

PASSAGE

FRIENDS OF THE MUSEUMS SINGAPORE

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ISSUE IV

THE PEOPLE'S DOCTOR

SUN YAT SEN'S CURE FOR A NATION

OPIUM

HELLISH CURSE OR
HEAVENLY RELIEF?

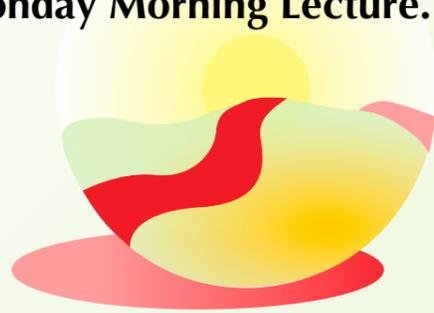
HAWKERS

FROM PUBLIC MENACE
TO NATIONAL TREASURE



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"The Material Culture of the Peranakans: Representation, Identity & Taste"
by Kenson Kwok

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A painting of Dr Sun Yat Sen in Chinatown by Shanghai-born artist Chen Chu Dian. In this scene, Dr Sun arrives at the famous Lai Chun Yuan opera theatre to give his support to performers who put up shows for his revolutionary cause. Two iconic landmarks, the Chulia Mosque with twin minarets and the Sri Mariamman Temple, can be seen in the background. Read "The Revolutionary Doctor" on page 9. Image courtesy of SYSNMH.

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PASSAGE

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President's Blog

Hello everyone,
 FOM is back after a well-deserved summer break! What a way to bounce back than with an introduction to the team which keeps FOM running as a society. Sharing a lovely picture of the FOM Council. If our memory serves us right, this was the first time an FOM Council had the opportunity to do a studio shoot such as this. Out of the hundreds taken that day, this one's my favourite!

We were delighted to accept the complimentary offer of Ray Chan and Niraj Sharma, arranged through FOM member Kiki Ertegun, and spent a fun Saturday afternoon all in white! Their portraits of us are also on the FOM website. So a big thank you Ray, Niraj and Kiki. And thanks also to STPI for allowing us to use their gallery as a makeshift studio. Unfortunately we have had to say goodbye to Min Yee, our Secretary as she has full-time work commitments now. We warmly welcome Lee Hong Leng (not in picture) as she kindly steps up to the role.

As we moved into a new FOM season, we got into high gear again with our annual Open Morning (which was held in-person at ACM on 5 September). Open Morning serves as a public mini-carnival about FOM activities and is also the season's first Monday Morning Lecture (MML). Going forward, we'll be alternating in-person and online MMLs, for the best of both worlds.

FOM's docent training term began on 13 September and classrooms and galleries are abuzz with trainees once more. We'll also see the new cohort of docents who graduated before summer taking on new roles as training team members. Thank you! As usual, senior docents will be generously helping out in other training-related roles. Thank you too.

If you are interested to train, you're not too late as the next tranche of training programmes will begin in the first quarter of next year, so do keep a look out on our website, newsletter and social media on when applications open.

Till the next issue, that's it for now!



Millie Phuah
 FOM President
 president@fom.sg



Standing, from left: Kim, Gisella, Aditi, Darlene, Lee Chiew, Jyoti. **Seated, from left:** Irina, Millie, Susan, Min Yee. **Laying down:** Charlotte. **Not in picture:** Garima and Hong Leng.
 Photo by Ray Chan and Niraj R. Sharma.

From the Editors

We hope you enjoy this issue of *PASSAGE* with the theme of Health and Well-being. Our lead article features the historically sensitive subject of opium.

It was initially used as a medication, but when large quantities were smuggled into China it led to wide-scale addiction and social disruption. Ironically, much of the silver derived from the trade in opium was used to buy tea. And the healthy habit of drinking tea in Britain grew in direct proportion to the unhealthy use of opium in China. The turning point for tea-drinking in Britain was 1784, when the tax on tea was reduced, making it affordable for the masses. It also eliminated tea smuggling. Conversely, the smuggling of opium into China only ended 1842, when the Opium War compelled the Chinese to legalise its trade (and to gain revenue from taxing it). This led to even greater quantities of opium entering the market.

Another unhealthy practice for which China became infamous was foot-binding. Thankfully, 'Golden Lotus' shoes, like opium pipes, are now relegated to museums. But for hundreds of years Chinese women were coerced, from an early age, to bind and so cripple their feet. It is tempting for westerners to condemn this practice as barbaric, but that would be hypocritical as young women of society in Europe and North America were once subjected to equally harmful physical constraints. From the 1820s till the beginning of the twentieth century the waist became the central focus of female dress. From their early teens, girls were tight-laced into corsets with the aim of maintaining a wasp waist. Despite the protests of doctors, the demands of fashion prevailed, and women endured pain and injury to their internal organs.

In this issue, we also look at how the human spirit has triumphed in the face of adversity. Discover how the prisoners of war at Changi found ingenious ways to promote health and sustain life during their wartime internment. We celebrate the life of Dr Sun Yat Sen, who was medically trained but found his true calling in healing a nation.

Historically, health has often been a subject more associated with magic and superstition than science. Faith in the power of symbols to protect against illness has been common to many ancient cultures at a time when the origin of diseases was a mystery. We learn how even batik motifs were believed to have healing properties. However, belief in the power of the bezoar stone to protect against poison sometimes had disastrous consequences.

We should not forget that modern medicine still owes much to the ancients. The ancient Greeks laid the foundations and the early Islamic world expanded on this knowledge about the anatomy, as exhibits in ACM will testify.

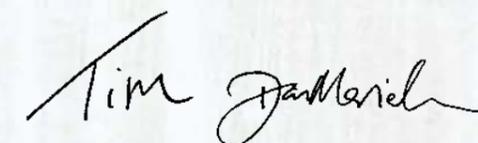
Even ancient folk remedies have often become recognised by modern science for their useful properties. Mother Nature still has much to offer, and foraged plants might provide an effective solution, as Dawn recently discovered when she was struck by dengue during the production of this issue. Although dengue was first discovered over 400 years ago, there is no known cure and today it still kills 40,000 people annually. The danger of dengue is that it causes a severe drop in blood platelet count which could lead to internal bleeding and death. In Southeast Asia, folk wisdom recommends drinking raw papaya leaf juice to rapidly increase platelet count, which dengue sufferers have discovered, actually works!

On a very sad note, as we were preparing this issue, we learned of the death of Caroline Carfantan. Caroline died after a long illness which she fought bravely. She was a devoted docent and a long-time contributor to *PASSAGE* who continued to write even when she was very ill. Her last contribution appeared in our Yellow Issue. Our condolences to her family.

The theme for the next issue is Voyages and Travel. While we are not looking to publish personal travel stories, if you'd like to write about epic voyages and voyagers in history like Magellan, Zheng He, Isabella Bird and how their travels changed the world, do write in to pitch us your story ideas.



Photo by Darlene Kasten.



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OPIUM: HELLISH CURSE OR HEAVENLY RELIEF?

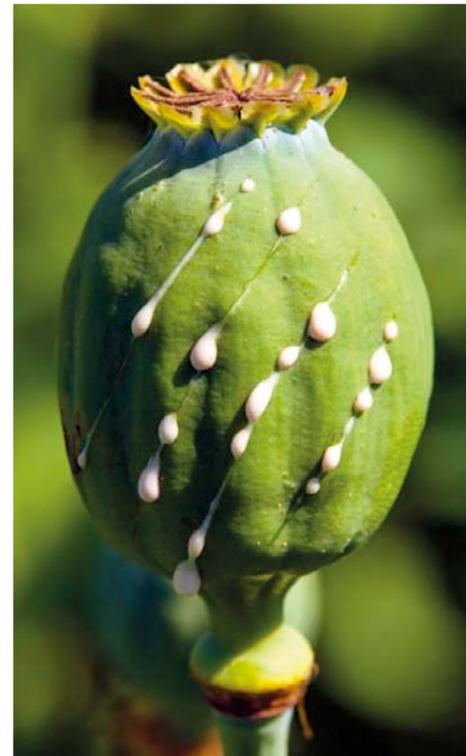
DARLENE KASTEN LOOKS AT THE HISTORY OF
THIS MEDICAL MARVEL IN CHINA



A portable opium case, 19th century China. This portable opium case opens to reveal six compartments, holding a glass lamp, a silver burner, a silver container with a spout, and a pipe. Opium has a long, complex, and often sordid history. But finely crafted objects like these show that it was enjoyed by the highest levels of society. Collection of the ACM.

God's own medicine' or 'the vilest curse on society'? Conflicting opinions about a drug are common, but only one can lay claim to the truth of each of these extremes: opium, the narcotic extracted from the poppy plant, *Papaver somniferum*.

God's own medicine? Opium is more effective than any other known drug for managing extreme pain. To this day, extracts from opium are used as essential ingredients in modern medicine; as a very effective cough suppressant, anti-diarrhoea medication, and sleep-inducer. Before modern pharmacology, opium would have been a miracle cure.



This image shows how sap is extracted from an opium poppy. After the bloom has faded and the petals fall away, an oval seed pod is revealed. The pod contains a milky sap which is opium in its crudest form. The sap is extracted by slitting the pod vertically in parallel strokes with a special curved knife. The sap darkens and thickens as it oozes out, forming a brownish-black gum. The opium farmer scrapes off the gum and bundles it into balls or small cakes. Photo from Wikimedia Commons.

