due to the Covid-19 restrictions for theatres in Singapore, the AFA was only able to present the restored work in September 2021.[8] It was finally screened at the Oldham Theatre in the National Archives of Singapore, with Doris Young in attendance. (There was also a second run in July 2022.[9]) The multiple runs saw sold-out screenings and a renewed interest in the actress and the character she played.

They Call Her…Cleopatra Wong serves as an interesting restoration case study for the AFA in how variants of the same film obtained from different sources can be pieced together to culminate in a meaningful result. It is also interesting to look at why these variants existed, and why the film was edited and distributed differently. These could be for a combination of reasons – like the accidental loss of frames from re-splicing and re-editing the film to suit a specific market or, possibly, censorship.

The process of recovering original film elements of supposedly lost or forgotten works is a long-drawn out one and frequently involves serendipity. And this would not be possible without the persevering work of film archives around the world. ♦

NOTES

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Kampong Wak Sumang, one of Singapore's earliest fishing villages, was purportedly founded by a warrior-diplomat whose musical abilities landed him in trouble.

By Hannah Yeo

Remembering Punggol's KAMPONG WAK SUMANG and the Man Who Made It Happen

Children playing in front of a house in Kampong Wak Sumang, 1985. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

Hannah Yeo is a Curator with the National Library, Singapore, and curated the "Punggol Stories" trail at Punggol Regional Library.

As you walk around Punggol today, you may encounter the name "Sumang". Sumang Walk runs along the eastern bank of the Punggol River, near the Jewel Bridge. The southern end of Sumang Walk terminates at Sumang Lane. Meanwhile, Sumang LRT station, which is nearby Waterway Residences, lies along Punggol Way between Nibong and Soo Teck stations.

The name Sumang belongs to the man who founded Kampong Wak Sumang, also known as Kampong Punggol – one of Singapore's earliest kampongs.[1] This kampong was situated at Punggol Point, a 10-minute cycle from the current Sumang neighbourhood.

For over 100 years, the growth of Kampong Wak Sumang reflected changes in the Punggol Point community, until its residents were relocated in the 1980s to make way for today's public housing estate.[2] Although no physical traces of the kampong remain, fragments of its story can be pieced together from books, oral history interviews, newspaper reports and artefacts in the collections of the National Library and the National Archives of Singapore.

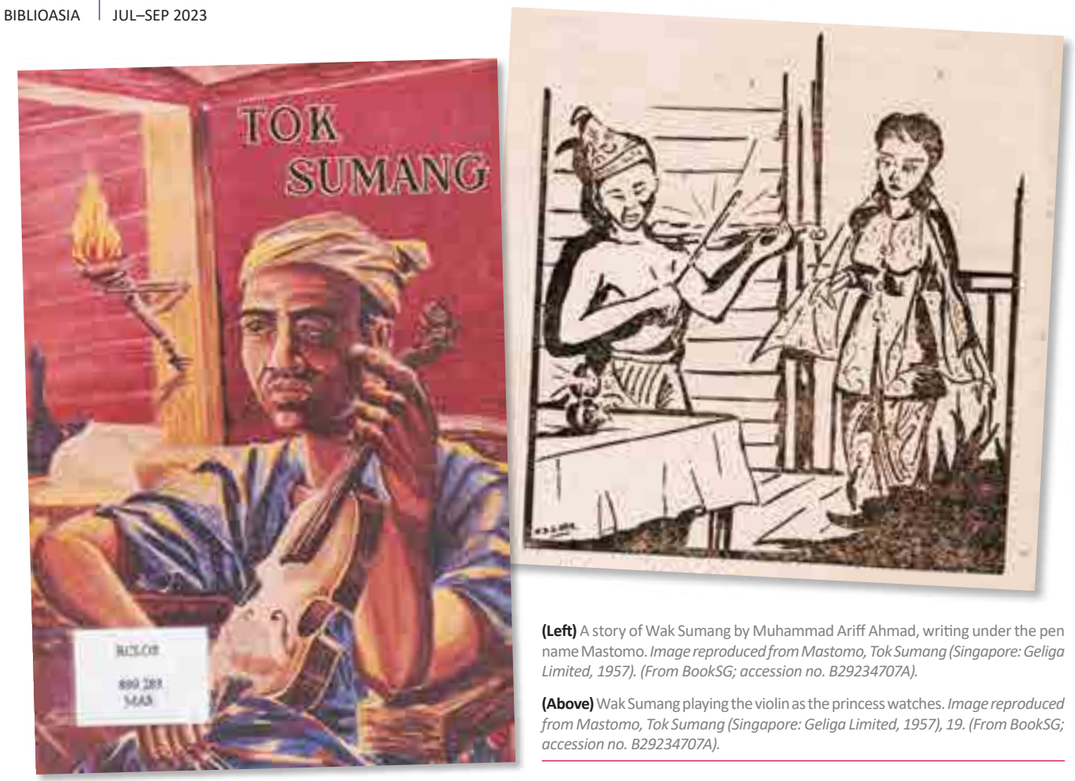
Sumang, Who?

> "Her husband was named Che' Soman, who hailed from Daik. He was talented in playing the violin, and was also humorous and cheerful. Some also said that he was a warrior."[3]
>
> – *Tok Sumang*, p. 4

Like many indigenous communities, Wak Sumang's history has been passed down primarily by word of mouth. While this sometimes makes it difficult to separate fact from fiction, it invites us to shift our focus to the values and morals being disseminated through the oral tradition and surviving stories.

Wak Sumang (also known as Wah Soomang, Wah Sumang, Tok Sumang and Che Soman) is believed to have landed on Punggol Beach in the mid-1800s. He came from the Riau Islands, likely Daik. While he is generally said to have been Javanese, at least one source says he was Bugis.[4]

The Malay literary pioneer Muhammad Ariff Ahmad (writing under the pen name Mastomo) wrote a story of Sumang's life titled *Tok Sumang*, which was published in 1957. The work details the exploits of Sumang in the court of Lingga Sultan Mahmud Muzaffar Shah (r. 1841–57) during the time of the Pahang Civil War (1857–63).[5] Muhammad Ariff based the book on stories he had heard from descendants of Wak Sumang while he was teaching at Sekolah Melayu Ponggol (Ponggol Malay School).[6]



(Left) A story of Wak Sumang by Muhammad Ariff Ahmad, writing under the pen name Mastomo. *Image reproduced from Mastomo, Tok Sumang (Singapore: Geliga Limited, 1957). (From BookSG; accession no. B29234707A).*

(Above) Wak Sumang playing the violin as the princess watches. *Image reproduced from Mastomo, Tok Sumang (Singapore: Geliga Limited, 1957), 19. (From BookSG; accession no. B29234707A).*

In Muhammad Ariff's account, Sumang is described as a talented musician. "It is surely fictitious if we say that the birds stopped flying when they heard Tok Sumang playing the violin. However, if a lady hears the melodious notes of Tok Sumang's violin and is not halted while working, it can be said that she is not a lady," he wrote.[7] Sumang's job in the court was to entertain the sultan and those around him. In addition, he was known as a healer and wiseman.[8]

Sumang's skill as a musician, unfortunately, led to a tricky situation because his violin playing enchanted the sultan's daughter, who asked to marry him.[9] Sumang, who was already married with three sons, fled the Lingga court with his family to avoid a scandal. However, his great-grandson Jusoh Ahmad told the *Berita Minggu* newspaper in 1983 that it was the sultan's concubine, and not the daughter, who wanted to marry Sumang. According to Jusoh, "Wah Soomang was unable to return her affections, however, as he was afraid that this would anger the king. And once again, he journeyed to another land to start a new life".[10]

While Mastomo's *Tok Sumang* suggests that Kampong Wak Sumang was established in the 1850s or 1860s, an 1852 map of Singapore, based on surveys conducted between 1841 and 1845, shows a Malay community around Punggol Point from as early as the 1840s.[11]

Sumang and his family's long journey to Punggol included stopovers at other islands. Some accounts say he helped set up another village, Kampong Pahang, on Pulau Tekong before arriving in Punggol.[12] Besides Punggol, some of Sumang's relatives settled in Kampong Pos in Seletar. Sumang would later have more children and grow his village in Punggol.[13]

When Sumang died in the late 1800s, he left behind a huge estate for his descendants in Punggol, comprising fruit plantations and at least nine houses.[14] As much of Punggol has been reclaimed, it is difficult to determine the exact location of this old kampong, but we know from a 1986 *Berita Minggu* newspaper report that Sumang's estate comprised two land parcels, Lot 23 and 24.[15] These added up to 10.27 acres (4.16 hectares), almost the size of the Padang.[16]

In addition to setting up the kampong, Sumang is also believed to have dug a five-metre-deep well in the kampong. It was said to never run dry and to contain healing properties.[17] Haji Mohammed Amin Abdul Wahab, a teacher and resident in the kampong, told the *Straits Times* in 1995 that the villagers believed that the well could cure children of fever and epileptic fits. "They would bring their children to bathe with the well water before dawn and they were cured," he said.[18]

Wak Sumang's Legacy

> "The life of a tree brings fruit, the life of a person brings benefit."[19]
>
> – *Tok Sumang*, p. 35

After Sumang's death, his descendants built on his legacy. An early example can be seen in the construction of the old Punggol Road, which was originally a sandy track for bullock carts (the road is a part of Hougang Avenue 8 and Hougang Avenue 10 today).[20]

According to Mastomo's *Tok Sumang*, one day in 1890, a government official arrived in the village asking to build a road through Sumang's estate, and he was met by Long Amat, Sumang's eldest son. His brothers, Che' Mamat and Si Kemidin, were keen to accept the government's generous offer of compensation. However, Long Amat encouraged his brothers to take a long-term view with a quote from their father: "Hidup pohon biar berbuah, hidup manusia biar berfaedah!" ("The life of a tree brings fruit, the life of a person brings benefit!").

Instead of accepting the government payout, Long Amat proposed that they ask the government to guarantee that their land would not be taxed so that their descendants could live there freely for many generations to come.[21] This arrangement would prevail for almost 100 years before Sumang's descendants traded kampong life for high-rise living in the 1980s.[22]

Apart from the kampong, the former Masjid Wak Sumang at Track 26 of the old Punggol Road also bore Sumang's name. The mosque started out as a shrine by the sea, which Sumang erected when he arrived in Punggol.[23] Over time, as the shrine deteriorated, it was demolished and Masjid Wak Sumang was built with the help of the community after World War II. Reginald Schooling, a retired foreman with the Royal Air Force who had lived in Punggol since 1948, told the *Straits Times* in 1984 that everyone pitched in to help. "When the villagers needed a mosque we all contributed what we could. I donated $200. Some

A well at Kampong Wak Sumang, 1985. Villagers believed that Wak Sumang dug a well with healing properties when he arrived. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

Detail from a 1939 topographic map of Singapore showing Punggol Village (Kampong Wak Sumang), an Alligator Shoal close to Punggol Point (confirming crocodile sightings), the Singapore Zoo owned by William Lawrence Soma Basapa, and Matilda Estate, a former plantation. *Singapore, 1939, TM001048, Singapore Land Authority Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

(Above) Masjid Wak Sumang was located at the end of the old Punggol Road, 1985. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

(Above right) A house in Kampong Wak Sumang, 1985. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

gave bricks, some gave cement and wood, while others contributed an hour or two of their time."[24]

Masjid Wak Sumang served as an epicentre of religious activity as well as a meeting point for villagers and visiting political heads who wished to meet the people of the kampong.[25] Interestingly, one such visitor was Richard Nixon, who was then vice-president of the United States. He visited Punggol Point as the first stop in a tour of rural areas during his 1953 visit to Singapore.[26]

Sumang and his wife Gobek were buried near the grounds of Masjid Wak Sumang.[27] When the mosque was demolished to make way for redevelopment in 1995, the couple's remains were exhumed and reburied at Jalan Bahar Muslim Cemetery.[28] Some of the items that belonged to the mosque – such as drums, prayer mats, prayer schedules, the sermon stick and mosque pulpit – were taken into the repositories of the National Museum of Singapore and the Asian Civilisations Museum.[29] Staff from the National Archives of Singapore also took photographs of the area and conducted oral history interviews. One of these interviews was with Awang Osman (1906–90), the village *penghulu* (headman or chief).[30]

Awang Osman (seated, second from left) and his family in their home in Kampong Wak Sumang, 1985. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

Changing Communities

Awang Osman was Kampong Wak Sumang's headman from 1932 until its demolition in 1985.[31] His account of the kampong's history is captured in 800 minutes of oral history interviews with the National Archives of Singapore, recorded over 30 reels between August 1984 and December 1985. Wak Sumang was Awang Osman's maternal great-grandfather.[32]

In his interviews, Awang Osman recalled the dark days that followed after Singapore fell to the Japanese in February 1942. He and everyone else in Kampong Wak Sumang fled inland. "Of course I ran. The white [British] people told me, don't stay here, you must flee. So I started running… there wasn't a single person who remained in the kampong."[33]

After the Japanese invaded, they massacred thousands in an effort to purge anti-Japanese elements from the Chinese community (now known as Operation Sook Ching[34]). Punggol Beach was one of the execution sites. Awang Osman had not witnessed the killings, but he saw the aftermath. "When I returned [to Punggol], there were many Chinese who had been killed, floating in the sea. They had been shot by the Japanese. All in all there were maybe 500 [to] 600 people. Some were tied up with ropes, others impaled by barbed wire," he recounted.[35]

When the Japanese Occupation ended, residents rebuilt Kampong Wak Sumang with the little compensation they received from the British authorities. This included restoring Masjid Wak Sumang and other community spaces.