Vilest curse on society? Many of opium's best properties make it a magnet for recreational users. And whether taken legitimately for pain relief, or abused for recreation, opium comes with one major drawback – addiction. Patients who have been prescribed the drug medicinally may not start with the intention of abusing the medication. But while a prescription and specified dose from a doctor initially is effective, over a period of time tolerance builds and that same dose becomes less effective. When that happens, the patient may try to find sources to increase their dosage, which leads to spiralling use, and addiction.

The story of opium in China is part of the history of trade between east and west. It is one of use, abuse and eradication that spans many centuries.

THE OPIUM ROAD TO CHINA

It is possible that opium was indigenous to China but that has never been confirmed. The earliest reference to opium growth and subsequent use by man is in 3400 BCE, when the opium poppy was cultivated in lower Mesopotamia, now part of Iraq. The Sumerians who lived in southern Mesopotamia referred to it as *Hul Gil*, the "joy plant." The Sumerians soon passed it on to the Assyrians, who in turn passed it on to the Egyptians.

Possibly from the Egyptians, opium became known to the ancient Greeks and Romans. The English word opium is derived from the Greek word *opos*, which means *juice*, one of the principal products of the poppy seedpod. A powerful pain reliever, it was prescribed by Greek physicians to induce sleep and to give relief to the bowels. Opium was even thought to protect the user from being poisoned.

As word spread of the power of opium as a potent pain-killer, demand for it increased. Its cultivation spread along the Silk Road, the series of interconnected trade routes that developed between the empires of Persia and Syria on the Mediterranean coast and the Indian kingdoms of the East. China's exchange with Central Asia reached its zenith during the Tang dynasty when the routes extended from Italy in the West to China in the East and opium was one of the products traded.

THE MEDICAL MARVEL PRIZED BY MONKS IN CHINA

Medics and scholars agree that Arab traders introduced opium into Tang dynasty China in the late 6th or early 7th century CE. The word then current in China for opium, *a-fu-jung*, derived from Arabic, and signified foreign medicine. Early opium was swallowed raw, often as syrup or mixed with food and drink.

Although opium was introduced into China in the early Tang dynasty, medical sources of the period do not show that the Tang dynasty doctors were aware of the medical properties until later. It was Buddhist monasteries that played a significant role in the evolution of the opium poppy in Chinese medicine after Chinese civil servants - the literati - and doctors of the Song dynasty became acquainted with the role of the flower in the diet and medical practices of Buddhist monks in China.

At the beginning of the Song dynasty, we find the earliest examples of the medical application of opium poppy to treat diarrhoea in a Buddhist monastery in a village in Yixing, Jiangsu province. Word of its success spread to other Buddhist monasteries in Southern China where it became a valuable medicine. Records describe it as a 'dharma milk beverage' garnished with opium poppy seeds simmered in water. The monks even recommended prophylactic consumption of opium poppy among the elderly which further expanded its use across different social groups, both religious and secular.

Soon testimonies reached the ears of the literati who from the late 11th and 12th century China incorporated opium poppy into the official medical materials as a medicinal herb specifically used to combat dysentery, diarrhoea, coughing and spasms, as well as to treat cinnabar poisoning. The inclusion of opium poppy in Southern Song medical literature allowed even more developments in its application such as the incorporation of the poppy into paediatrics. Perhaps as a result of its application in the field of paediatrics, the poppy was also introduced into late Song gynaecological practice.



Opium bed, 1875. This opium bed features very ornate carvings of various motifs with the side panels also decorated with Chinese figurative scenes and poetry. One outstanding feature of this bed is the ornately carved lion dog leg supports. Ornate pieces like this opium bed were primarily commissioned by wealthy merchants in Singapore for use in their homes and their shops. Collection of the ACM. Gift of Mr Rudy Mendez.

THE DARK SIDE OF THE 'BLACK SPICE'

The medicine-to-aphrodisiac transformation occurred in the late 15th century when opium became an ingredient in aphrodisiacs produced for the Ming court. What prompted this latest transformation? Not the Buddhist monasteries, nor the literati, but the tribute missions from vassal states such as Siam, Java and Bengal, who presented opium as tribute gifts to the Ming emperor. Tribute missions were the vehicles by which subordinate foreign courts could exchange gifts to the Emperor in exchange for permission for them to trade in China. Tributes were often of the best indigenous products that were worthy of the mighty Chinese emperor. Because of crude opium's appearance, it was known as *wuxiang* (烏香) or 'black spice'. Many Ming emperors championed the use of opium as tribute including the Wanli Emperor (reign 1572 to 1620), long speculated by the literati and writers of the day to have been addicted to opium as a result.

From *yao*, or medicine, opium became *chun yao*, literally spring drug or aphrodisiac. Believed to preserve *qi* or man's vital force, opium was recorded to be 'mainly used to aid masculinity, strengthen sperm and regain vigour'; and along with its use to cure chronic diarrhoea that results in the loss of vital energy, that it 'enhances the art of alchemists, sex and court ladies'. But for much of the Ming dynasty, opium use was limited to the highest level of society, the court and literati.

After maritime trade supplanted the tribute system, the Chinese put a duty on the small quantity of opium they imported for medical needs, and in the early Qing dynasty the annual import of the drug remained fairly steady at about 100 chests (with approximately 63.5 kg per chest.)

THE OPIATE OF THE PEOPLE

Further spread of the drug across all social strata in China during the Qing dynasty was encouraged by the new ingestion technique of opium-smoking. The taste of raw opium in the mouth, as it had formerly been taken, was somewhat repugnant and its absorption into the body slow. Smoking overcame both these disadvantages.

Opium-smoking was most likely introduced to China through maritime trade with the Siamese, Bengalis and Javanese who valued opium highly and were especially fond of smoking it together with their tobacco. The sea-faring Chinese traders who travelled to South and Southeast Asia brought the habit of smoking opium mixed with tobacco back to the mainland.

Opium smoking was, however, still strongly condemned in China, since according to Confucian morality, the smoker's body was not his own, to demolish exactly as he chose, but had been entrusted to him by his ancestors as their link to their descendants. Using the drug habitually led to gross offence against filial piety. Nevertheless, opium addiction across all strata of Chinese society increased with smoking and was soon integrated in and promoted by the sex recreation industry in the mid-18th century further spreading its intake.

Opium dens were established as sites to buy and sell opium and finely crafted objects were made for high society with which to enjoy opium recreation. Despite Imperial decrees against opium smoking issued in 1729, the demand surged. The amount of opium imported into China increased from about 200 chests annually in 1729 to roughly five times that or 1,000 chests in 1767.

OPIUM TRADE, WARS AND TEA

Once the Europeans discovered the profitability of opium, they quickly sought the opportunity to meet the demand. The Portuguese were among the first Europeans to supply China with opium grown in India and in the 17th century, after the Dutch took control, they dominated much of the Asian trade. By 18th century, the British discovered the trade and in 1773, the British East India Company (EIC) established a monopoly on opium cultivation in the Indian province of Bengal, where they developed a method of growing opium poppies cheaply and abundantly so they could become the main suppliers of opium to the Chinese market.

Then in 1799 a new Imperial decree against opium smoking was issued which included a ban on opium importation in the 'free interchange of commodities' permitted with the foreign nations trading at Canton. But that did not stop the British who were desperate to fund their ever-increasing desire for Chinese-produced tea and to solve the associated chronic trade imbalance draining their only acceptable legal commodity, silver. In fact, you could argue that the Chinese addiction to opium funded the British addiction to tea.

Although the EIC never shipped opium directly and illegally into China, they cultivated it and sold it in vast quantities to independent traders from various countries who smuggled it in. Estimates of opium entering China grew from about 10,000 chests per year between 1820 and 1830 to some 40,000 chests imported annually by 1838. This

resulted in a soaring addiction rate among the Chinese and led to the Opium Wars of the mid-1800s.

The first war, between Britain and China (1839–42), did not result in the legalisation of the opium trade, as the British had hoped, but it did halt Chinese efforts to stop it. However, in the second Opium War (1856–60), fought between a British-French alliance and China, the Chinese government was forced to legalise the trade, although it did levy a small import tax on opium which the Qing government used to sustain itself for a time. By the end of the war, opium imports to China had reached 50,000 to 60,000 chests a year, and they continued to increase for the next three decades.

THE DECLINE OF OPIUM IN CHINA

By 1906, the importance of opium in the West's trade with China had declined, and the Qing government was able to begin to regulate the importation and consumption of the drug. In 1907 China signed the Ten Years' Agreement with Britain, whereby China agreed to forbid native cultivation and consumption of opium with the understanding that the export of Indian opium would decline in proportion and cease completely in 10 years' time. The trade was thus almost completely stopped by 1917.

Opium smoking and addiction remained a problem in China during the subsequent decades. However, since the weakened central republican government, which had overthrown the Qing dynasty in 1912, could not wipe out the native cultivation of opium. The Nationalist



A postcard showing Chinese opium and pipe smokers, late 19th century. In 19th-century China, opium smoking was accepted as a social grace throughout society. To both the elite and the poor, offering a guest an opium pipe was likened to serving tea. With the wave of Chinese migration to the Straits Settlements during the 19th century, the practice of opium smoking was also brought to Singapore. Collection of the National Museum of Singapore.



An illustration showing parts of the opium poppy, *papaver somniferum* from Köhler's Medicinal Plants, written by German physician and chemist Hermann Adolph Köhler. It was edited and published in 1887, eight years after his death. Image from Wikimedia Commons.



Jardine Matheson's opium clipper, *Red Rover*, off Singapore. Oil on canvas, 19th century. The clipper was launched in 1829 in Calcutta and was renowned as the fastest opium clipper, transporting chests of opium from Calcutta to Hong Kong. The EIC cultivated opium but never shipped it directly to China. Instead, they sold vast quantities to traders who shipped and smuggled it into China. The *Red Rover* made several calls in Singapore during the 1830s and 1840s, her fastest passage being just 12 days from Calcutta to Singapore in January 1836. Her final passage departed Calcutta on 6 July 1853, but she was caught in a typhoon in the Bay of Bengal and was never seen again.

Government under General Chiang Kai Shek during the Nanjing Decade (1928-1937) followed contradictory opium policies. Chiang himself was morally opposed to opium use, but other government ministers saw opium as a source of much needed revenue.

During the war years of 1941 to 1945 the Japanese cultivated and supplied not just opium but also heroin as a means of funding their campaigns and in order to subjugate the Chinese population. The Mao Zedong government is generally credited with eradicating both consumption and production of opium during the 1950s using unrestrained repression and social reform.

OPIUM TODAY

The Chinese may have eradicated the opium problem within its borders, but today the opium problem continues unabated in the west, exacerbated by the ready availability of synthetically produced opioids. The National Institute On Drug Abuse reported that "In 2019, nearly 50,000 people in the United States died from opioid-involved overdoses." As a trade product, opium is still grown illegally in Myanmar, Afghanistan, and Colombia.

Australia (Tasmania), Turkey and India are the major producers of poppy grown for medicinal purposes and poppy-based opioid drugs, such as morphine or codeine which can be found in common painkillers and cough syrups. In 2014, Tasmania had 25% of the world's opium and codeine production.

In a continuation of the pattern of use followed by abuse, the west's reliance on opioids to manage chronic pain has only led to spiralling addiction, abuse, and adverse societal impact.

How will that story end? Heaven only knows. 📌

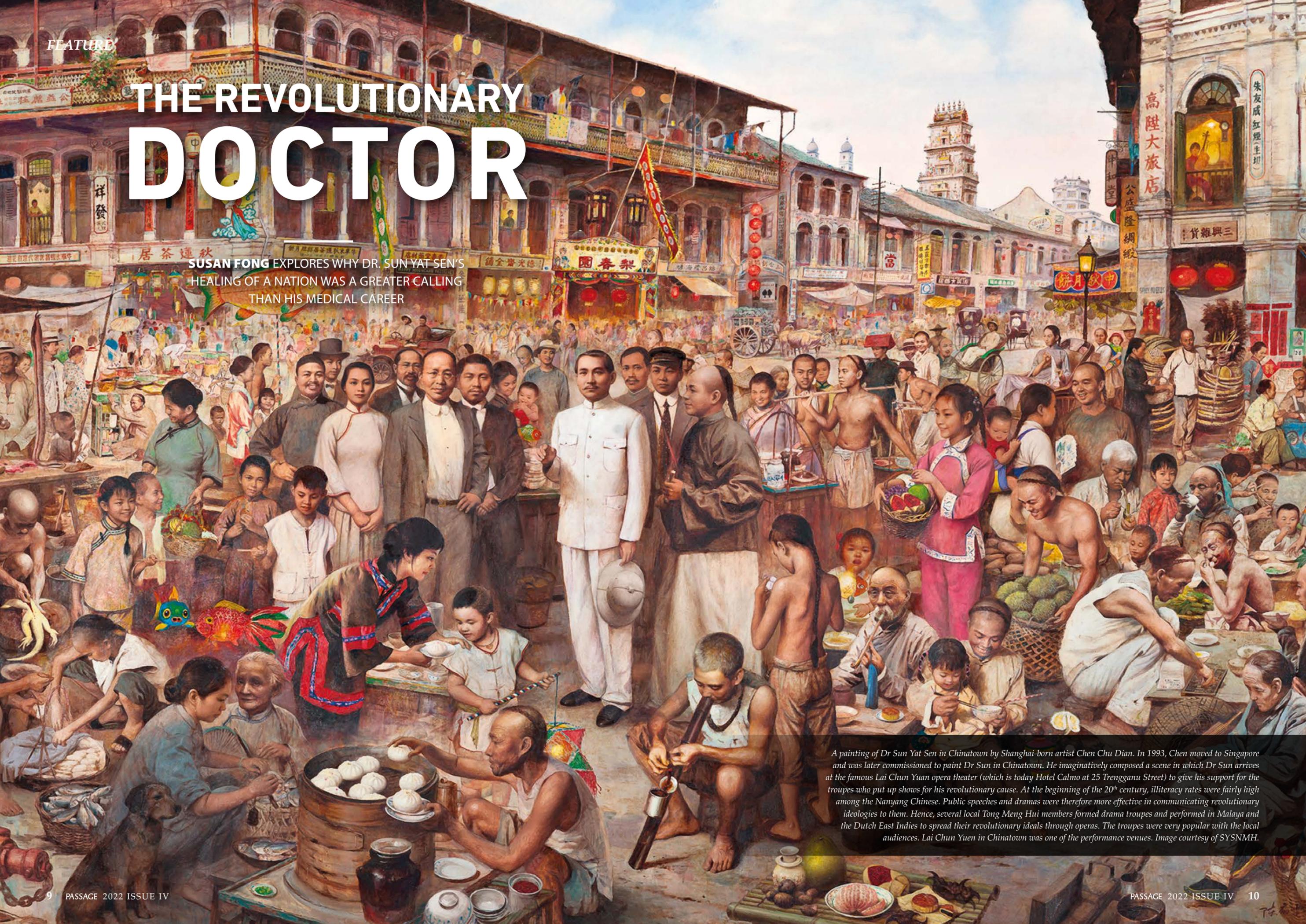


Crest of The Royal College of Anaesthetists, London. A poppy bloom and seed pod as well as cocaine leaves can be seen at the top of the crest, symbolising general and local anaesthesia. Pain management drugs such as morphine and codeine derived from poppies are still commonly used today as medicine.

DARLENE KASTEN is a docent at the Malay Heritage Centre, STPI Creative Workshop & Gallery and the Asian Civilisations Museum.

THE REVOLUTIONARY DOCTOR

SUSAN FONG EXPLORES WHY DR. SUN YAT SEN'S HEALING OF A NATION WAS A GREATER CALLING THAN HIS MEDICAL CAREER



A painting of Dr Sun Yat Sen in Chinatown by Shanghai-born artist Chen Chu Dian. In 1993, Chen moved to Singapore and was later commissioned to paint Dr Sun in Chinatown. He imaginatively composed a scene in which Dr Sun arrives at the famous Lai Chun Yuan opera theater (which is today Hotel Calmo at 25 Trengganu Street) to give his support for the troupes who put up shows for his revolutionary cause. At the beginning of the 20th century, illiteracy rates were fairly high among the Nanyang Chinese. Public speeches and dramas were therefore more effective in communicating revolutionary ideologies to them. Hence, several local Tong Meng Hui members formed drama troupes and performed in Malaya and the Dutch East Indies to spread their revolutionary ideals through operas. The troupes were very popular with the local audiences. Lai Chun Yuen in Chinatown was one of the performance venues. Image courtesy of SYSNMH.

Dr Sun Yat Sen (1866-1925) was the leader of the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) who devoted his life to overthrowing feudal rule in China. His political legacy is unique in Chinese history despite his party's opposition to Mao Zedong's Communist Party during China's civil war. He continues to be revered in both China and Taiwan as the founding father of modern China. But unknown to some, his first profession was that of healing men, not curing the nation.

CHINESE TRADITIONS AND WESTERN IDEALS

Sun was born in 1866 to a peasant family in Xiangshan county (now known as Zhongshan) in Guangdong province, China. He started schooling at age of ten in his village but left after two years for Hawaii where his elder brother, Sun Mei, worked.



Sun Yat Sen at 17 years old. Image from Wikimedia Commons.

As there were no Chinese schools in Hawaii at the time, the young Sun enrolled at the Anglican-run Lolani school. He went on to Oahu College in 1882 (later renamed Punahou School), whose other future-presidential alumni includes Barack Obama. It was through education at these missionary

schools that Sun became deeply influenced by Christianity. This irked his brother who decided to send him back to China. In retaliation, Sun broke the arm of a statue of a deity housed in a Chinese temple. Shocked by this act of defiance and desecration, his family packed him off to Hong Kong to finish his studies.

Following China's defeat in the first Opium War, the strategic port city of Hong Kong was ceded to the British in 1841. Sun attended the Central Government School in 1884 and, in spite of his brother's objections, was baptised that same year. Sun had at one point even considered joining the clergy but eventually decided to study medicine.

He gained entry to Canton Hospital Medical School in 1886 and transferred to the Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese in 1887. The newly established school sought to equip local Chinese doctors with Western medical knowledge to complement, rather than supplant, traditional Chinese medicine.