A new phase of Kampong Sumang's history began after the kampong took in refugees from three villages in Johor – Ayer Biru, Pasir Merah and Pulau Tukang – during the Japanese Occupation and the Malayan Emergency (1948–60).[36] The Johoreans settled inland and were called *orang darat* (land people), while the original inhabitants and descendants of Wak Sumang referred to themselves as *orang laut* (sea people).[37] Their nickname notwithstanding, the Johoreans actually spent most of their time out at sea. Being skilled fishermen, their arrival kick-started the *kupang* (mussel) trade in the kampong. Shelling was done by hand and it took around six to eight people three hours to shell a full sampan (a small boat with a flat bottom) load of mussels.[38]

"Whenever you see a lot of smoke coming out from my house, it means good business. I use pieces of wooden planks from a nearby dumping ground as firewood – that's why it's so smoky," mussel farmer Jantan Rani told the *Straits Times* in 1984. Mussel farmers could earn double what they used to make as fishermen in a day. However, the widespread use of fire had its dangers. In 1981, Jantan Rani's house caught fire and burned down. "I returned home to find my wife crying and my house in ashes. We lost everything, furniture, refrigerator, television and all."[39]

As the community grew, the villagers in Kampong Wak Sumang decided to build a Malay School – Sekolah Melayu Ponggol – to educate the younger generations. It opened in 1955 with funds raised through the Rotary Club and other private donors.[40] In 1963, the school was taken over by the government and moved to Track 13.[41]

Villagers shelling *kupang* (mussels) at Kampong Wak Sumang, 1985. Often, entire families would be involved in the deshelling process. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

Chief Secretary William Goode arriving in Kampong Wak Sumang to open Sekolah Melayu Ponggol, 1955. Welcoming him is Awang Osman (in traditional Malay attire), the headman of the village. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

Developing Punggol

In the 1960s, Kampong Wak Sumang welcomed piped water, electricity, paved roads and drainage systems. Punggol Point was also becoming well known for its open-air seafood restaurants and boatels (boat storage and water sports centres). Besides providing docking facilities for pleasure boats when not in use, these boatels also rented out boats for water skiing, fishing and sightseeing activities. People would come from all over Singapore to soak in the sea breeze, enjoy delicious seafood and take part in water sports. Punggol Point became a popular recreational spot for locals and tourists.[42]

The residents of Kampong Wak Sumang were part of the thriving scene. Some like Awang Abdullah, whose nickname was Awang Pendek, ran a boatel business. Others sold their fishing catch to seaside restaurants and hotels and also at nearby markets in Kangkar and Punggol.[43]

The idyllic kampong life, however, would ultimately come to an end. In 1983, the government announced that it would be undertaking a reclamation project for future housing needs in Punggol. Some 277 hectares of land would be reclaimed off the Punggol coastline over the next three years at a cost of $136 million.[44] Residents of Kampong Wak Sumang, as well as Punggol Point's famous seafood restaurants and boatels, were asked to vacate their premises by 1986.[45]

Not everyone was ready to part ways with the kampong. After giving up his boatel business and moving to Hougang, former headman Awang Osman made it a point to return to Kampong Wak Sumang every day. In an interview with *Berita Minggu* in 1987 – when he was already 100 years old – Awang Osman vowed to continue visiting the kampong as long as his body was able and the site had not been developed into a housing estate. Echoing the wisdom of his great-grandfather, Awang Osman summed up the villagers' sentiments with the Malay proverb, "Tempat jatuh lagi dikenang, inikan pula tempat bermain". While the adage literally means "where we stumbled, we also rejoiced", it conveys that it was not easy for people to forget the place that had been their home for decades.[46]

Although they had been resettled, some continued to rely on the sea for a living. Awang Atan, like many in his community, continued to work as a fisherman. In 1987, he told *Berita Minggu* that he could earn $300 a month by selling fish, crabs and mussels to nearby *kelong* (an offshore platform made of wood for fishing) and the Punggol Fish Market. "The sea is my flesh and blood," he said "[and] I have been happy with this way of life for generations".[47]

In the same news report, Mohamed Baba revealed that he was still able to make a decent living from the sea. "I can get 50 kilos of mussels daily and earn $100 from the *kelongs* on a good day," he said. "After deducting fuel and rental for the motorboat, and also after paying the helpers, my net profit can be $30."[48]

Those who owned boatels stayed behind to faithfully watch over their clients' boats. Almost 10 years after most of the villagers had left, Jimat Awang of Awang Boat Sheds and Zainal Jantan of Zainal Water-ski Centre were still looking after the boats under their care.

"My brother, my brother-in-law and I will be staying behind to take turns to keep an eye on the boats," said Jimat Awang when he was interviewed by the *New Paper* in September 1994. This was even though his main office building, the two huts where the family slept in, and his store had been torn down. Zainal Jantan said that "he and a few friends would also be watching over his 40 to 50 boats" and "sleep in a small hut that had not been demolished, but the rest of his family would be returning to their Hougang flat".[49]

(Left) Stilt houses along the Punggol River, 1985. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

(Below) Awang Abdullah's boat shelter along Punggol Beach, 1985. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

The "Punggol Stories" exhibition at Singaporium on Level 4 of Punggol Regional Library, 2023. The exhibition features stories and memories of Punggol, with many contributed by the community.

Revisiting Punggol

Although Kampong Wak Sumang no longer exists today, its legacy lives on in the stories of the people who once called it home.

The National Library Board (NLB) is showcasing some of these stories at Singaporium – a permanent exhibition space located at level four of the new Punggol Regional Library – to bring its heritage collections closer to the community. The inaugural exhibition, "Punggol Stories", features the *Tok Sumang* book by Muhammad Ariff Ahmad as well as memories collected from former Punggol residents, including those who used to live in Kampong Wak Sumang.

To make the stories of Wak Sumang and his contributions more accessible to the wider community, Ahmad Ubaidillah – whose mother Rohaida Ismail is a descendant of Wak Sumang and grew up in Kampong Wak Sumang – has translated *Tok Sumang* into English (read the original Malay digitised text on BookSG, while the English translated version can be accessed on the BiblioAsia website). Ahmad Ubaidillah was inspired

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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The name "Poongul" appears in an 1820s map of Singapore. While it is highly unlikely that Wak Sumang alone gave Punggol its name, stories about his encounters with *punggur* continue to be repeated. The Malay word *punggur* refers to dead wood and comes from the words *pokok* (tree) and *gugur* (to fall).

Some say that a felled trunk of a tree was in Punggol before the arrival of Sumang, while others claim that a broken tree branch fell on Sumang's house. Other stories say that Sumang saw a *punggur* floating in Punggol River, inspiring him to name his kampong and the river after it.

A funny version of the origins of the name "Ponggol" in *Tok Sumang* involves an intercultural misunderstanding. Apparently, Sumang was chopping down the trunk (*punggur*) of a rumbia tree (also called sago tree) when a white man and his Indian interpreter came to visit.

> "Sir, wait for me at my home, for I will return in a while. I am about to finish chopping the punggor of this Rumbia," he [Tok Sumang] said, while directing his thumb towards his house.
>
> Tok Sumang was unable to comprehend what the interpreter explained to the white man, but he heard the white man repeatedly saying, "Ponggor… Ponggol…"

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to translate the book after hearing his mother's stories of her kampong and Wak Sumang.

"Punggol Stories" is part of NLB's efforts to grow #SingaporeStorytellers and there are many more stories waiting to be told. Members of the public who wish to share their stories and memories of Punggol are encouraged to do so via social media using the hashtag #PunggolStories. ♦

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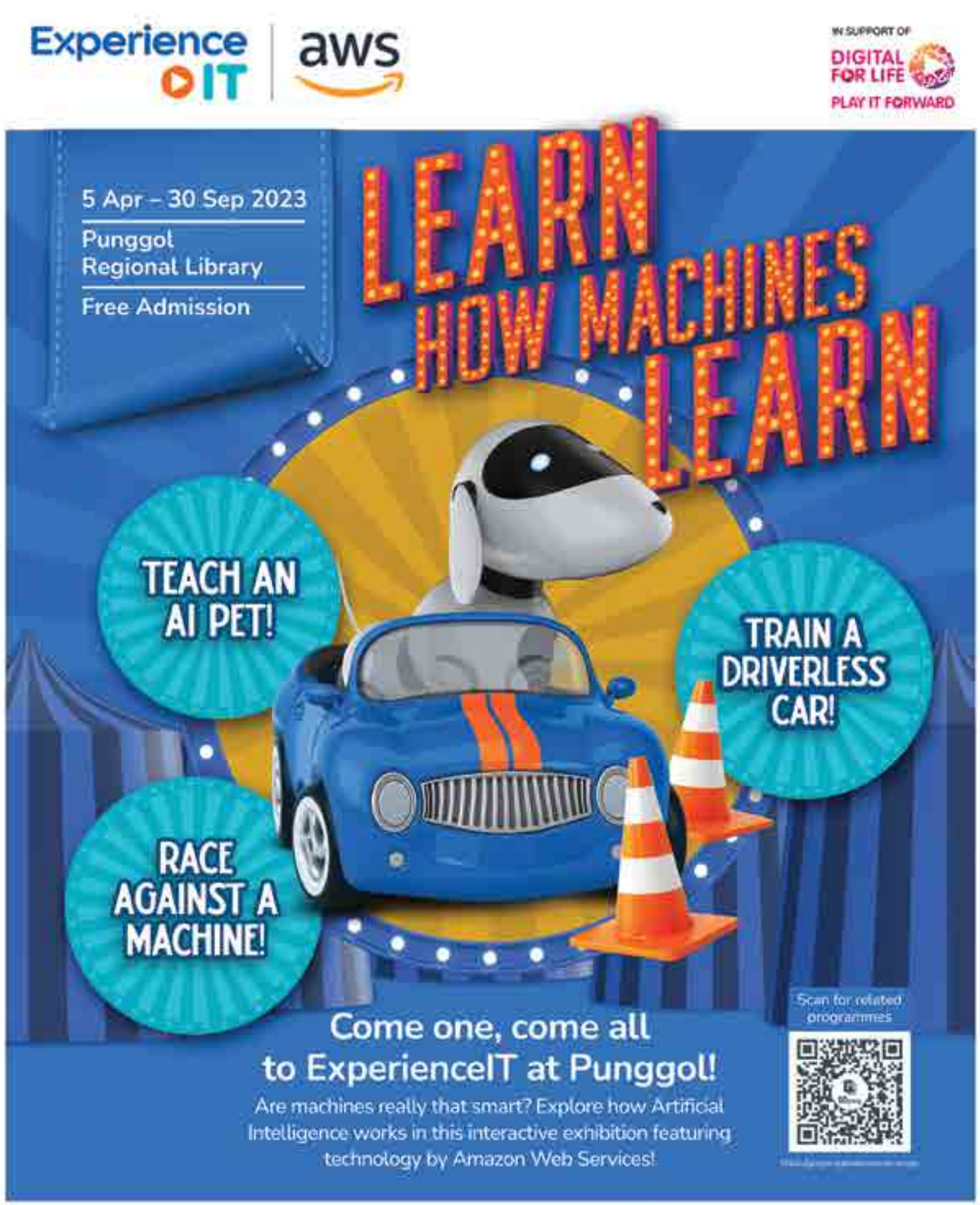

LOCAL MUSIC REACHES A CRESCENDO

THE SINGAPORE RECORD INDUSTRY IN THE 1960S

In this extract from the book *From Keroncong to Xinyao*, the author looks at why the record industry in Singapore took off in the 1960s.

By Ross Laird

Following its establishment in Singapore, Philips recorded local band The Crescendos, whose first record in 1963, *Mr Twister*, was a great success. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

Despite the significant changes that had taken place in Singapore's record industry in the 1950s, few could have predicted the even more dramatic transformations to come in the 1960s. At the start of the decade, the record industry in Singapore was still dominated by EMI (which had originally been known as Electric and Musical Industries, hence the initials), as it had been since the 1930s. The few independent record labels that existed were relatively insignificant in market terms, and no other multinational record company had yet shown an interest in establishing a presence in Singapore.

EMI was famously conservative when it came to signing up local talent in its main Asian markets of Hong Kong and Singapore. The company enjoyed a virtual monopoly in these markets in the early 1960s, and they saw little reason to expand beyond the well-established forms of local popular music.

Most Singapore recordings in the late 1950s and early 1960s were either traditional Chinese opera, or Malay and Chinese film or pop songs of the period sung in Chinese or Malay. There were very few local recordings in English aimed at the emerging youth market, which at the time was almost completely dominated by imported British and American (and some European) records.

New Competitive Forces Emerge

It was not until 1963 that a new multinational record company would set up operations in Singapore. After a relatively unsuccessful investment in Hong Kong in the 1950s, Philips decided to relocate to Singapore. One of its first decisions in 1963 was to release a record by a Singapore guitar band, a step that would singlehandedly kickstart a process of radical change in the local record industry. This guitar band was The Crescendos, and the rest, as they say, is history.