It was during this time that Sun developed a close friendship with three young men who shared similar political beliefs. Frequently discussing their plans to topple the decaying Qing regime, Sun and his friends - Yeung Hok Ling, Chen Siu Pak and Yau Lit - came to be collectively known as "the Four Desperados".

MEDICINE AND POLITICS

Gravely concerned by a series of defeats at the hands of more technologically-advanced Western powers, Sun began to develop ambitions for a political career. He expressed how

"Medicine could cure a few people, but politics could cure a whole nation."

Perhaps he was inspired by the German physician Rudolf Virchow (1821-1902) who famously declared that "Medicine is a social science and politics is nothing else but medicine on a large scale."

Sun earned a Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery in 1892 as one of only two graduates of the medical college. However, his qualification was not recognised by the British colonial government, thereby preventing him from practicing as a doctor in Hong Kong.

Eventually, Sun moved to Macau where he opened a pharmacy and was allowed to practice medicine at the Kiang Wu hospital. In 1893, he moved to Guangzhou where he ran a clinic practicing traditional Chinese medicine while dispensing Western drugs in a hybrid fashion. His aspirations to "heal the nation" crystallised in the wake of China's humiliating defeat in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894 that led to a profound loss of confidence in the Qing government's competence. As his medical qualifications continued to be denied official recognition by the colonial authorities, he gave up his medical practice and entered the political arena. Sun resolved to chart a new course in his life. He left China and travelled the world to garner support for his cause.



A studio shot of Sun Yat Sen with Soong Ching-ling in Shanghai, 1922. Soong Ching-ling's father, Charlie Soong, was a long-time supporter of Sun's revolution, and Ching-ling was Sun's secretary during his exile in Japan. They fell in love and got married in Tokyo in 1915. Photo from Wikimedia Commons.

REVOLUTIONARY ZEAL

In 1905 in Tokyo, he founded the Tong Meng Hui (Revolutionary Alliance), to rally support from overseas Chinese communities and raise funds for his revolutionary cause. He secured significant support through his Singapore branch at Wan Qing Yuan, a villa bought by Teo Eng Hock for his mother. Teo offered the villa to Sun for his revolutionary activities. It was in this villa that Sun planned three uprisings before the successful Wuchang Uprising of 1911.

The villa is today's Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall (SYSNMH). As the Nanyang (Southeast Asian) headquarters of the Tong Meng Hui, Singapore assumed a pivotal role in the 1911 Revolution which eventually overthrew the Qing dynasty and led to the birth of modern-day China. Sun had many loyal and wealthy supporters in Singapore such as Teo Eng Hock, Tan Chor Lam and Lim Nee Soon. They organised fundraising activities and disseminated revolutionary principles and ideals through speeches and drama performances.

Even so, the Tong Meng Hui was loosely organised and Sun struggled to coordinate the organisation which had branches across the US, China, Japan, New Zealand and Southeast Asia. As each and every uprising Sun orchestrated ended in failure, the reality of revolutionary success seemed more and more like a distant dream.

Just as all hope seemed lost, a local revolutionary group in Wuhan staged another rebellion, which became known as the 1911 Wuchang uprising. This set off a series of other provincial uprisings which managed to overthrow the local Qing governments. When news of the success in Wuchang spread, provinces in Central and Southern China declared independence. Sun who was in Denver, Colorado at the time, received this news with shock and elation. He returned to Shanghai and was elected Provisional President of the Republic of China in Nanjing on New Year's Day 1912.

Yet all was not yet won since the north of China was still under Qing rule. The military strongman Yuan Shi Kai was tasked by the Qing authorities to wrest power from the newly-independent provinces. However, Yuan, after forcing the abdication of Puyi, the last emperor of the Qing dynasty, became President of China for a short while then later dissolved parliament and declared himself emperor. A second revolution was launched to unseat Yuan, but did not succeed.

In 1913, Sun was exiled in Tokyo, where he established the Chinese Revolutionary Party to oppose Yuan Shi Kai's return to power. Charlie Soong who had been a great supporter of Sun since they met in 1894, sent his second daughter Ching-ling to Tokyo to be Sun's secretary, only for the two to fall in love. Soong was dead set against the relationship as he felt it was just hero worship by the young Ching-ling who was 27 years younger than Sun. They married in 1915.

Subsequently, Madame Sun Yat Sen (as she later became known) followed her husband back to Shanghai and then Guangzhou. In February 1923 Sun returned to Guangzhou and installed himself as generalissimo of a new regime. Madame Sun was by his side from the first National Congress of the Kuomintang (KMT), to cooperation with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the establishment of the Whampoa Military Academy, and for peace talks, right up until his death.



Generalissimo Sun Yat Sen. Photo courtesy of SYSNMH.

Sun succumbed to cancer before he could realise his dream of unifying China and passed away in 1925 in Beijing. His successor, Chiang Kai Shek, partnered with the Chinese Communist Party and defeated the warlords, establishing the Kuomintang in 1928. The Kuomintang were forced to flee to Taiwan when the Communists seized power and formed the People's Republic of China in 1949. Chiang Kai Shek married Soong Ching-ling's youngest sister, Mei-ling in 1927.

It should be noted that one of Sun's last direct involvements with medicine was in 1897, where he translated six chapters of a first aid manual which was later used to train army medics in the Kuomintang's Northern Expedition, a military campaign to overthrow the Beiyang government and reunify China.



Group photograph of Dr Sun Yat Sen and members of the Tong Meng Hui Singapore Branch several days after its establishment at Wan Qing Yuan in late 1905. Front row, from left: Lin Gan Ting, Teo Eng Hock, Tan Chor Lam, Dr Sun Yat Sen, Yau Lit, Lau Kaim Seng and Lim Nee Soon. Back row, from left: Goh Ngo Sow, Teo Bah Tan, Zhang Ji, Chan Lui Ho, Deng Zi Yu, Wong Yew Ting and Teo Peng Kay. Collection of the National Museum of Singapore.

WAS REVOLUTION THE GREATER MEDICINE?

In a speech at Hong Kong University in 1923, Sun stated that when he was a young graduate, he perceived how "...it was necessary to give up my profession of healing men and take up my part to cure the country". He emphasised how his stay in Hong Kong left a lasting impression upon him, stricken by the orderly development in Hong Kong in contrast to the social and economic backwardness of China. At the same time, Sun was conscious of the fact that colonial rule subjected local populations to discriminatory practices—a reality he experienced when his medical qualification was denied official recognition.

Essentially, Dr Sun saw the healing of a nation as a greater calling. Drawing from his eclectic experience living across various cultures, Sun was able to contribute to the healing of a dysfunctional China suffering from what could be diagnosed as a stagnant and corrupt system. His work and vision as a revolutionary pioneer continues to resonate across the world today. 



Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall, Singapore. Photo courtesy of SYSNMH.

SUSAN FONG guides at Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall, Peranakan Museum and the NUS Baba House.

Time for Tea

JO WRIGHT LOOKS AT THE HISTORY OF TEA



A depiction of the semi-mythical Yan emperor Shennong who is said to have discovered tea, by Chinese artist Guo Xu (1456-1529). Ink on paper, 1503. Image from Wikimedia Commons.

Tea is one of the most widely consumed drinks in the world - around 3.7 billion cups each day, according to the latest estimates. It's drunk for pleasure, serves as a pick-me-up, soothes the nerves and forms an important part of the culture of many societies. It was its health-giving properties that initially led to it being drunk in China over 4,000 years ago - or at least that's what some people say.

According to Chinese legend, tea was discovered by Shennong, the semi-mythical Chinese emperor and so-called "Father of Agriculture". He is regarded by some as the founder of traditional Chinese medicine and is said to have discovered many medicines derived from minerals, plants

and animals. It is said that a servant was boiling water for Shennong to drink, but did not notice that some leaves from a nearby *Camellia sinensis* bush fell into the water. Shennong drank the resulting brew and pronounced it delicious. This was good news for history but rather bad news for the servant, as some versions of the story say that his head was immediately cut off and planted under the offending tea bush which, of course, flourished.

This story assumes that tea was first discovered in China, but it's interesting to note one of the many other origin stories of tea feature Bodhidharma, who may possibly have been an Indian prince. He is said to have travelled to China in the 6th century to spread the teachings of the Buddha and is credited with introducing Chan Buddhism to China as well as founding the Shaolin Temple.

One of many stories about Bodhidharma, or Da-Mo, as he's sometimes also called, recount that he fell asleep whilst meditating and was so distraught when he woke up, that he cut off his eyelids and flung them on the

ground in an effort not to go back to sleep. Where his eyelids fell, a tea bush sprang up.

The first written mention of tea in China is around 2,000 years ago, where it was used mainly as a medicinal tonic. It was especially popular later on with Buddhist monks as an aid to meditation - as Bodhidharma discovered, all that theine in the tea is a great way to keep you awake.

It wasn't until the Tang dynasty that tea became a really popular drink in China, rather than a medicinal tonic. The poet Lu Yu (also called "the Tea King") published a book on tea around 760CE. It is considered the world's first monograph about tea. In his book, Lu Yu described in some detail the different steps to make tea properly. He cited around 27 different vessels - from tea bowls, to warmers to spittoons, which was a fabulous boost to the ceramics industry of the day. We can see some lovely examples of Tang dynasty tea paraphernalia in the Khoo Teck Puat Gallery at the ACM including a rather fine bowl made in the Changsha kilns, which, we are told, declares its purpose as being for the drinking of tea.

TEA CHAMPIONSHIPS DURING THE SONG DYNASTY

Fast forward to the Chinese Song dynasty and tastes in tea changed. Whilst today we have the annual World Barista Championships to find the best professional coffee maker, in Song dynasty China it was scholars who gathered together to see who could produce the best brew of tea.

Unlike the Tang dynasty, tea drinking practices in the Song Dynasty had changed. Tea was ground into a powder, which was then sieved into a tea cup. A small amount of boiling water was added to make a tea paste which is blended. Then more water is added and the tea was whisked with a bamboo whisk.

At these tea competitions, marks were awarded for the light-coloured froth which resulted from whisking green powder in hot water. Dark coloured tea bowls showed these frothy peaks to perfection and it explains why the most sought-after tea bowls at this time were in dark, rich colours. The Ceramics Gallery on ACM's level 3 has some of these rather beautiful bowls on display. Like the best coffee beans today, aficionados paid high sums for the best tea. It's on record that the best tea in Song dynasty China cost more than it's weight in gold.

TEA IN EUROPE

But what of tea outside China? Tea, along with Buddhism, spread to Japan and it was from Japan that the first recorded consignment of tea was purchased by the VOC - the Dutch East India trading company at the



Changsha tea bowl with inscription. On display at the ACM, Khoo Teck Puat gallery. Photo by the author.

start of the 17th century. Chests were shipped to the VOC headquarters in Batavia (current day Jakarta) and were then transported onwards to Europe.

Tea first made an appearance in England in the mid-17th century but it was prohibitively expensive. It was regarded primarily as medicinal, available in pharmacies, and was used to invigorate the body and keep the spleen free of obstacles. As with any new drug on the market, medical opinion at the time in Europe was divided into two camps, one that believed tea to be the panacea for all ills and one that derided tea as a dangerous foreign herb detrimental to human health.

So what prompted the change in England from tea being sold mainly as a medicinal tonic into the popular beverage that it is today?

Due credit has to be given to the Portuguese princess Catherine of Braganza who arrived in England in 1662 to marry King Charles II. The Portuguese aristocracy had been drinking Chinese tea since the mid-1500s, which they



Tang dynasty tea paraphernalia in the Khoo Teck Puat gallery at the ACM. Photo by the author.

FROM PUBLIC MENACE TO NATIONAL TREASURE

TIM CLARK INVESTIGATES THE SHADY ORIGINS AND DISCOVERS THE STAR QUALITY OF TODAY'S HAWKER STALLS

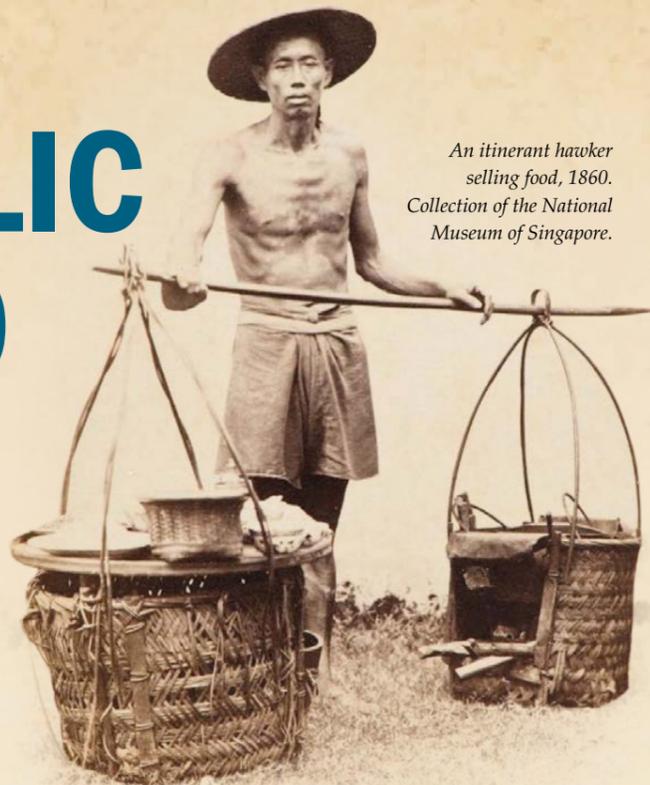
“It’s a raid!” Both the paintings shown here (opposite page) from Singapore’s National Gallery could share this same title. Although they were painted at different times, by different artists, they both feature the same problem. A problem that the Singapore authorities have wrestled with for well over a hundred years: street hawkers.

As the free port of Singapore prospered, it attracted immigrants, many of whom lacked technical skills, education and capital. But they needed to eke out a livelihood, and they hoped ultimately to make their fortune in trade. The easiest option for such folk was to hawk their wares in the streets from a basket, barrow or pushcart. This caused numerous social problems including traffic congestion, public nuisance and littering. Worse still, when hawkers sold food without hygienic facilities it spread diseases such as cholera and typhoid.

These unlicensed traders were constantly playing cat and mouse with the authorities. In addition to needing to dodge law enforcers, they were obliged to negotiate terms with gangsters and compete for space with other hawkers before they could peddle their wares. Not surprisingly, this unhappy underclass attracted the attention and sympathy of a group of artists belonging to the Equator Art Society. Instead of painting pretty pictures to sell to tourists, this group of social realists was dedicated to recording social issues and the struggles of the working classes.

PAINTING SCENES OF SOCIAL HISTORY

Picking by Tay Kok Wee depicts the aftermath of a police raid. It shows disgruntled-looking hawkers cursing and



An itinerant hawker selling food, 1860. Collection of the National Museum of Singapore.

scrambling to retrieve the remnants of their merchandise after the disruption caused by officials who were empowered to impose fines and confiscate goods. The tyre skid mark is evidence of the impact of the heavy hand of the law.

Such incidents were, however, not just a feature of colonial rule. Ten years later, in 1965, under self-government, it was the same old story. *Here they come* by Koeh Sia Yong shows a scene of panic when street traders prepare to flee as the rumour of an impending raid reaches them. In retrospect, the solution to this problem seems obvious but the advent of hawker centres and food courts was a long evolutionary process.

SHELTER FROM HARASSMENT

In 1903, legislation was enacted that required street hawkers to be licensed. By 1907, municipal commissioners were given the power and responsibility to control the problem. And in 1908 the concept of a “shelter for hawkers” was proposed. This could be the first mention of a facility which became known as the hawker centre we know and love today. The first such shelter was established in 1922 at Finlayson Green, and the People’s Park Hawker Shelter was added a year later. Others followed with increasingly advanced facilities such as washing facilities, toilets and a jaga (security guard). Hawkers were typically charged \$10 per month rental which included water supply and later gas and electricity.

As the popularity of hawker shelters grew, a government report in 1950 recommended that more sites be offered. Eight new sites were identified for constructing hawker shelters including, in 1951, what became known as the Tiong Bahru Market and Food Centre, which has remained a favourite eating venue to this day. Clearly combining a food centre with a wet market meant the added convenience of being able to shop and eat under one roof.

The report recommended that Hawker Inspectors be employed (at a ratio of one per 2,000 to 3,000 hawkers to enforce regulations). A monumental task. To reduce the temptation to accept bribes these officials were to be paid \$250 a month plus allowance, which was more than a schoolteacher could expect at the time. But maintaining standards of hygiene was beyond their powers.

In 1957 the Singapore Free Press reported on the dangers to health of unregulated hawkers.

“In some shops, food was stale, and others sold pieces of meat left over by customers. A mee seller wiped perspiration from his body with his hands and then handled food. Some hawkers were seen buying rotten vegetables from street urchins who had salvaged the foodstuffs from dustbins. Many hawkers spat and rubbed their hands on their mouths and then served customers.”

BIRTH OF THE HAWKER CENTRE

The answer to this public health problem was to compel street hawkers to occupy stalls with sanitary facilities and make them subject to inspections. With this aim, the Hawker Centre Development Committee was set up in 1971 leading to the building of the first hawker centres at Collyer Quay and Boat Quay. Ten more followed in 1975 and by 1986 there were 113 hawker centres islandwide, including Newton Road, which was to become a popular tourist attraction.

This grand scheme was not easy to implement though. Initially hawkers resisted being installed in centres because, although the rental charge was low, the streets were free, and they could venture wherever they pleased. By 1975 there were still 15,000 hawkers in the streets and one in six hawker stalls was unoccupied. So, the government decided to get tough, forcing licenced street hawkers to occupy stalls or have their licenced cancelled. And by 1978 the government completely stopped issuing street hawker licences.

THE MOST HISTORIC OF HAWKER CENTRES

One of the oldest buildings and most historic food centres in Singapore is Lau Pa Sat (Telok Ayer Market). Originally built as a fish market in 1824 and located on the waterfront, it was redesigned by architect GD Coleman in 1838. It was further developed by MacRitchie, and moved to its present



Here they come by Koeh Sia Yong, 1965. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.



Picking by Tay Kok Wee, 1955. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.

site in 1894. This stately Victorian structure once housed an ornate fountain which can now be found in a courtyard of Raffles Hotel. Lau Pa Sat was converted into a hawker centre in 1972 and gazetted as a national monument in 1973. Attempts to enclose and air-condition it proved a failure, so it has reverted to relying on ceiling fans for which the building is much better suited.