The Crescendos started out in early 1961 as an all-male three-piece guitar band, and made their first public appearance at the Radio Singapore Talentime Quest in January that year.[1] According to press reports,[2] John Chee, the leader of The Crescendos, "discovered" 15-year-old Susan Lim just before the start of the 1962 Talentime Quest competition and decided to feature her as the lead vocalist. In reality, Lim had been performing publicly since she was around 12 and was already a seasoned performer by the time she joined the band.[3]

The Crescendos' first record, *Mr Twister*, was announced in February 1963,[4] and by October had sold more than 10,000 copies. "Local dealers of Philips records confirmed that since the arrival of The Crescendos' disc, a similar song by [famous American singer] Connie Francis on another label was 'dropped' by buyers who showed a marked preference for The Crescendos."[5]

Within 18 months of the success of the first Crescendos release, there was a definite increase in activity within the local record industry. The Singapore branch of Philips began signing local acts quite aggressively and, in the mid-1960s, initiated a series of local records that developed into an exceptionally fine catalogue of Singapore pop releases.[6]

Other labels were quick to follow suit, and new startups such as Cosdel (supported by giant American label RCA that was already active in Japan) and Eagle as well as the long-established EMI began actively recording a wide range of local popular music. In 1966, several new independent Singapore labels entered the market, such as Blue Star, Camel, Olympic, Pigeon, Swan and Roxy (all of which specialised in local artistes). In 1967, the Polar Bear and Squirrel labels were established and in the same year, Decca, another multinational label, also began local recording in Singapore.

From the mid-1960s onwards, the record industry in Singapore developed rapidly, and between 1965 and 1969 alone, over 120 different labels released local recordings.

From the mid-1960s onwards, the record industry in Singapore developed rapidly, and between 1965 and 1969 alone, over 120 different labels released local recordings.

What is interesting, and has often been overlooked, is that this prolific burst of record industry activity in the 1960s was unique to Singapore. Although Hong Kong was a similar market in many ways, it did not have the same diversity of record labels. Until the late 1960s, no major record labels had recording or pressing facilities in Malaysia, so Singapore also catered to that market. Additionally, there was a big demand for Singapore pressings in Indonesia. Although the latter had a much larger population, no international record companies had set up branches there and only a handful of Indonesian record companies existed.[7]

Further Developments

By the end of the 1960s, there were hundreds of labels in Singapore catering to every taste, of which about 140 of these labels released local recordings (a majority being independent companies based here).

Apart from supplying the Singapore market, many companies exported a significant percentage of

The Crescendos (from left: Raymond Ho, Susan Lim, Leslie Chia and John Chee) recording at Television Singapura, 1963. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

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their production, especially to Malaysia and Indonesia. One relatively small producer, Kwan Sia Record Company, which produced the Swan and Star Swan labels, reported that half of its 8,000 copies pressed from a single LP release was exported to Indonesia at a value of about $30,000.[8]

By early 1967, Singapore was producing a total of 2.45 million records annually. According to the *Straits Times* in May 1967, three record companies – Life Record Industries, EMI Records (Southeast Asia) and Phonographic Industries – were expected to reach a total output of 8.925 million records in five years.[9]

Hala A' Go-go, a record released under the Swan label for Charlie & His Go-Go Boys, 1967. Record companies like Kwang Sia Record Company (which produced the Swan label) also exported part of their production to overseas markets such as Malaysia and Indonesia. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

O.B. A Go Go, a record released by Cosdel for The Trailers in 1967. This was a local band popular with teenagers in Singapore. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

By 1970, there were at least four record manufacturers in Singapore that pressed records for their own labels as well as for other companies.There were likely other small-scale manufacturers as well, so exact figures are not available, but according to newspaper reports of the time, record production at these four major pressing plants had reached one million discs per month.[10]

New Markets

The 1960s saw the development of new markets because of economic and social developments as well as an emerging new youth market. While a similar demographic for popular music had existed in Singapore in the 1950s, the youth market then was relatively smaller and almost entirely focused on a diet of imported records by foreign artistes.

In contrast, young people of the 1960s had the funds to purchase records on a larger scale than ever before, and were willing consumers of a local pop culture that was targeted specifically at them. Press coverage and advertisements published on an almost daily basis point to a seemingly endless line-up of concerts, dances, stage shows and live music activities catering to this market.

There was also a rise in the standard of living in 1960s Singapore that led to the creation of a rising middle class who could afford to spend a bigger portion of their income on discretionary items like records and other luxuries. This rising affluence in turn resulted in an unprecedented volume of records of all kinds produced or distributed in Singapore in the 1960s to meet the demands of a growing market.

New Venues

New music and entertainment venues specifically aimed at the youth demographic were added to existing cabarets, nightclubs and dance halls. Some of these older venues also adapted and innovated in order to take advantage of the new group of potential customers. For instance, before the war, on-stage live performances took place before film screenings at the cinemas, but in the 1960s, these performances took the form of pop concerts, especially when they were held in conjunction with films featuring pop stars or had themes relating to pop culture.

Another example was "The Early Bird Show", which was also held in a cinema, but at an early hour of the morning (hence its name), and not in conjunction with a film screening. "The 'Early Bird Show' has played to packed houses at Singapore's Odeon Cinema. Starting at 8.45 a.m. each week, the show looks like being [sic] with us a long time yet, as it will continue as long as the fans respond," reported *Radio Weekly* in July 1967.[11]

In addition, there were live concerts such as "A Night of Blue Beats", "Pop Stars on Parade '66", "Top Talents '66", "What's Up in Pops" and "Seven Sounds of Soul". These featured all-star line-ups that differed from conventional concerts usually showcasing a single performer accompanied by one or two supporting artistes.

Apart from the many one-off concerts held in various halls, there were also regular concert series, including "The Early Bird Show" at the Odeon Cinema (1967–70) and "Musical Express" at the Capitol (1967–68).

Other important platforms for local performers were the regular Talentime competitions and thematic contests such as "Ventures of Singapore Competition". In some cases, the winning artistes were offered an opportunity to make a record as part of their prize. Talentime and similar competitions had existed since 1949, but during the 1960s they became ever more popular and many winners went on to have significant careers as performers and recording artistes.

One novel event organised in the 1960s was the series of "Pool Parties" held at the Chinese Swimming Club. Everyone came in their swimsuit and could take a dip in the pool whenever they needed to cool off or in between dancing to the music of live bands.

It is possible to see connections between these modern live music performances and earlier forms of public entertainment such as Chinese street opera (*wayang*) and Malay opera (*bangsawan*) performed by travelling opera troupes on open-air stages, and even the relatively more recent *getai* (literally meaning "song stage") performances associated with the Chinese Hungry Ghost festival.[12]

Other outlets for popular music performances in the 1960s were radio and television broadcasts, charity concerts and shows at British military establishments (which despite the more restricted audience reach were important venues for live music). Private parties also provided additional avenues for bands and vocalists to perform on the entertainment circuit.

Taken together, these opportunities to perform publicly encouraged many musically inclined younger Singaporeans to form their own bands or become singers. This, in turn, fuelled the Singapore music scene in the 1960s, as evidenced by the large number and variety of performers who were recorded here.[13]

New Bands and Genres

Many new groups formed every year in Singapore in the 1960s. There were over 200 local bands or vocalists who were at a sufficiently professional level to be paid to perform at nightclubs, dance halls, concerts and similar events. Many more were amateur groups or artistes who held full-time jobs and pursued their musical interests after work. While older forms of entertainment such as cabaret-style vocalists were still popular in the 1960s, it was the newer emerging styles such as guitar-driven rhythm-and-blues bands that dominated youth-oriented venues like concerts and tea dances.

A 1967 article in the *Sunday Times* said:

> Pop music is today a very potent force in Malaysia and Singapore.... The latest beat or sound emanating from Britain and America is heard here within weeks and even days later. Local fans take a remarkably short time to catch on to the

(Left) An advertisement promoting the "Top Talents '66" live concert, featuring popular local bands such as The Quests and Naomi & the Boys. *Image reproduced from "Page 4 Advertisements Column 3," Straits Times, 2 April 1966, 4. (From NewspaperSG).*

(Below) A local band (name not known) who was featured in "The Early Bird Show" at Odeon Cinema. The band members followed Western fashion trends, from their long hair to the bell-bottom pants. *Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

(Bottom right) An advertisement for a pool party at the Chinese Swimming Club, 1965. *Image reproduced from "Page 4 Advertisements Column 3," Straits Times, 21 August 1965, 4. (From NewspaperSG).*

> latest trends or beat in the pops.... Every new craze is bound to make its way to Singapore and Malaysia where local guitar-twanging groups are ready always to imitate new styles...[14]

From the mid-1960s onwards, even the conservative *Radio Weekly* began devoting several pages in each issue to the latest trends in pop music.

Another new development was sponsored radio programmes devoted to pop music. Cosdel Record Company, for example, promoted two radio shows: "Your Record Shop" on Radio Singapore and "Cosdel Pop Shop" on Rediffusion. These programmes played local records on the Cosdel label as well as imported labels that were distributed by Cosdel.[15]

By the late 1960s, local popular music was deemed important enough to be treated seriously, with regular columns appearing in daily newspapers and other print media. The lure of a much larger market in Malaysia and Indonesia also gave rise to Malay-language pop music publications that were based in Singapore.[16]

Many amateur bands and singers were able to develop a following via fan clubs and attracted regular patrons at their performances, even if some of their careers were short-lived. Local record companies were just as eager to tap into these markets as they were in recording the more established performers. Almost every amateur band aspired to record, and although many never did so, there were many more opportunities to cut a record in Singapore during the 1960s than ever before.

Finally, the increasing availability of relatively cheap and reliable air travel within Southeast Asia in the 1960s meant that Singapore bands could frequently tour places like Sarawak, Brunei, Bangkok and Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City). A few Singapore bands (such as The Quests and The Phantoms) were booked for lengthy appearances in Hong Kong, and even recorded there. On the other hand, bands from Indonesia, Malaysia, Sarawak, Brunei and the Philippines also came to Singapore to perform at hotels and nightclubs or to record in Singapore.[17]

A Cosdel advertisement promoting its radio shows, "Your Record Shop" and "Cosdel Pop Shop", 1967. *Image reproduced from "Page 12 Advertisements Column 2," Straits Times, 21 May 1967, 12. (From NewspaperSG)*

New Technologies

One reason why multinational companies such as EMI were able to monopolise the record industry in Southeast Asia before the 1960s was due to the large investment required to establish record pressing plants that could manufacture heavy shellac 78-rpm records. At the time, independent record companies could not afford the high cost of setting up their own manufacturing facilities.

In the 1950s, however, record production was revolutionised with the introduction of lightweight vinyl records and, by the 1960s, the cost of equipment needed to produce such records was within the reach of even relatively small record companies. Also, the extensive use of tape recording machines in recording studios by the early 1960s not only reduced the cost of making recordings but simplified the process as well. In addition, record companies in Singapore now had access to privately owned recording studios such as Kinetex and Rediffusion, where they could record material without having to hire EMI's facilities or set up their own.

All these factors meant that independent record labels were now able to record and produce their own discs at a much lower cost. This alone was a major factor in the surge of record companies in Singapore during the second half of the 1960s.

The Legacy of the 1960s

It is clear that the combination of a number of factors created a unique situation in the 1960s, which saw the Singapore record industry reach unprecedented levels of activity. As many of these factors actually began emerging in the 1950s or earlier, it is essential to view the developments that took place in the 1960s as the outcome of several different processes that fortuitously came together during this decade.

Like almost everywhere else in the world, Singapore was influenced by 1960s pop culture and garage bands (instrumental groups formed by teenagers who played more for fun than anything else) that became part of the local scene. In the 1960s, it was still possible to achieve a level of success and even make records without turning professional. This was why many recording artistes chose not to make music their full-time occupations. For instance, the Singapore all-girl band The Vampires started in 1965 when all its members were still in school.

Despite the many new developments in the entertainment scene and the dramatic spike in record industry activity, other aspects of the Singapore music scene were not that much different from what they had been in the 1950s. While there was still a limited number of professional bands and singers, there was a large pool of undiscovered amateur talent who appeared in Talentime quests and other similar events, charity concerts, parties, and occasionally professional concerts or dances.

As the local press devoted more space to its coverage of popular music, we have a more accurate picture of 1960s popular culture in Singapore compared to previous decades. Clearly, the youth culture and the dynamism of the 1960s made this period an especially fascinating one in the development of Singapore's musical culture. ♦

Singapore all-girl band The Vampires. The group was formed in 1965 when the girls were still in school. *Courtesy of LP Cover Lover.*

This is an edited chapter from the book, *From Keroncong to Xinyao: The Record Industry in Singapore, 1903–1985*, by Ross Laird and published by the National Archives of Singapore (2023). The publication is available for reference at the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library and for loan at selected public libraries (call nos. RSING 338.4778149095957 LAI and SING 338.4778149095957 LAI). It also retails at major bookstores as well as online.