HAWKERS ENTER THE HALL OF FAME

The food hawkers in Singapore have come a long way. From street vending to Hawker Shelters to Hawker Centres to airconditioned Food Courts. Indeed, hawker food was elevated to the highest level of appreciation when, in 1971, the Mandarin Hotel coffeeshop Chatterbox put three hawker dishes on their menu: Hainanese Chicken Rice, Char Kway Teow and Laksa. And charged premium prices for them.

But affordability remains the hallmark of hawker centre food when served in these competitive eating environments. You can still find stalls that will serve you a good meal of, say, Hokkien Fried Mee, for a couple of dollars. And you don’t need to compromise on quality to get a great value cuisine. Several hawker stalls have won stars from the Michelin Guide. In 2022 the Hill Street Tai Hwa Pork Noodle Stall retained the Michelin star it has been consistently awarded every year since the guide was launched in 2016. And celebrity status has not affected prices. Tai Hwa’s *bak chor mee* is still priced this year at \$6/\$8/\$10 a bowl.

CHANGING OF THE GUARD

The gourmet status of hawker stalls and UNESCO’s 2020 recognition of their cultural value has added prestige to the attraction of entering this field. Gone are the fears that an aging population of hawkers might not be replaced by a new generation. The future of hawker centres is assured when young, and often highly educated, entrepreneurs can take pride in making it their business. The Singapore Tourism Board has acknowledged the importance of hawker centres as a tourist attraction and has actively promoted them. And when international food celebrities like Anthony Bourdain and travel shows feature hawker centres, they acquire a global stature. So long live Singapore hawkers! 🍲

TIM CLARK is an ACM docent and semi-retired NTU lecturer who can’t resist a good bowl of laksa.

OF RICE, RATS AND GRASS

RUPA TAMSITT REVEALS HOW THE INCARCERATED AT CHANGI SURVIVED THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION THROUGH HUMAN INGENUITY

All photos courtesy of the Australian War Memorial unless otherwise stated.

Nearly 50,000 military and civilian prisoners of war (POWs) from Britain, Australia and other allied countries, were imprisoned in Changi from 1942 to 1945.



POWs at Changi. Three “fit” workers standing outside a camp hospital. The prisoner on the right is unable to fasten his shorts because his stomach is swollen with beri-beri.

One of the lasting memories of life at Changi is that of the fragility of the POWs; starving, malnourished, mistreated. Photos of their frail, gaunt bodies still haunt us today. No surprise really since the meagre rations provided by the Japanese army consisted mainly of 450 grams of white polished rice per day, a diet entirely lacking vital nutrients. The prisoners could go through a whole year without any meat.

Food grown in prison gardens, or acquired on the black market, was never enough. Occasionally Red Cross supplies made it through, but they became less frequent as the war drew on. The POWs resorted to scavenging for food such as cats, dogs, birds and snakes. Can you imagine that the delicacy of the day might well be a rat?

Amongst the many horrors she chronicled in her secret diary, Sheila Bruhn-Allan, a 17-year-old Eurasian internee at Changi, once wrote about how she was so hungry she ate a live baby mouse.

Severe malnutrition, compounded by cramped conditions, limited water supply and poor sanitary conditions led to a plethora of diseases such as scurvy, dysentery, cholera, beri-beri and malaria, as well as mental health issues.

HUMAN INGENUITY CAME TO THE RESCUE

The prison community comprised a diverse group of men and women from many walks of life, forced together through war. With almost every need, someone with the necessary skills or knowledge would usually emerge. There were carpenters, teachers, dentists, botanists, chemists and engineers amongst the interned, and this is how the famous Changi Enterprise was born.

It consisted of well organised workshops and factories, run by the POWs, in which they invented and built items that would make their everyday lives so much better.

THE VITAMIN FACTORY

The Japanese warders considered the POWs as expendable and cared not for their health, but only that workforce quotas were met. If POWs couldn't work, their already meagre rations would be halved, so they rarely faltered.

One of the greatest medical concerns at Changi was not just the severe lack of food, but the lack of nutrition, making them particularly prone to illness.

Thus a vitamin factory was created, providing supplements for the malnourished and weak POWs.



A hospital ward in Singapore showing members of the 8th Division released from Changi POW camp. All were suffering from severe malnutrition.

With a diet comprising primarily of white polished rice, Vitamin B deficiency syndromes were particularly common, such as beri-beri, from lack of Vitamin B1, affecting the heart and the nervous system; and pellagra, from lack of B2, leading to ‘the four Ds’: dermatitis, diarrhoea, dementia and death.

The natural treatment for Vitamin B deficiency was Marmite or Vegemite, rich in riboflavin and niacin, but this was rarely available. Therefore, alternatives such as the watery extract of passion fruit leaves or remedies made from soya beans were used.

Did you know that Vitamin B is found in grass? At first, grass was boiled in water, the liquid drained off, and drunk. But heat partially destroyed the vitamin content, so an innovative cold-press method was devised. Grass was crushed between two rollers, with water running through a 95-litre percolator to extract the “grass juice”. Despite its acrid taste, it was relished because it had extraordinary health benefits. Hundreds of litres of lalang grass juice were produced every day, and each POW would get a daily shot.

THE ARTIFICIAL LIMB FACTORY

With infection being hard to control, often the only way to save a life was to amputate a limb. As a result, an Artificial Limb Factory was set up to improve the lives of amputees, giving them more freedom to move, work and contribute to life at the camp, which remarkably even included taking part in sports competitions. It also promised them a better life after the war.

Internees secretly gathered old filing cabinets, fan blades, fire hoses, tyres and metal from dumps and vehicle wreckages around the camp. Then armed with lessons from first aid training, they made crutches and artificial moving limbs, including legs, knee and ankle joints. These were so comfortable and well-made that some POWs decided to keep their artificial limbs after the war. In his book *The Naked Island*, Russel Braddon, a former POW at Changi, described them as “beautiful pieces of work” which were light, walked without a squeak and very well-fitted to the users.

DENTAL CARE AND DENTURE FACTORY

Limbs were just the start. After much experimentation, the denture factory also devised innovative practices to produce well-fitted dentures. They manufactured dental rubber to make plates. Then, by converting a fire extinguisher into a distillation apparatus they extracted rubber oil from scrap

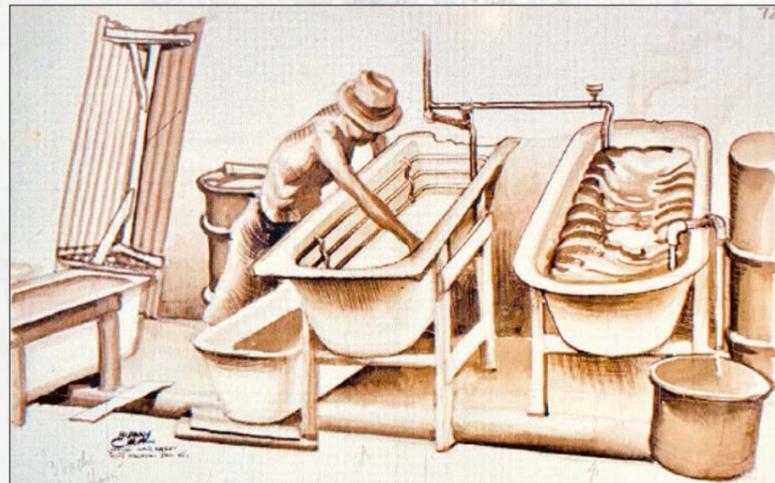


This drawing by Murray Griffin shows two men operating an improvised press which was devised to extract vitamins from rice polishings, the parts of the rice that are removed by milling and are rich in Vitamin B1, and make them into a drink.



(top)
Men from the 2/30th Battalion of East Maitland, NSW at Changi POW camp in 1945, wearing artificial limbs made at the camp. These limbs gave them more freedom to move, work and contribute to life at the camp. These men would soon be returning home.

(right)
Soap Manufacturing Industry, by Murray Griffin. This depicts three stages of soap making at Changi by the POWs. On the left, washings of wood ash to produce potassium carbonate. Centre, boiling potassium carbonate and lime to produce caustic potash and finally on the right, evaporating this to produce a strong liquid.



rubber, to treat the new rubber plates, making them more malleable. Finally, the cellophane from cigarettes sent by the Red Cross was used to finish the inside of the dentures.

As well as 1,400 spectacles repaired every week at Changi, over 700 toothbrushes were either reconditioned or made weekly from the soft fibre of coconut husks. Nevertheless, overall poor dental health persisted. Beeswax and synthetic resin from crashed airplane cockpits were often used to perform dental work.

How creative these dentists of Changi were as they strived to better the lives of so many. But there were a few whose lives they did not want to better. Sometimes, the Japanese guards would force the dentists to remove tartar from their teeth. The job was completed thoroughly, but then they would coat the guard's teeth with a 'protective layer' of amoebic dysentery.

And their ingenuity did not stop here. Another common problem was skin diseases caused by high humidity, lack of soap, fresh water and vitamins. A common complaint was that of scrotal dermatitis, commonly known as 'rice balls' or 'Changi balls', which led to the wide gait or 'Changi walk'.

Very quickly, a way to make soap was developed, by mixing palm oil and potash from the boilers, using a machine made from empty drums and stolen pipes.

And so it went on, with one novel idea after another emerging from the Changi factories, each somehow helping to lessen the hardships encountered. The POWs embraced every opportunity to stay healthy, stay fed, and for some, simply to stay alive.

ART FOR SANITY'S SAKE

In their time of need, many POWs turned to art to chronicle their experiences of life at Changi, but many more sought art for mental healing and as an emotional distraction, an escape from the reality of their dire existence.

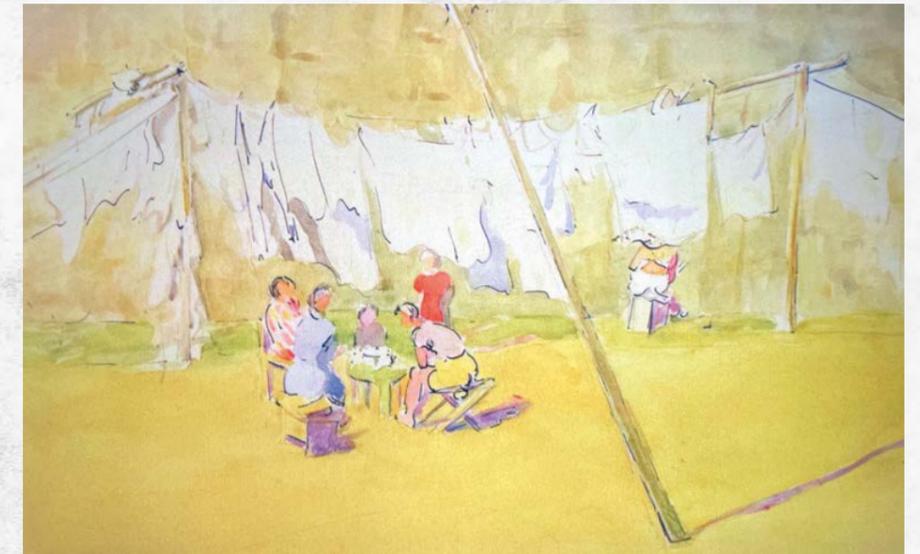
In *Laundry Room* amateur artist Mary Angela Bateman, shows the women of Changi sitting in the courtyard taking a moments' respite from their heavy workload. It's believed that these women were mostly on the brink of starvation, especially as the war dragged on.

There was no food on the table. Instead, they would enjoy a make-believe feast, dream up dinner party menus, trade recipes and relish in the idea of flavours. It didn't take away their hunger, but helped to lift morale and their mental well-being. These imaginary feasts were the brainchild of Ethel Mulvany, a Canadian internee, who encouraged the ladies to write down their recipes on the white borders of old newspapers found in the dungeons, because paper was in short supply. Many years later, she would resurface these wisps of paper to publish a recipe book called *The Taste of Longing* to raise money for former POWs.

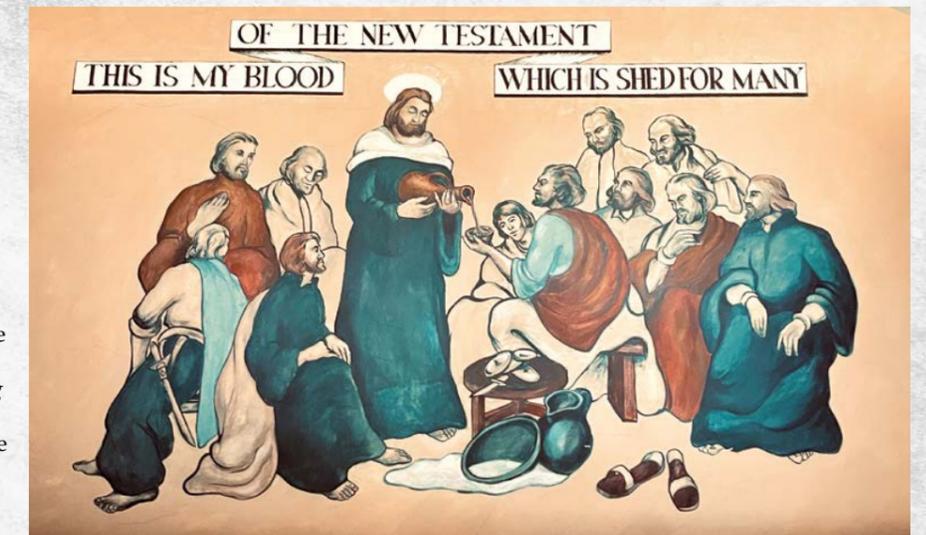
Like Bateman, Stanley Warren, the dedicated artist behind the famous murals at St Luke's Chapel in Changi also found solace and peace through art. But he also provided much needed healing to others through his work. Due to ill health, at times Warren could only paint for 15 minutes at a time, then laid on the floor to rest. But knowing that morale was very low at the camp, and that the murals brought much mental comfort and happiness to the prisoners, he did not stop. The Japanese didn't interfere and would sometimes even come and watch him paint.

The murals are still preserved at St Luke's Chapel within a restricted area of Changi Air Base. Replicas can be seen at Changi Chapel & Museum.

And it wasn't just art that helped mental wellbeing, but 'live' entertainment in the form of concert parties and theatre productions performed by the POWs. Education came in the form of the Changi University, and literature was found in the makeshift library which housed 20,000 books smuggled into the prison. All of these creative endeavours were initiated and led by the POWs, showing such ingenuity, sometimes at great personal risk to themselves.



Laundry Room by Mary Angela Bateman. Bateman's work provided important insights into the everyday lives of women POWs and the hardships they endured. Here she depicts the starving women taking a moments' respite from their endless chores. They would often devise imaginary feasts savouring the smells and tastes of the food they would prepare. It wouldn't take away their hunger, but it would lift their moral and mental wellbeing. Photo By Rupa Tamsitt at Changi Chapel and Museum.



The Last Supper by Stanley Warren is one of five renowned Changi Murals, still preserved in Block 151 of Roberts Barracks of St Luke's Chapel, within a restricted area of Changi Air Base. Warren used scavenged materials like crushed billiards chalk and brushes made from human hair to produce his murals which provided much mental healing and solace to the POWs at Changi. Replicas of the Changi Murals can be seen today at Changi Chapel and Museum. Photo by Rupa Tamsitt at the Museum.

As we reflect on the brave POWs of Changi, who through incarceration, starvation and malnutrition still found the strength to improve their health and mental wellbeing, their experiences cannot help but move us. Their courage and ingenuity provide a light of inspiration to many, hopefully also to those who continue to suffer in captivity today. 📖

RUPA TAMSITT is a docent of the National Museum of Singapore and Changi Chapel and Museum. To hear more inspiring stories of the brave POWs, please visit the Changi Chapel and Museum.

SPIRITUALLY INSPIRED FOR DIVINE HEALING

TONY SUGIARTA EXPLORES THE MYSTICAL WORLD OF HEALING BATIK MOTIFS

Photos by aNERDgallery unless otherwise stated.

In today's world of modern medicine, covering a sick person with a *batik tambal* (patchwork motif) may seem irrational, but in Java, where spirituality is part of holistic wellness and there is still a strong belief in "hidden forces", using batik to promote healing is a perfectly acceptable response. In traditional textiles, patterns are often associated with auspicious or protective meanings. Similarly, batik is believed to add power to a piece of plain white cloth for protection and well-being.

Batik motifs are influenced by cultural beliefs, religion and trade. The process of drawing the motifs, where each step is a deliberate movement, adds to their healing power. Each stroke of the *canting* (a copper and bamboo batik tool that contains



Batik artisans draw patterns using a canting in East Java.



Semen Cuwiri, a pattern showcasing a harmonious balance across spiritual realms.



Triangles filled with varying motifs patched together in a batik tambal.

hot wax) represents a prayer. "One breath, one stroke, it's like a meditation," said Siti, a batik master from Giriloyo, Yogyakarta, as she coached me to create clean, consistent wax lines with a *canting* on my first batik-making attempt.

Healing batik motifs have roots in stories handed down the generations. Many old texts explain that symbols in Javanese art forms are related to seeking balance, harmony and mindfulness.

THE BATIK PROCESS: A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Batik is a dye-resist technique using hot wax drawn with a *canting* or stamped using a *cap* (a copper stamp). Each step of batik creation has a spiritual aspect. As with many Javanese art forms, batik represents harmony among three worlds: *Jagad Alit* (the microcosmos realm represented by human beings), *Jagad Ageng* (the macrocosmos represented by Mother Nature) and the third world being the source of creativity. This Javanese cosmological worldview is called Tribawana in the Arjunawiwaha text. Translated into practice, artists make a connection with tangible materials and elements of nature through a process of self-internalisation prior to creating their art.

Batik masters Nia Fliam and Agus Ismoyo of Brahma Tirta Sari in Yogyakarta are devoted students and promoters of the Tribawana creative process. I learnt from them that these interconnections between a human, the environment and the source of creativity are expressed through thoughts, speech and actions.

THOUGHTS: IDEATING BALANCE

Many classic batik designs have been carefully planned to reflect balance and harmony. Every element, from the main

central motif to the *isen* (filler motifs) are deliberately selected to create contrasting yet complementing images. Other than using size and space, one might see light/dark colour combinations or orderly geometric patterns against fluid shapes. Thick lines represent strength and tiny dots or thin, cracked lines represent fragility, two opposites that make up the cosmic balance.