NOTES

1 These events, and the growing popularity of The Crescendos, took place well before British group The Shadows performed in Singapore in November 1961. Writer Joseph C. Pereira states that the rise of Singaporean guitar bands was sparked by The Shadows' 1961 performances in Singapore. See Joseph C. Pereira, *Apache Over Singapore: The Story of Singapore Sixties Music, Volume One* (Singapore: Select Publishing, 2011), 1. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 781.64095957 PER)

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5 "Crescendos' Disc Sales Top the 10,000 Mark," *Radio Weekly*, 7 October 1963, 1. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RCLOS 791.44095957 RW)

6 Philips was the first multinational record company to establish a record pressing plant in Singapore. It officially opened on 24 November 1967.

7 One cannot directly compare Singapore's record industry with that of Indonesia's as there are several important differences between the two countries (Indonesia, for instance, had a relatively small middle class at the time despite its much larger population). During the 1960s, most record labels in Indonesia were produced by a few large corporate entities. There was a government-owned record label called Lokananta, which had a few subsidiaries, and almost all the other labels were owned by Indonesian Music Co. Irama Ltd. (Irama), Republic Manufacturing Co. Ltd. (Remaco, Bali, Diamond, Mutiara, etc.), Dimita Moulding Industries Ltd. (Mesra) and El Shinta Broadcasting System (El Shinta, Jasmine). EMI had no direct presence in Indonesia (except through imports) and Philips also had limited access to that market except under licence or later (from 1968) through imports from Singapore.

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10 Lawrence Wee, "Singapore's Recording Firms Hit Happy Note," *Straits Times*, 11 May 1970, 10. (From NewspaperSG)

11 "The Early Bird Show," *Radio Weekly*, 24 July 1967, 3. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RCLOS 791.44095957 RW)

12 *Getai* are performances of songs staged during the seventh month of the lunar calendar. See Jamie Koh and Stephanie Ho, "Getai," in *Singapore Infopedia*. National Library Board Singapore. Article published 25 February 2015.

13 The author estimates that there were over 1,500 singers or bands who recorded in Singapore during the 1960s. Some of these were artistes from Malaysia and Indonesia who came here to record and were not residents (although many took the opportunity to perform publicly while they were here).

14 Yeo Toon Joo, "Fanomania," *Straits Times*, 21 May 1967, 10. (From NewspaperSG)

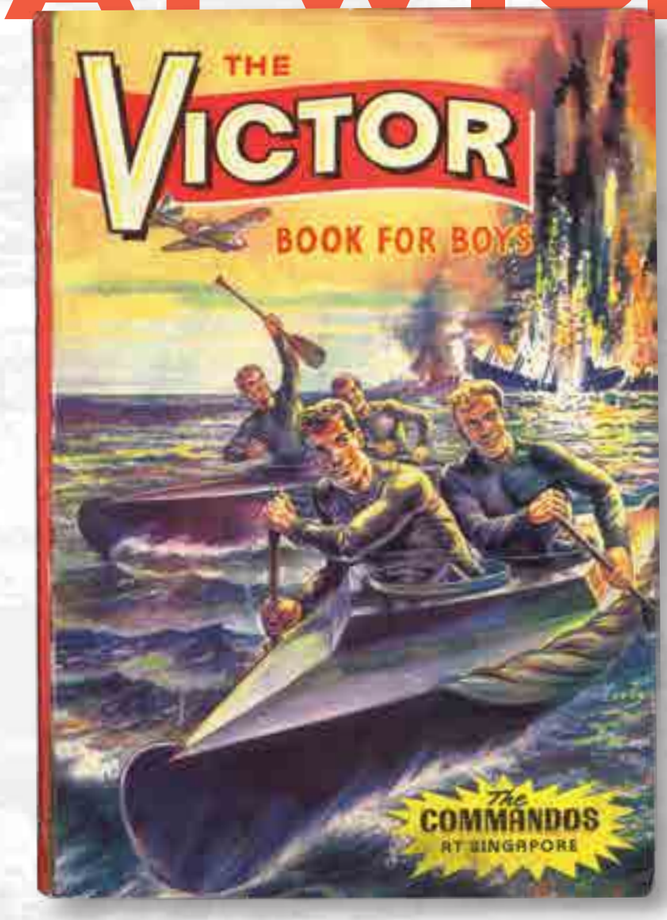
15 "Page 12 Advertisements Column 2," *Straits Times*, 21 May 1967, 12. (From NewspaperSG)

16 In 1969, *Radio Weekly* was discontinued and replaced by a new entertainment magazine called *Fanfare*, which featured regular articles on new groups and trends in popular music. There was also a Malay-language magazine titled *Bintang dan Lagu*, which began publication in 1966 and ran until at least 1967, with well-illustrated articles on current groups and listings of new record releases. By 1967, even Malay film magazines such as *Purnama Filem* were featuring articles on the latest pop bands.

17 For example, it was reported in 1969 that a group of 30 Indonesian singers had come to Singapore to record at Kinetex Studios. The newspaper article does not indicate the organiser of this event but states that the artistes included Vivi Sumanti, Bing Slamet and Tanti Josepha, and that they intended to record "250 songs in Malay, Indonesian, Chinese, English and several European languages". The unnamed organiser was in fact Philips record company, and the recordings appeared on their PopSound label for sale in Indonesia (although the label was also distributed in Singapore, Malaysia and probably elsewhere). The article also states that the artistes would stay in Singapore for three months, recording almost every day and "cutting over 70 EPs and 25 LPs". See Maureen Peters, "S'pore May Soon Become the Recording Centre for all South-east Asia," *Straits Times*, 25 October 1969, 8. (From NewspaperSG)

COLLECTION FOCUS

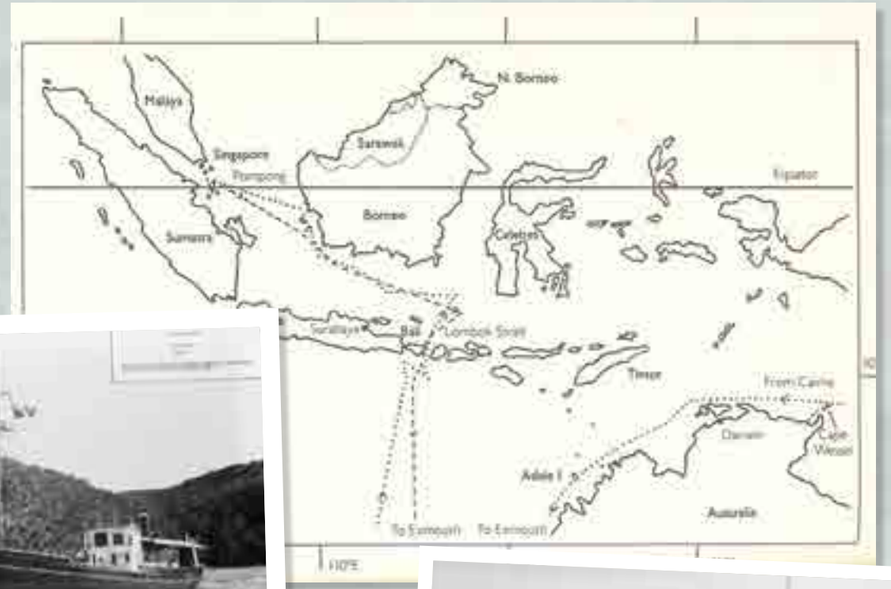
A COMIC BOOK VERSION OF OPERATION JAYWICK



The Victor Book for Boys: The Commandos at Singapore published in 1965 by D.C. Thomson & Co., Ltd., and John Leng & Co. Ltd.

The story of Operation Jaywick, a daring attack on Japanese ships at Keppel Harbour in September 1943, is retold in a comic aimed at boys published in London in 1965.

By Gautam Hazarika



(Top) Route taken by the *Krait* to and from Singapore, 1943. *Image reproduced from Lynette Ramsay Silver, Krait: The Fishing Boat That Went to War (Singapore: Cultured Lotus, 2001), 78. (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 940.545994 SIL-[WAR]).*

(Above left) The *Krait* which carried the commandos on their raid to damage Japanese ships at Keppel Harbour in September 1943. *Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial, 044211.*

(Above) Australian and British commandos on board the *Krait* en route to Singapore to sabotage Japanese ships at Keppel Harbour, 1943. Ivan Lyon is in the back row, third from the left. *Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial, P00986.001.*

"At 5.15 a.m. on the morning of September 27, 1943 a terrific explosion shook the harbour of Singapore and a big Japanese tanker went up in flames. She was the first of seven ships to blow up at their moorings – victims of Operation Jaywick, a daring sabotage expedition in World War Two carried out by men of Unit Z of the Australian Experimental Station."

This is the dramatic introduction to "The Cruise of the Krait" which retells, in comic book form, the story of the real-life Operation Jaywick, a clandestine attack by British and Australian commandos and sailors on Japanese ships in Singapore's Keppel Harbour.

The story, which spans 12 pages, is one of 14 stories in *The Victor Book for Boys: The Commandos at Singapore*.[1] Published in London in 1965 by D.C. Thomson & Co., Ltd., and John Leng & Co. Ltd., the hardcover book measures 19.3 cm by 27.6 cm. (The book is 124 pages long, though because the publishers counts the cover as page 1, the page numbers run to 128).

Operation Jaywick

Operation Jaywick took place in September 1943. The team of 14 commandos and sailors, led by Major (later Lieutenant-Colonel) Ivan Lyon, sailed from Australia to Singapore in a fishing boat (the *Krait*), with the aim of sabotaging ships in Japanese-occupied Singapore.

They departed from Exmouth Gulf in Western Australia on 2 September 1943 and reached the waters near Singapore a few weeks later. On the night of 26 September, the commandos successfully paddled in small canoes into the Singapore harbour and attached explosives to Japanese ships that were moored there. The limpet mines went off just before dawn, by which

Gautam Hazarika grew up in India but moved to Singapore more than 20 years ago. A former banker, Gautam now focuses on his passion, history, and has a collection of books, maps, prints and paintings. He donated *The Victor Book for Boys: The Commandos at Singapore* to the National Library Board in April 2023.

time the men had safely made their escape. Mission accomplished, they paddled back to rendezvous with the *Krait*, before sailing home to Australia. They eventually arrived back at Exmouth Gulf on 19 October.

As a comic book aimed at teenage boys, the work is naturally more focused on recounting a thrilling narrative than on historical accuracy.

The comic is structured into four main parts: the journey to Singapore, preparations for the raid, the process of adding explosives to the Japanese vessels in the harbour, and the men's subsequent escape after the mines were detonated.

As a comic book aimed at teenage boys, the work is naturally more focused on recounting a thrilling narrative than on historical accuracy. As a result, some events were exaggerated or even added for dramatic effect. The comic book also gets some details wrong. In one panel, the wrong Japanese flag is used. (It should have been the flag with a red circle against a plain white background.) Author and researcher Lynette Ramsay Silver, who has written a number of books on Operation Jaywick, including *Deadly Secrets: The Singapore Raids, 1942–45*, has also argued that while it is commonly believed that seven vessels were damaged, records can only confirm six, and all but two were put back in service within days.[2]

Sailing to Singapore

In the comic book, the narrative begins with Lyon informing the men about the details of their mission once they are out at sea.

As they get closer to Singapore, the crew disguise the ship and themselves to avoid detection. "We're supposed to be a Jap fishing boat so we must fly the Jap flag and from now on we're either Japs or natives," says Lyon in the story. The men applied dark brown cream on themselves to look more Asian. According to Silver, the men also switched out of their uniform into sarong, but this is not mentioned in the comic. Instead, the men are depicted shirtless and wearing only a sarong.[3]

In the story, a man lets down his guard and tosses overboard an empty can with a label indicating that it contained Australian peaches. He receives a tongue-lashing and the *Krait* has to turn back to retrieve the can in case the label alerts the Japanese to their presence. This is likely to be a narrative device used to illustrate how the men had to be careful about the trash that they disposed of. According to Silver, the tinned food they had did not have labels on them; instead, the cans had identification numbers. A lookout did accidentally drop a hat and a towel into the sea though, which were retrieved.[4]

In the comic, the men are depicted shirtless and wearing only a sarong. *Image reproduced from The Victor Book for Boys: The Commandos at Singapore, p. 6.*

(Above) The men retrieving the can of peaches from the sea in case they are discovered by the Japanese. *Image reproduced from The Victor Book for Boys: The Commandos at Singapore, p. 7.*

(Left) As the *Krait* sails past a Japanese base in broad daylight, Lyon instructs the men to kneel and bow towards the mountain behind the camp as it is considered sacred by the locals. *Image reproduced from The Victor Book for Boys: The Commandos at Singapore, p. 8.*

The comic says that after the *Krait* makes it through the Lombok Strait, it sails past a Japanese base during broad daylight, which means they are likely to be spotted. Lyon instructs the crew to kneel and bow towards the mountain behind the camp as it is considered sacred by the locals. The ruse works, and although spotted, the *Krait* is presumed to be a Japanese fishing vessel with a native crew. According to Silver, while Lyon did know the area well, she has not come across any mention of such an incident.[5]

Preparation

The men eventually reach an island 30 miles (48 km) from Singapore and prepare for their mission. They split up, with the saboteurs paddling in canoes to an island closer to Singapore and are almost detected by a Japanese patrol boat. On the island, they exercise regularly to keep fit while waiting for the plan to attack Japanese ships at Keppel Harbour.

Mines Are Attached

A plan is hatched to attack a convoy that has docked in the harbour. Six men travelling in pairs paddle successfully into the harbour and begin attaching mines to ships.

In the comic, a pair have a narrow escape when they are spotted by a Japanese sailor. However, by pretending to be Malay fishermen, they manage to talk their way out of the situation. According to the account in Silver's book, while the commandos spotted a man looking out of a porthole, apparently staring in their direction, he did not see them and there was no exchange.[6]

After being spotted by a Japanese sailor, the two men pretend to be Malay fishermen. *Image reproduced from The Victor Book for Boys: The Commandos at Singapore, p. 12.*

(Above) The mines on the Japanese ships go off at 5.15 am on 27 September 1943. *Image reproduced from The Victor Book for Boys: The Commandos at Singapore, p. 13.*

(Right) A miraculous wave saves the men after they are spotted by a Japanese warship. *Image reproduced from The Victor Book for Boys: The Commandos at Singapore, p. 14.*

(Below) Lyon buys food from local Malays using gold coins. *Image reproduced from The Victor Book for Boys: The Commandos at Singapore, p. 16.*

The Escape

The mines go off just before dawn on 27 September. While this part of the mission is a success, the men must now rendezvous with the others on the *Krait* to get back to safety.

According to the comic book, escaping from Singapore was no easy task. The men first encounter a storm, and then to make matters worse, they are spotted by the Japanese. Fortunately for the commandos, the Japanese ship is wiped out by a sudden, enormous wave caused by the storm. There is no mention of such a dramatic and unlikely incident in Silver's book.

The comic also says that while on an island waiting to be picked by the *Krait*, the men run out of provisions and have to buy food from the local Malays using gold coins. This story has some basis in truth. According to Silver, while waiting for the *Krait*, an old Malay man traded his fresh fish for their tobacco and promised to keep them supplied with vegetables and fish.[7] But they would not have used gold coins as these would have drawn too much attention.[8]

The men are all eventually picked up by the *Krait* and after a few weeks, they arrive safe and sound in Australia. According to the comic, they are given a heroes' welcome but in reality, there was no such thing: the men simply held a secret celebration among themselves.[9]

What Was Left Unsaid

Apart from getting details wrong and inserting events that did not take place, the comic book also leaves out some critical pieces of information. While Operation Jaywick was successful as a commando operation, civilians in Singapore paid a large price.

According to the comic, the men are given a heroes' welcome upon their return to Australia. In reality, this did not take place. *Image reproduced from The Victor Book for Boys: The Commandos at Singapore, p. 16.*

(Left) Elizabeth Choy in a photo taken in 1955. Suspected of playing a part in Operation Jaywick, Choy was imprisoned and tortured over a 200-day period before she was released. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

(Below) Ivan Lyon's headstone at the Kranji War Cemetery, 2022. *Photo by Janice Loo.*

According to Silver, the raid remained a top secret that was revealed only after the war had ended. The Japanese believed that it had been the handiwork of people in Singapore.[10] This led to what is now known as the Double Tenth incident. On 10 October 1943, the Kempeitai (Japanese military police) raided the cells holding civilian internees at Changi Prison. A subsequent roundup of suspects across the island included Elizabeth Choy and her husband Choy Kan Heng.

While Operation Jaywick was successful as a commando operation, civilians in Singapore paid a large price.

Out of the 57 internees and civilians who were taken away, interrogated and tortured, 15 died. Those who survived served long prison sentences at either Outram Jail or Changi Prison. Elizabeth Choy, recognised today as a war heroine, was released only after 200 days of starvation and repeated torture, while her husband was released much later.[11]

Lyon subsequently died in a similar operation, which took place a year later on 10 October 1944. Operation Rimau failed as the men were detected before the raid began. Lyon was killed in action, and everyone with him on that mission also died. They were either killed while trying to escape, perished from their injuries while in captivity, or were executed by the Japanese. Lyon's remains are buried at Kranji War Cemetery in Singapore (plot 27, row A, headstone 14). Most of the other men involved in the mission are also buried in Kranji, though six still lie in unmarked graves in the Riau Islands.[12]

On 26 September 2013, a ceremony was held in Singapore to commemorate the 70th anniversary of Operation Jaywick. War veterans from Singapore, military personnel from other countries, students and members of the public, along with the Australian and British high commissioners, attended the event.[13] As for the fate of the *Krait*, the vessel is currently berthed at the Australia National Maritime Museum in Sydney, and operated on special occasions or displayed at special events. ♦

The Victor Book for Boys: The Commandos at Singapore will be made available for reference at the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library in due course.

NOTES

1 The *Victor Book for Boys* was an annual accompaniment to the weekly comic paper, *The Victor*, which ran from 25 January 1961 to 21 November 1992 (1,657 issues). The majority of the stories in the paper were about the exploits of the British military in World War II. There were 31 annuals altogether and these were published from 1964 to 1994.

2 Lynette Ramsay Silver, *Deadly Secrets: The Singapore Raids, 1942–45* (Binda, New South Wales: Sally Milner Publishing, 2010). (From National Library, Singapore, call no. RSING 940.5425957 SIL-[WAR]); "SOA, M & Z Special Units, Operation Jaywick Myths," Lynette Ramsay Silver, AM, MBE, accessed 26 April 2023, https://lynettesilver.com/special-operations-australia/soa-m-z-special-units-operation-jaywick-myths/.

3 The dark brown cream was apparently made by the cosmetics brand, Helena Rubinstein. See Silver, *Deadly Secrets*, 152.

4 Silver, *Deadly Secrets*, 153, 157.

5 Lynette Ramsay Silver, email correspondence, 5 April 2023.

6 Silver, *Deadly Secrets*, 165.

7 Silver, *Deadly Secrets*, 100.

8 Silver, email correspondence, 5 April 2023.

9 "SOA, M & Z Special Units, Operation Jaywick Myths."

10 "SOA, M & Z Special Units, Operation Jaywick Myths."

11 Wong Heng, "Double Tenth Incident," in *Singapore Infopedia*. National Library Board Singapore. Article published January 2021; Bonny Tan, "Elizabeth Choy," in *Singapore Infopedia*. National Library Board Singapore. Article published 30 June 2016.

12 Janice Loo, "They Died for All Free Men: Stories from Kranji War Cemetery," *BiblioAsia* 18, no. 2 (July–September 2022), 18–25.

13 Andre Yeo and Kelvin Chan, "Commando Attack at Keppel Harbour," *New Paper*, 27 September 2014, 14–15. (From NewspaperSG)

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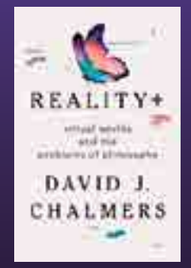

SCAN TO BORROW

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32 BINJAI PARK

The Modernist Home of an Architect

The house that Lee Kip Lin built has stood the test of time, reflecting its simple yet modern and clean design.

By Lim Tin Seng and Lee Peng Hui

Significant buildings in Singapore tend to fall into a few well-known categories. There are colonial-era buildings typically in the neoclassical style, like the former Supreme Court or the old Parliament House. Then there are stunning modern ones like Jewel Changi Airport, Marina Bay Sands and Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay. Not many of them, however, are 1970s homes located in leafy suburbs. Then again, not many buildings can claim to be the family home of the late architect and conservationist Lee Kip Lin.[1]

Lim Tin Seng is a Senior Librarian with the National Library, Singapore. He is the co-editor of *Roots: Tracing Family Histories – A Resource Guide* (2013), *Harmony and Development: ASEAN-China Relations* (2009) and *China's New Social Policy: Initiatives for a Harmonious Society* (2010). He writes regularly for *BiblioAsia*.

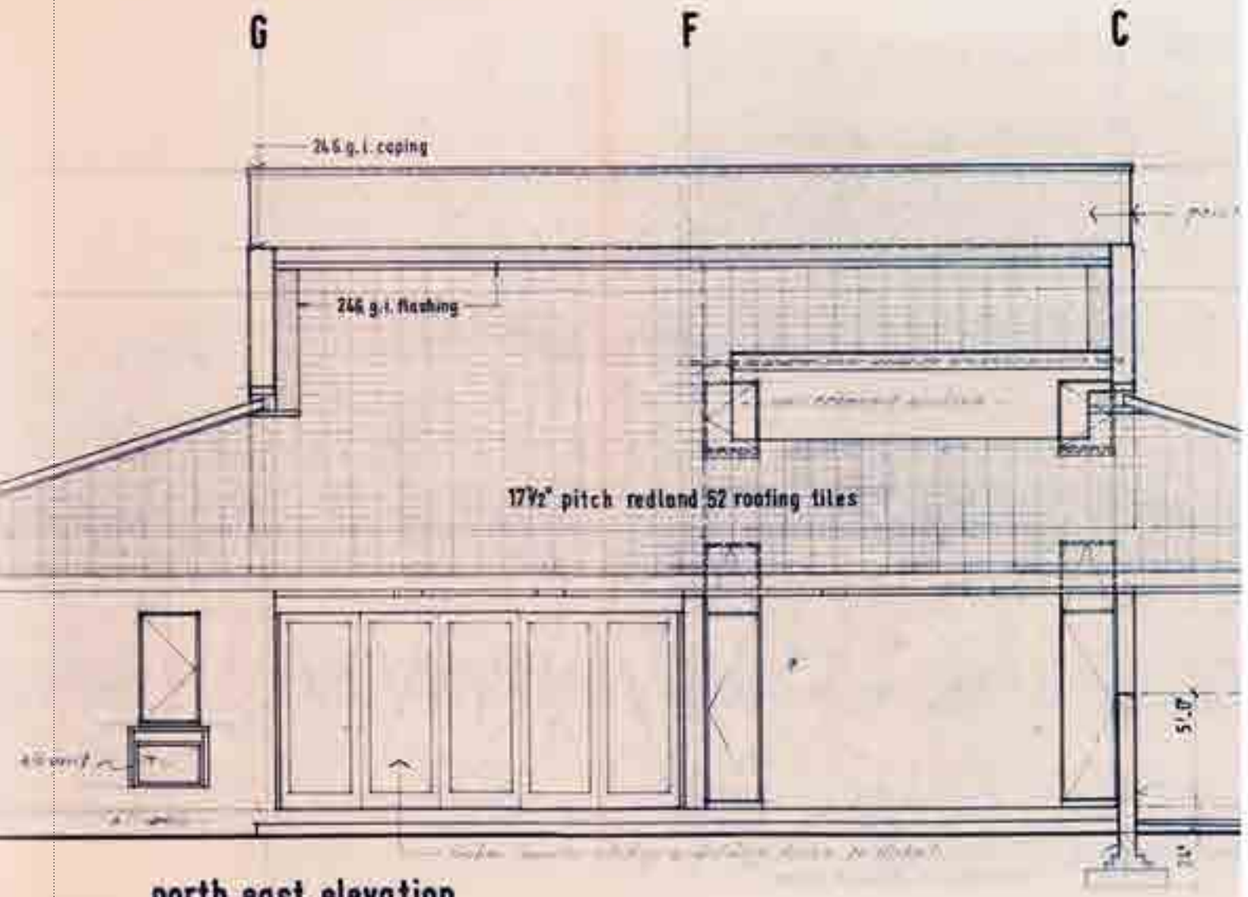
Dr Lee Peng Hui is the son of Lee Kip Lin. He is an independent researcher and cultural commentator, who grew up surrounded by Singapore's pioneer modernist architects. He has been observing the architectural scene in Singapore and abroad since the late 20th century.

Designed by Lee and built in 1973, the house at 32 Binjai Park has been designated as a significant modernist building in Singapore.[2]

From the street, the 3,800-square-foot home (353 sqm) is unassuming, with its white-painted brick and plaster walls, and sloping, red-tiled roof. Although it does not stand out visually from its neighbours, it is when one walks through the front door that the unique qualities of the house are revealed.

The house boasts a high ceiling with exposed timber beams and rafters as well as unobstructed, seamless access to the living room, dining room, veranda and garden. The open layout draws in natural light and breeze to create a spacious and airy feel, making the interior seem larger than it is.

The relatively modest house sits on 21,304 square feet of land (1,979 sqm), most of which is occupied by a garden where the grass has been allowed to grow out, allowing biodiversity to thrive. Taking centre stage is a tall, majestic Binjai tree, which has been listed as a heritage tree by the



(Above) Northeast elevation drawing of 32 Binjai Park, 1973. *Lee Kip Lin Collection, National Library, Singapore.*

(Right) The house as seen from the northeast direction, 2023. In the garden is a wall made of red bricks salvaged from the former Raffles Institution building on Bras Basah Road. *Photo by Jimmy Yap.*

National Parks Board.[3] Wild chickens can be seen pecking away, while the pet cat lazes nearby.

At dusk each day, Javan pipistrelles (a species of bat; *Pipistrellus javanicus*) emerge from within the frame of the sliding doors of the dining rooms where they have made their nests. They leave their hideaway to hunt before returning to roost at dawn. In the garden near the veranda is a wall made from red bricks salvaged from the former Raffles Institution building on Bras Basah Road.

(Above) A recent photograph of the house taken from the front gate looking into the car porch, 2022. *Courtesy of Dr Lee Peng Hui.*

(Below) Lee Kip Lin and his architecture students at his Binjai Park home, 1970s. *Courtesy of Mrs Lee Li-ming.*

Pioneer architect Tay Kheng Soon, a close friend and former student of Lee, describes 32 Binjai Park as "practical, tropical, refined and unassuming".[4] Peter Keys, co-author of *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places* (1988), notes that the house "does not rely on any tricks or dramatic embellishments of any kind" to carry out its function as a family home.[5] It is one of the few remaining houses in Singapore that still exists in its largely unaltered, original condition and bears characteristics from the late Modernism period of the 1970s.

A True Modernist

Associate Professor Tse Swee Ling from the Department of Architecture at the National University of Singapore described Lee's design approach as pure and down-to-earth. "He did not do fanciful things like the post-modernists with a lot of decorations," she said. "He did not believe in all that."[6]

Tse had worked with Lee on many projects since the 1960s, including 32 Binjai Park. She pointed out that Lee's home embodies his design philosophy. "The distinctive feature [of 32 Binjai Park] is the simplicity of the design," she said. "The layout and setting are based on a simple square grid with recesses and void carved out. It is practically a single storey house except for the loft."[7]

She noted that most people preferred double-storey houses, which made Lee's home distinctive. The house is also notable for eschewing ostentatious flourishes. "In those days, in the area, which was a rich man's area, the houses built there were much more elaborate," she noted. While others used marble, Lee chose normal floor tiles. "I still remember he brought the tiles and showed me. He said, 'I found these tiles. They are very nice for my house. What do you think? What do you think?'… He was so happy when he found the tiles."[8]

Lee Kip Lin with his wife Ong Li-ming on their wedding day, 1959. *Courtesy of Mrs Lee Li-ming.*

Moving Out from Amber Road

Lee purchased the plot of land at Binjai Park in the early 1960s but he only started making plans to design and build a house on it in the latter half of the decade when he decided to move out from his family home on Amber Road.

The house in Binjai Park is very different from the Amber Road one. That was a two-storey seafront house, also designed by Lee after the earlier house on the same site was demolished in 1960. Only a wall with a gate stood between the garden and the beach.

In the Amber Road house, the dining room, kitchen and servants' quarters were on the first floor. The living room, however, was on the second floor, and it opened to an extensive balcony. The balcony afforded panoramic views of the sea, ships and the Riau Islands beyond, which would not have been possible if the living room had been located on the first floor. From the balcony, Lee would often peer out, armed with a pair of binoculars.

Lee was very attached to Katong. He loved the sea and might never have left Amber Road if not for the Bedok-Tanjong Rhu reclamation works in the 1960s, which pushed the shoreline out. Another factor was the impending construction of the multistorey Chinese Swimming Club sports complex adjacent to the house. In addition, the tax on the vacant land at Binjai Park was extremely high compared to what it would have been if the property was occupied. Given all these, Lee decided to sell the house on Amber Road and move his family to Binjai Park.

[32 Binjai Park] is one of the few remaining houses in Singapore that still exists in its largely unaltered, original condition and bears characteristics from the late Modernism period of the 1970s.

A House for the Tropics

In designing his new home, Lee based the proportions of the house on a square grid, or module. This can be seen in the ground-floor plan of the house.

According to Tse, Lee revised the design concept of the house at least three times. The earlier designs featured a more basic grid layout. She said that when Lee first started planning, the house had an even simpler design. However, over time, he added new features like a garden and

later a courtyard for ventilation. "If he didn't have a courtyard, it would have been a large area with no lighting and no air and it would be very stuffy," she said. "But you can't see the courtyard from outside because of the veranda."[9]

At one point, the house was even meant to be double-storey. But in the final design, it was reduced to one storey with a loft. From the outside though, the loft is not apparent. "The loft was just a small area above the entrance area," she said. "But the look of the house is single storey, and if you look from outside, you do not know there is a loft."[10]

Adding to the simple look is the use of brick walls to conceal the reinforced concrete columns inside the house. Lee used the rough finish of bricks as a contrast to the plastered walls. Tse added that Lee chose common bricks instead of "facing bricks", which are used mainly for facades and hence more aesthetically pleasing.

Lee also did not want to install false ceilings. "He wanted to expose the roof construction by expressing the elements such as timber beams and rafters," said Tse. "The concrete floor slab of the loft over the dining area was also left bare without a false ceiling. He had taken great care to place services such as the floor trap of the bathroom of the loft outside the house away from the main area so that a false ceiling is not necessary."[11]

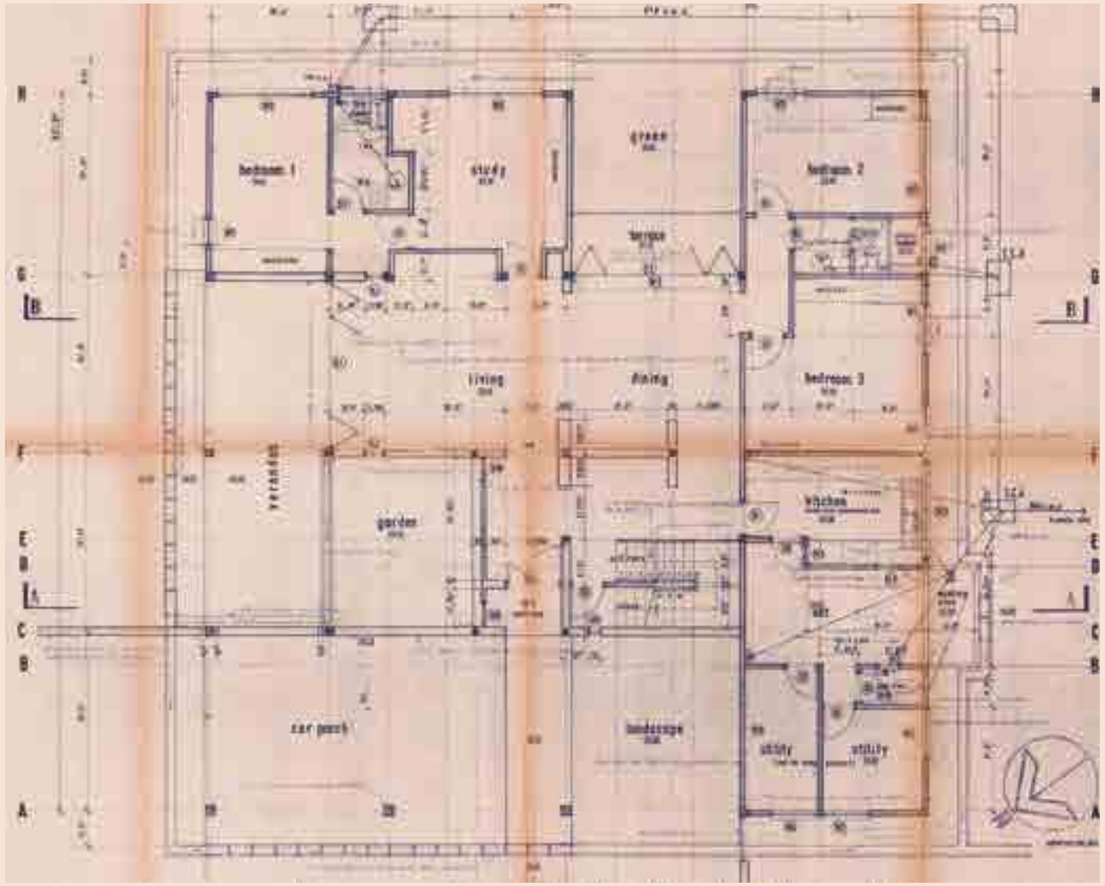
The design of the home also takes the local climate into consideration. Lee relied on the extensive use of louvres for windows and doors (some of which were bifold and trifold), which allows for cross-ventilation even when closed. The use of louvres also extends to the main entrance door.

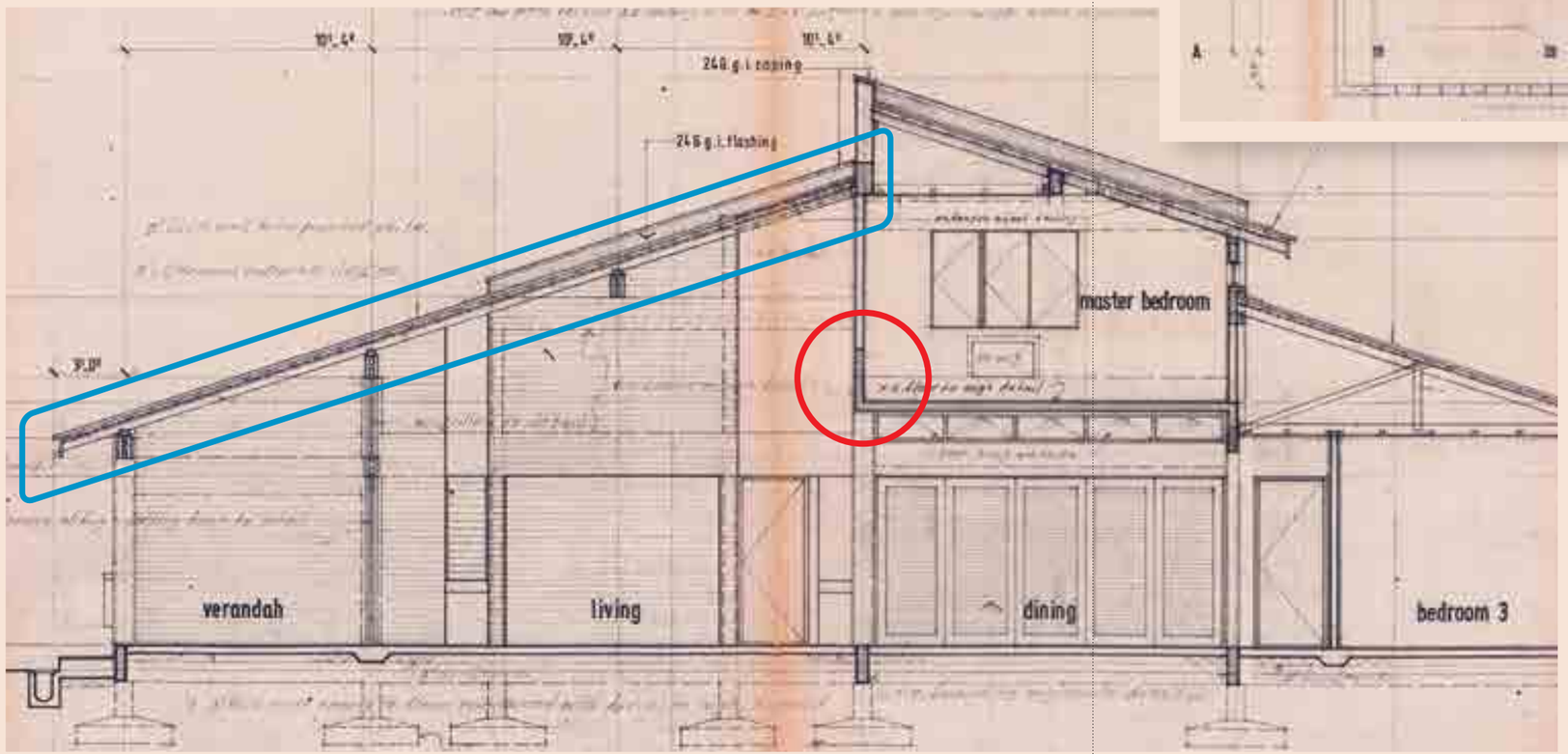
While sliding glass windows and doors were coming into fashion about the time the house was built, Lee was adamantly opposed to them as he considered them to be unsuitable for the tropics: they cannot be fully opened and do not allow optimal use of the window and door apertures for ventilation.

Lee also chose to use a sloping roof instead of a flat one because of the torrential downpours that Singapore regularly experiences. Flat roofs are more likely to leak, which is why Lee gave his house – as well as every house he designed – a sloping roof. A sloping roof would also create a high ceiling that improves ventilation.

(Below) Upstand or inverted beams (circled in red) are used for the loft so that its beams are hidden above the general slab level, 1973. This allows the slab to be fully exposed below without any protruding structure. Without false ceilings, Lee Kip Lin could also fully display the roof construction, including its timber beams and rafters, (boxed in blue) above the living room and veranda, 1973. *Lee Kip Lin Collection, National Library, Singapore.*

(Facing page) The ground-floor plan of 32 Binjai Park, 1973. *Lee Kip Lin Collection, National Library, Singapore.*





A Unique Character

The house today reflects both the original design as well as changes resulting from a major refurbishment that took place in 1997. This was necessary because many things had begun to deteriorate from wear and tear, including the original electrical wiring. The wiring had been embedded in the concrete walls, as was the practice in those days, and needed to be replaced. Lee was unwell by that time and was not involved in the work, which was supervised by his wife, Mrs Lee Li-ming.

She firmly dismissed suggestions to replace the original steel window frames and wooden doors with more "modern" alternatives. Although newer alternatives might have simplified the refurbishment, the look and feel of the house would have been irretrievably damaged.

One significant change that did occur during the renovation was the introduction of a false ceiling. Although this allowed the installation of recessed ceiling lights, it has subtly altered the appearance of the house, most evidently along the edges of the living room where the false ceiling ends. Thankfully, the false ceiling can be easily removed to restore the ceiling to its original height and purpose in the future.

A more recent addition is the installation of a large ceiling fan in the living room in 2006 – of the type more commonly found in public spaces such as MRT stations. Although the high ceiling made the house seem larger than it really was, an unintended consequence was that it gave the living room a rather cavernous feel, making it a less welcoming space. This changed when the large fan was installed, at the suggestion of architect Tay Kheng Soon. Apart from cooling the room, the fan has also made the living room cosier and therefore popular. Previously, guests would naturally gravitate to areas with lower ceilings, such as the veranda or what is now the TV room. Since the fan was installed, the living room has become more frequently utilised.

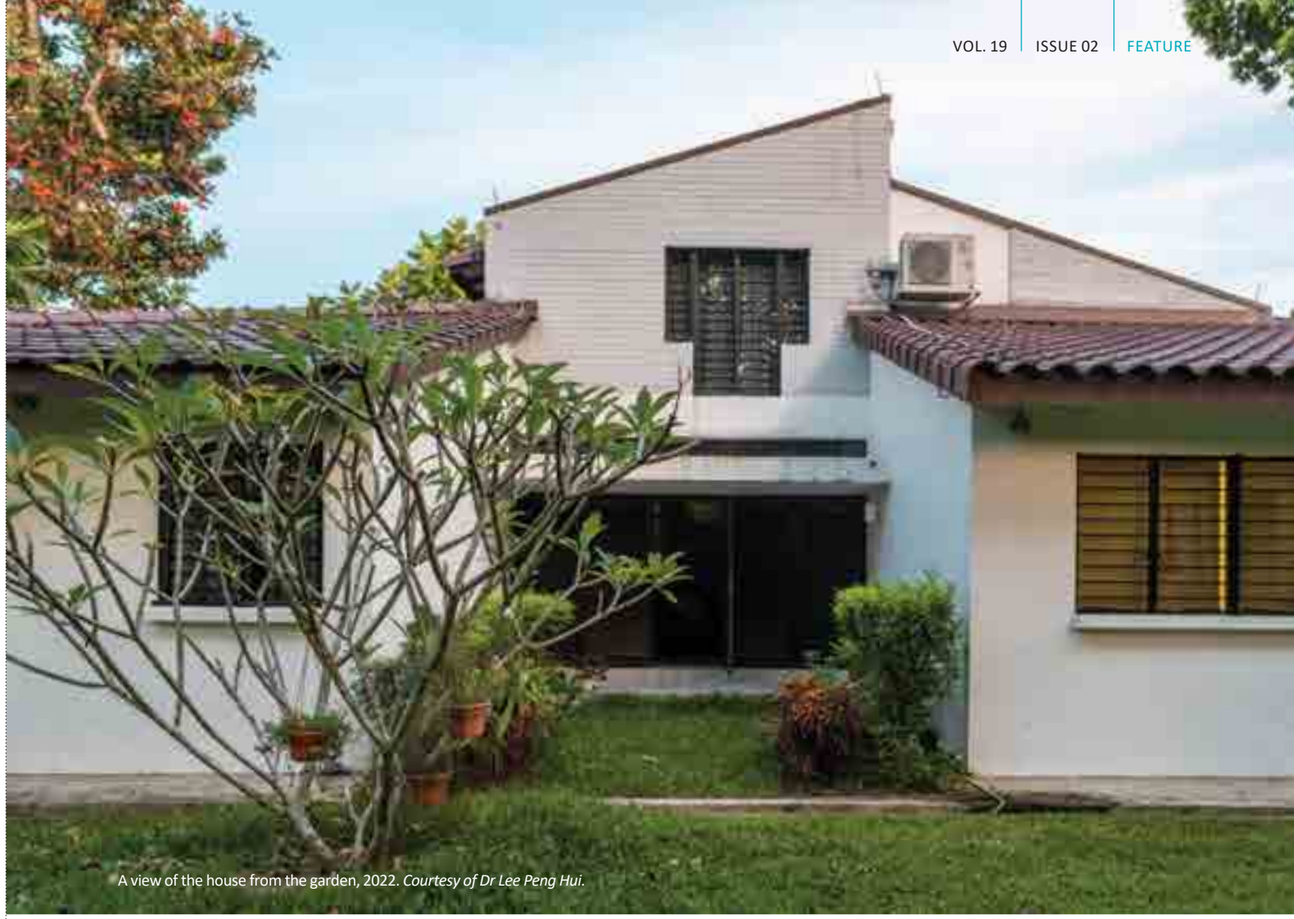
(Left) Looking out into the veranda and garden from the living room, which has a very high ceiling, 2023. The large fan gives the living room a cosier feel. *Photo by Jimmy Yap.*

(Below) A view of the veranda and the sloping roof, 2022. On the right is a wall made of red bricks salvaged from the former Raffles Institution building on Bras Basah Road. *Courtesy of Dr Lee Peng Hui.*

A Home for the Ages

In recent years, there has been an increased interest in Singapore's modernist architecture.[12] The public became more aware of modernist architecture here after the iconic Pearl Bank Apartments was demolished in 2019, despite international attention and proposals for conservation.[13]

The loss of Pearl Bank Apartments prompted the formation of the Singapore chapter of Docomomo International. Lee's Binjai Road house has been included in Docomomo Singapore's Modernist 100 list, joining other buildings such as Golden Mile Complex, Jurong Town Hall, Asia Insurance Building and the flats in Tiong Bahru built by the Singapore Improvement Trust.



A view of the house from the garden, 2022. *Courtesy of Dr Lee Peng Hui.*

Lee's home is one of the few modernist homes in Singapore that has been opened for public visits. In March 2022, Docomomo Singapore organised two tours of the house, and tickets for both sold out almost immediately.[14]

In 2022, the family of the late architect donated the original architectural plans and documents, comprising contract drawings and correspondence between Lee and the firms involved in constructing the house, to the National Library, Singapore. These form part of the Lee Kip Lin Collection.[15] The public may request to access the materials in the collection via the National Library Board's catalogue at http://catalogue.nlb.gov.sg/. Walk-in requests can be made at the Level 11 information counter of the National Library Building on Victoria Street. ♦

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BRIDGING PAST AND PRESENT IN PASIR RIS

Once dotted with plantations and mangrove swamps, Pasir Ris is today a bustling residential town with modern facilities and amenities.

By Asrina Tanuri

Sun, sand, sea and sax – the popular Malay song "Bila Mama Pakai Celana" had it all. Set to a cha-cha beat, the song was written by actor, musician and filmmaker P. Ramlee and featured in the 1959 film *Saudagar Minyak Urat* (*Love Crazy*).

In the film, actor Aziz Sattar sings this song – whose title roughly translates as "When Mother Wore Pants" – on a beach surrounded by a bevy of ladies in swimsuits who are gyrating their hips as they twirl hula hoops. A saxophone dangles around his neck, which he holds occasionally but never seems to actually use.

Produced by the Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Productions, this particular scene was shot on the grounds of a beachside hotel in Pasir Ris.[1] The now largely forgotten Pasir Ris Hotel on Elias Road was owned by well-known hotelier Ho Meng Quee. Before he took over the place in the 1950s, the building had been the beachfront holiday residence of wealthy Jewish entrepreneur Joseph Aaron Elias, who was also a Justice of the Peace (he and his brother Ezra Aaron Elias gave Elias Road its name).[2]

The Lorong Halus Red Bridge across Serangoon Reservoir. Photo by Allen Chun. *Courtesy of Singapore Tourism Board.*

It is not surprising that the producers of this lightweight comedy would have chosen Pasir Ris to capture a laidback beach vibe. For much of Singapore's postwar years, the white sands of Pasir Ris drew city folk looking for a quiet, peaceful respite. At one time, Pasir Ris boasted two seaside resorts and even had a museum of corals and seashells. Its remote location added to its allure, in the way that holidaymakers today seek out beach holidays in Bintan, Tioman and Phuket.

These days, Pasir Ris is no longer quite as quiet and remote. Over 100,000 people live in bustling Pasir Ris town, which is well connected to the rest of Singapore thanks to the MRT (it is a speedy 33-minute train ride from City Hall MRT station). Downtown East, which styles itself as a premier lifestyle, recreational and entertainment hub, draws large crowds on weekends and school holidays. And although it still boasts sandy beaches, if you mention "white sands", you are more likely to be directed to the six-storey shopping mall next to Pasir Ris MRT station.

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An Idyllic Enclave

One of the earliest mentions of Pasir Ris is in an 1844 map by John Turnbull Thomson, the Government Surveyor for the Straits Settlements. In that map, the area was labelled as Passeir Rice. Other 19th century maps use variant spellings such as Passir Ris and Passir Risa. Charles Burton Buckley's 1902 book, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, refers to the place as Passier Reis.[3]

The origin of the name Pasir Ris is unknown though. According to a study by H.T. Haughton published in the *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* in 1889, the name could have been derived from a combination of the Malay words *pasir* (sand) and *hiris* (shred).[4]

Pasir Ris was once a low-lying and undeveloped area.[5] Maps from the 1950s to 1970s show that Pasir Ris was then occupied mainly by coconut and rubber plantations, mangrove swamps and ponds, and dotted with Malay kampongs and Chinese villages. The kampongs in the area included Kampong Loyang, Kampong Pasir Ris, Kampong Elias, Kampong Teban, Kampong Beremban and Kampong Sungei Blukar. Two waterways, Sungei Api Api and Sungei Tampines, used to flow through the area.[6]

Apart from rubber tapping and fishing as their livelihoods, the Malay villagers also produced *belacan* (fermented shrimp paste) made from *udang geragau* (small shrimps) caught at Sungei Api Api and Sungei Tampines during high tide. Kampong Tampines, located on Jalan Guan Choon and Tampines Road, was a popular filming location in the 1950s and 1960s for Malay films such as *Hantu Jerangkong* (*The Skeleton Ghost*), *Antara Dua Darjat* (*Between Two Classes*) and *Batu Belah Batu Bertangkup* (*The Devouring Rock*).[7]

Interestingly, Pasir Ris was used as a film location very early on. In 1913, French filmmaker Gaston Méliès shot *The Poisoned Darts* in the area. An advertisement that ran in *Moving Picture World* magazine proudly proclaimed that it was "produced in the jungles of Passir Riz [Pasir Ris], a suburb of Singapore, Strait Settlements, Asia, employing natives in many of the roles".[8] Author and film director Raphaël Millet, who directed a documentary on

Detail from a 1961 topographic map showing Pasir Ris Hotel (circled in red) and the kampongs in Pasir Ris such as Kampong Loyang, Kampong Pasir Ris, Kampong Teban, Kampong Beremban and Kampong Sungei Blukar (circled in white). *Singapore, 1961, TM001090, Singapore Land Authority Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

This still from Gaston Méliès' fiction film *The Poisoned Darts* is the only known scene from the film that was shot on location in Singapore. Filmed at "Passir Riz" (Pasir Ris), the non-Caucasian actors in the scene were likely Malay "natives" living in the kampongs in the area. *Courtesy of "Gaston Méliès and his Wandering Star Film Company" © Nocturnes Productions, 2015.*

Méliès, noted that based on the surviving footage of this film, the actors were most likely inhabitants of Malay villages in Pasir Ris.[9]

A Seaside Getaway

Pasir Ris was known for its recreational amenities that attracted local holidaymakers and tourists. Pasir Ris Hotel, the location for the song "Bila Mama Pakai Celana" was a pioneer in beachfront development in Pasir Ris.[10]

A *Straits Times* advertisement on 16 May 1952 described the hotel as "Singapore's Premier Pleasure Resort" that offered "the clearest, beautiful, palm-fringed beaches, swimming, boating and lawn tennis". Officially opened on 17 May, the hotel comprised 35 fully furnished rooms fitted with modern sanitation, and provided amenities such as a dance hall, tennis courts and an enclosed swimming *pagar* (fenced-in pool; *pagar* means "fence" in Malay).[11]

However, seven years later, the hotel was converted into a transit accommodation for the personnel of the British Royal Air Force and their families. Although the hotel subsequently reopened to the public in 1966, it never regained its former glory and struggled to attract guests.[12]

In May 1971, *New Nation* reporter Wendy Hutton described the hotel as a "faded gentlewoman, now reduced to taking in paying guests, who occasionally dreams of the days of her youth and beauty when young men sipped champagne from her dancing slippers".[13]

The hotel hung on for another decade before finally shuttering on 31 December 1983. Speaking to the *Straits Times* that year, Robin Tan, the assistant front manager, recalled the hotel in its heyday. "I remember coming to this place when I was a little boy and seeing only *ang mohs* (Caucasians) around. It was very exclusive, somewhat like the Singapore Cricket Club. And the sea came right up to the hotel's doorsteps."[14]

The nearby Golden Palace Holiday Resort, which opened in 1969, was another popular spot for holidaymakers. The 20-acre resort at the now-expunged Jalan Ang Siang Kong off Tampines Road was touted as an "ideal retreat for fishing, boating, picnics and parties" with a "beautiful panoramic scenery". It had chalets, pavilions, restaurants and a nightclub. One of the resort's key offerings was its boating and fishing pond, which was once a sand quarry.[15] According to Pasir Ris resident Law Yap Teck, who visited the resort when he was in his 20s, "[it] was a place where people came for an eye-opening experience. To have fun, row boats and stay in the holiday resort".[16]

The resort wound up in 1971 after a petition by one of the directors over alleged mismanagement by the company's chairman. In 1973, the government acquired the resort for $870,000, with plans for it to be used for fish-breeding experiments. Today, the resort's former site forms part of Pasir Ris Park. The pond was converted into a commercial saltwater fishing pond, which opened to the public in October 1990.[17]

While Pasir Ris Hotel and Golden Palace Holiday Resort targeted a more affluent clientele, the People's

The Golden Palace Holiday Resort at Jalan Ang Siang Kong, 1969. Its fishing and boating pond was later converted into a commercial saltwater fishing pond. *Lim Kheng Chye Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

Association Holiday Flats offered affordable rentals that became popular among local families. A three-storey block comprising 30 holiday flats was officially opened by then Minister for the Environment Lim Kim San on 11 November 1973.[18]

These flats were intended to serve the "average wage-earners" and provide a beach holiday "at a cost within their means". The daily rate was $7 for a two-room unit and $10 for a three-room unit. Each flat came with a living and dining room, and kitchen facilities.[19] Noraini Anastasi, who stayed there in 1988, recalled that "[t]he seaside scenery is super. My only complaint: mosquitoes. We should have brought mosquito coils but, alamak, we forgot".[20]

In addition to the holiday flats, the People's Association built a sea sports centre to cater to water sports enthusiasts. The Pasir Ris Sea Sports Centre on Elias Road opened in August 1987 "for Singaporeans who love the sun-and-sea type of sports". Today, the centre is known as PAssion WaVe @ Pasir Ris and offers activities such as dinghy sailing, kayaking, abseiling and sports climbing.[21]

With its proximity to the sea, water skiing was a popular sport in Pasir Ris back in the day. In February 1955, Pasir Ris Hotel hosted the Malayan Waterski Association's first water skiing gala, which saw the construction of a 30-foot-long wooden ramp raised four feet above the water. The hundreds of spectators were entertained by the "spectacular tumbles" from the contestants. Pasir Ris was chosen "because it is safe for families to bring along children and also because there is plenty of parking space", according to the event spokesperson, A.C. Cooper.[22]

From the late 1960s to 1970s, Pasir Ris was also home to two tourist attractions – Villa Saujana and Dari Laut – located at Jalan Loyang Besar. Dari Laut,

Pasir Ris Hotel had its own swimming *pagar*, 1957–59. The building was formerly wealthy Jewish entrepreneur Joseph Aaron Elias' beachfront holiday bungalow before it was redeveloped in 1952. *RAF Seletar Association Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*

The design of the flats in Pasir Ris took inspiration from its history as a seaside resort. These flats at Pasir Ris Street 11 feature lighthouse-shaped turrets. *Courtesy of National Heritage Board.*

which means "from the sea" in Malay, was a museum showcasing 10,000 species of corals, seashells, fishes and other wildlife specimens.

Founded by beachcomber Johnny Johnson and marine enthusiasts John Langham and Jack Fisher, the museum was officially opened by then Finance Minister Goh Keng Swee in December 1969. It was initially accessible only to American troops on rest and recreation here from Vietnam. When the programme ceased a couple of years later, Dari Laut was opened to all tourists. Johnson eventually closed the museum and went on to supervise the establishment of the Coralarium at Sentosa with Fisher in 1974.[23]

Dari Laut's neighbour was Villa Saujana, the seaside residence of Englishman Ernest Smith, who was the former assistant manager at Raffles Hotel. ("Saujana" is a variation of *suasana*, Malay for "pleasant environment and view".) Smith had opened his home, which had a Malay kampong atmosphere, to tourists at $30 a head, inclusive of dinner, cultural shows and drinks. In the early 1970s, Villa Saujana was said to be one of the top tourist attractions in Singapore.[24]

A Park for All

In 1956, the Singapore Rural Board announced plans to develop 14.5 acres of land in Pasir Ris to provide more facilities for beachgoers. The plan included clearing coconut trees; building an access road, changing rooms and shower facilities; and repairing the seawall. Works were completed in 1958, and Pasir Ris beach park was officially opened on 17 August 1958 by then Chief Minister Lim Yew Hock.[25]

From the late 1970s, Pasir Ris beach underwent further developments, which included 44 hectares of land reclamation. Landscape and park specialists from Japan were engaged to develop the park. It would have a pond, flower gardens, jogging and cycling tracks, an area for nature walks and boating, a camp site, chalets, a children's playground, cafeterias and a sports complex.[26]

In 1984, the Parks and Recreation Department (today's National Parks Board) embarked on a project to build an 80-hectare regional park stretching from Pasir Ris beach park to Sungei Loyang, making it the second-biggest park in Singapore after East Coast Park.[27]

Today, the 70-hectare park – which stretches over 3.2 kilometres – provides pony rides, bicycle and barbecue pit rentals, camping sites and water sports facilities. A highlight of the park is the preserved mangrove forest with a mangrove boardwalk and a three-storey tower for birdwatching.[28]

Nature lovers can also visit Lorong Halus Wetland, a former landfill along the eastern bank of Serangoon Reservoir. Officially opened in March 2011, the wetland protects the reservoir water from contaminants caused by landfill waste. Spanning Serangoon Reservoir is the Lorong Halus Red Bridge, a great place to catch the sunset and popular with Instagrammers.[29]

A Residential Town

One of the earliest housing developments in Pasir Ris was the 57-hectare Pasir Ris Beach Park Estate. The private residential area, developed by property developer Kong Joo in the early 1970s, comprised 328 bungalows, semi-detached houses and terrace houses located near the former Pasir Ris Hotel site. Residents likened it to living in a kampong, and even harvested shrimps from the sea to make their own *belacan* and *cincalok* (fermented shrimp product).[30]

Happy Tay, president of the Pasir Ris Beach Park Residents' Association, told the *Straits Times* in 1988: "The atmosphere in this place is just like a kampung. Even if there is a disagreement, we try to solve it in a friendly manner and no one takes offence if we point out their mistakes. And people genuinely like to help each other."[31] Several of these houses today are owned by the government and private corporations as holiday bungalows for their employees.[32]

[Pasir Ris New Town] welcomed its first residents in 1988 and was dubbed a "yuppie neighbourhood with high expectations".

The Housing and Development Board (HDB) announced plans for the development of Pasir Ris New Town in its 1984/85 annual report, with construction slated to begin in 1986. The government had acquired land to build the new housing estate from Bukit Sembawang Rubber Company, Shaw Brothers and a number of private individuals in 1983. To attract potential buyers to the far-flung location, the HDB highlighted amenities such as the MRT system that would take residents to Orchard Road in 30 minutes and the new Pasir Ris Park. "Better-quality flats with better finish and better designs" in Pasir Ris were also cited to boost the estate's appeal.[33]

The town welcomed its first residents in 1988 and was dubbed a "yuppie neighbourhood with high expectations" by its Member of Parliament Charles Chong, as most of the residents were mainly young families.[34] Airline relations manager Nur Aireen Abdullah and her family moved into a five-bedroom flat in Pasir Ris Drive 6 in June 1989. She recalled: "There were limited bus services that plied the new neighbourhood at the time. There were no amenities

Pasir Ris Park is a popular camping spot, especially on weekends and public holidays, 2023. *Photo by Asrina Tanuri.*

or facilities. However, we were still thrilled to be able to walk to the beach from our home in under 10 minutes. Some evenings, my mother would pack our food, and we would eat by the beach. My siblings and I also enjoyed exploring the maze and spotting mudskippers at the mangrove swamp."[35]

Former chief of Mercy Relief Hassan Ahmad, who moved to an executive flat in Pasir Ris in 2006, said that the "proximity to nature" drew him to the estate. "We do a lot of cycling around here, my kids also love the beach at Pasir Ris Park. There are a lot of big open spaces," he told the *Straits Times* in June 2015.[36]

In 2017, the HDB announced that Pasir Ris would be rejuvenated under the Remaking Our Heartland programme.

Over the years, more facilities and amenities were added to the estate. Pasir Ris Bus Interchange and Pasir Ris MRT station opened in December 1989, while Loyang Primary School and Loyang Secondary School were the first schools established there. (Both schools no longer exist as they have merged with other schools due to declining enrolments.)[37]

Some notable religious landmarks in the estate include Tibetan Buddhist temple Sakya Tenphel Ling, Pentecost Methodist Church, Church of Divine Mercy and Masjid Al-Istighfar.

In November 2011, the Pasir Ris Sports Centre was officially opened. The centre houses an indoor sports hall, swimming pools, futsal and tennis courts, a gym, food outlets and sporting goods shops.[38] Next to it is the estate's first hawker centre, Pasir Ris Central Hawker Centre, which opened in November 2017.[39] Shopping malls such as White Sands, Loyang Point, Elias Mall and Pasir Ris West Plaza cater to residents' shopping and dining needs.[40]

A Recreational and Entertainment Hub

Downtown East – a lifestyle, leisure and entertainment hub located at Pasir Ris Close – is one of Pasir Ris' most recognisable landmarks. It was formerly known as NTUC Pasir Ris Resort, and was officially opened in 1988. The 14.7-hectare site offered chalets, swimming pools, a discotheque, squash and tennis courts, and play areas for children.[41]

The resort was redeveloped and renamed Downtown East in 2000. New amenities included Escape Theme Park, an outdoor theme park, which opened in May 2000, and water theme park Wild Wild Wet, which began operations four years later. Both parks became highly popular among Singaporeans and tourists.[42]

In 2008, E!hub, a new five-storey one-stop leisure and entertainment centre – comprising a cinema, a family play centre, gaming arcades, a bowling centre as well as retail and dining outlets – opened in Downtown East. Although Escape Theme Park closed in 2011, D'Resort @ Downtown East opened on its site and welcomed its first guests in July 2015. Wild Wild Wet was also enlarged in 2016.[43]

Today, Pasir Ris continues to be well loved by residents and is a popular retreat spot for Singaporeans. On weekends and public holidays, families and

Downtown East is a lifestyle, leisure and entertainment hub. It is one of Pasir Ris' most recognisable landmarks. *Courtesy of National Heritage Board.*

groups of young people continue to fill the rooms of the holiday chalets at Downtown East. Some pitch tents by the sea while others gather for beachside picnics or barbecue sessions.

In 2017, the HDB announced that Pasir Ris would be rejuvenated under the Remaking Our Heartland programme. In the works are new flats, more retail outlets, a town plaza for community activities and a mixed-use development integrated with a bus interchange. A key feature of the facelift is a 1.2-kilometre-long Central Greenway, where an elevated section of the greenway will enable residents to walk from Pasir Ris MRT station to Pasir Ris Park in 10 minutes.[44]

Nur Aireen Abdullah, who has lived in Pasir Ris for more than 30 years, looks forward to a refreshed neighbourhood when the works are completed. "I will probably not move out from Pasir Ris. I love it here as it holds the memories of my happy childhood and there are plenty of things to do here. I look forward to exploring the new recreational facilities and community spaces with my family," she said.[45] ♦

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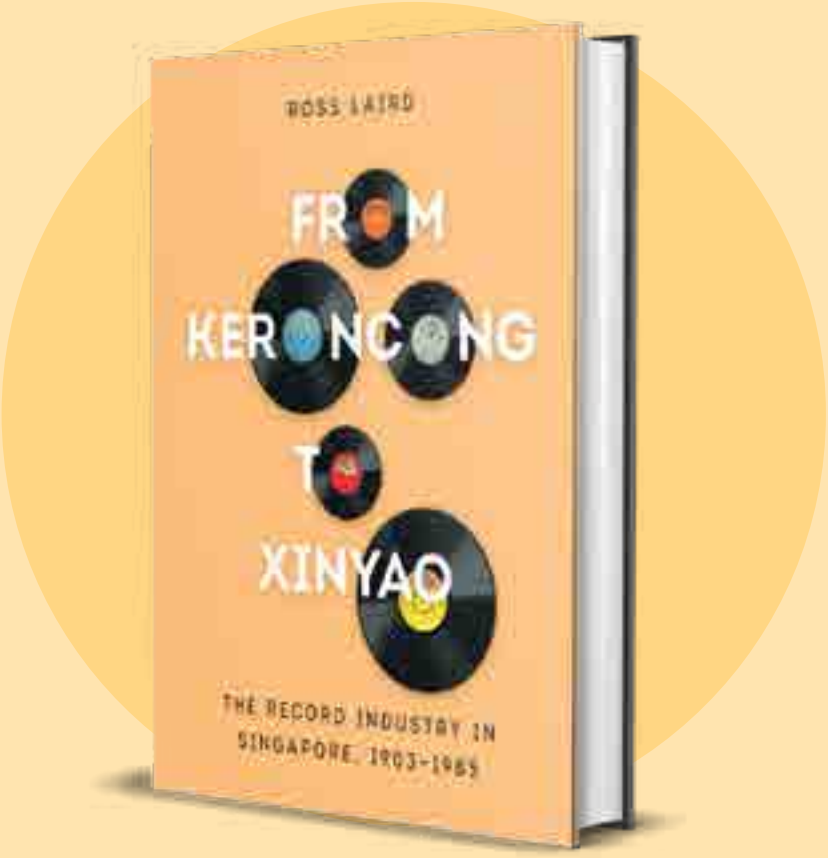

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