Sewan Susanto, in his book *Seni Kerajinan Batik Indonesia*, illustrates a Javanese philosophy of the Genesis of Life in the classic batik motif *Semen Cuwiri*, that has the elements of earth, fire, water and air. These elements may be represented with a *meru* (a sacred mountain), tongues of fire, *naga* (dragon) and *semen* (wings of the mythical Garuda), respectively. The kingdom of flora and fauna is balanced and well-represented.

A batik design is not just a motif drawn on cloth but a composition of beautiful prose that conveys messages of optimism and spiritual energy. Before batik artists start to draw, they meditate to feel the energy of the creative source of *Ibu Pertiwi* and *Bapak Angkasa* (Mother Earth and Father Sky). This process is referred to as *olah rasa* – to tap on divine creative energy to be expressed on the cloth. Once this *rasa* (sensitivity) is achieved, the wax should flow fluidly from the *canting* as though the batik artist is doing the bidding of the Divine. It's no wonder that many batik motifs are inspired by nature as an homage to this process.

ACTIONS: THE DIVINE'S WORK IN WAX AND DYES

Breathing with each stroke of hot wax is a deliberate act. It is akin to meditation to purify the mind and infuse blessings into the work. This action is a form of respect for oneself, nature and God. Spiritualism aside, mindful breathing

improves hand control to make consistent lines. It also serves as a natural timer to determine when to take a break and fill the *canting* with fresh, hot wax.

Drawing with a *canting* and hot wax is not easy. It requires patience and discipline which is proof of dedication that blooms into love and trust among artisans, workshop owners and people who eventually use the batik.

After the addition of wax, colours are added to fill the white spaces on the cloth. Colours had mythological meaning in classic court batik that was used by Mataram kings for daily attire or meditation purposes. Court batik has a palette of white, blue, *soga* brown or black. These colours were believed to have magical power to create connections with occupants of the other realms.

White symbolises a new beginning, blue represents worldly knowledge, and black refers to death and regeneration. These colours are often worn by the king who is seen as God's representative on earth. The king is a mediator for men in their relationship with God - an idea present in the primordial Islamic concept.

There are extremely limited records of batik dyeing rituals and its association with spirituality, if any. It could



The sultan of Yogyakarta, Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono VII, in a ceremonial dress, 1885. The *tambal* (patchwork) motif can be seen on his jacket. Photo from Wikimedia Commons.

simply be that most old court batiks were white, brown, and indigo because of the plant dyes that were available then.

NATURAL DYES FOR HEALTH

Many natural plant dyes used in batik have been used as traditional remedies. Studies show that skin absorbs toxins and chemicals from clothing and the environment. Natural dyes used in some batiks have antimicrobial and hypoallergenic properties.

With different mordant and post-processing fixers, natural dyes have different healing and protective properties. Iron-mordanted indigo-dyed cloth was found to absorb ultraviolet light and protect the wearer from the sun's harmful UV rays. Most alum-mordanted dyes, including morinda root dyes, have deodorising and insect-repellent properties.

MOTIFS AND THE LANGUAGE OF HEALING

Lines and dots are the simplest building blocks of batik patterns. Each shape symbolises hope, prayers, cultures and beliefs embedded in a piece of beautiful

batik cloth, providing strength and warmth for the soul of the wearers. There are many patterns associated with healing. Here are the three of them:



A *semanggi* motif (water clover, which has many medicinal benefits) is seen on this batik against a *gringsing* background.



A calligraphy batik bendera (flag). Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum.

Tambal

Tambal is a patchwork of triangle shapes filled with different patterns. These triangles represent the three strengths of Hindu gods (*Trimurti*) - Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva - which are arranged neatly and harmoniously on a piece of rectangular cloth.

Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono VII wore an outfit made of triangular cloths, both plain or batik, to show his determination to protect his people, to maintain harmony, and to prosper. This cloth then represents unity in diversity where living and maintaining peace is of the greatest importance in many Javanese societies that prioritise a sense of community over individualism.

Tambal represents a union, an addition to something that is missing and improving what is not perfect. When one is unwell, the healing power of a *tambal* can patch what's 'broken', mental health included. It may also refer to broken relationships or connections among people or one with nature to create a peaceful living environment. Many wear cloaks of this cloth when unwell or homesick to gain warmth similar to receiving a hug from the loved ones.

Gringsing

Gringsing in batik refers to a background pattern traditionally made up of circles with solid dots or cut-outs in the middle. In contemporary batik, *gringsing* patterns may be squares or diamonds. While *gringsing* has the same name as a famous double ikat cloth from Tenganan, Bali, there is little evidence that they are related.

There are many interpretations of *gringsing* being a protective and healing motif. Some believe that it is a symbol of women, as reverence to the Goddess of Birth. The pattern is used on mats for babies and offering coverings during seed planting and harvesting seasons. Others believe that it resembles a snake's scales as an incarnation of the God Vishnu; while some regard it as a form of an *urna*, a spiral or a circular dot on the forehead of Buddha that symbolises the third eye or a vision to the divine world.

Dutch batik researcher and artist Sabine Bolk discovered a text by G.P. Rouffaer and Dr H.H. Juynboll stating that *gringsing* is one of the oldest motifs and was part of a Javanese war uniform.

Some textile scholars also debate if *gringsing* is made up of two Sanskrit words, *gering* and *sing* meaning 'sick/ill' and 'not/no' respectively. Many are unsure of its etymology, but as a Balinese speaker, I find that the order of the two words as a mantra to get rid of sickness is grammatically odd.

Calligraphy batik

Calligraphy batik refers to batik cloth influenced by Islamic and Arab traditions. Calligraphy batik contains *shahadah*, a statement of Islamic belief - "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger." It is written in Arabic and arranged geometrically, in the shape of a bird or a *keris* (a sword) to ward off evil.

Malay is the language of choice in the Islamic discourse in Southeast Asia and Kufic script is often used to record both Arabic and Malay texts. However, in the past, batik artisans were less literate in Arabic, and calligraphy batik was considered more decorative rather than an accurate invocation to Allah.

Nevertheless, the symbolism of the script, incorporating the sacredness of the language of God, and the magic of writing as a protective talisman, still symbolises faith and protection for the users and makers. As such, this cloth may appear during circumcision ceremonies or used as headcloths and shawls.

BATIK: THE HEALING CLOTH

The idea of healing through batik is not just about the meaning of various motifs. The objective of healing is also present throughout the process of batik making itself. The intentions, language and actions of the batik maker also influence the batik's protective powers. Finally, the wearer appreciates the batik cloth, celebrating the makers and honouring the connection to Mother Nature which provides physical resources and creative inspiration. ■

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The Peony: in Beauty and in Health

MADDIE THAM REVEALS THE SECRETS OF THE KING OF FLOWERS



Peony bloom. Photo by Olia Gozha on Unsplash.



Porcelain plate with phoenix and peony motifs favoured by the Peranakan Chinese. The mythical phoenix is hailed as the King of the Birds and symbolises peace and prosperity, while the peony is considered the King of the Flowers and is associated with nobility, wealth and beauty. Xuantong Period (1908-1911). Collection of the Peranakan Museum.

Since antiquity, peonies have been recognised as medicinal plants. The Western term “Peony” is derived from ‘Paeon’, the ill-fated physician to the gods in Greek mythology. It is said that Paeon was an incredibly gifted healer who cured Hades of a grave ailment. His teacher, Asclepius, the god of medicine and healing, flew into a jealous rage and wanted to kill him. To save Paeon’s life, Zeus transformed him into a peony.

Plants classified under the peony family are found in various parts of the world. Tree peonies or *mudan* (牡丹) are native to China where they are considered symbols of wealth and prosperity. They were later introduced to Korea and Japan in the 7th and 8th centuries respectively where they are also associated with auspiciousness. When Chinese migrants flocked to Southeast Asia in the 19th century, the peony continued to be a favourite motif that appeared on material objects such as ceramics and silk hangings.

The cachet of the peony is such that today in Singapore, one can see silk peonies used as Chinese New Year decor at shopping malls and in homes. Few may realise that this peony decoration is a modern adaptation of an ancient Chinese practice to adorn homes with auspicious peony plants during Chinese New Year. Peony plants were generally expensive and wealthy merchants would present them as valued gifts - cementing their reputation as *fuguihua* (富贵花) or “wealth plants”.

During the 19th century, growers in Europe and later North America began to cultivate Oriental peonies (*Paeonia*

lactiflora) using mother stock from China and Japan. Through the enthusiasm of hobbyists and commercial growers, there are now thousands of peony cultivars and hybrids. However, the fresh-cut peonies that most florists use today are not *mudan* (tree peonies) but cultivars of herbaceous Oriental peonies which the Chinese call *shaoyao* (芍药).

Favoured By Royalty

Shaoyao (herbaceous peonies) were first mentioned in an important Han era (206 BCE - 220 CE) medical text known as the *shen nong ben cao jing* (神農本草經). Tang era medical texts also mention tree peony root cortex or *dan pi* (丹皮).

Compared to the early cash crop of *shaoyao*, the cultivation of *mudan* was initially an esoteric activity. Tree peonies were more difficult to grow than herbaceous peonies and require protracted cold spells to trigger blooming. However, herbaceous peonies die down each winter, while tree peonies are deciduous shrubs that could live a hundred years or more. This longevity perhaps added to the allure of *mudan* as a luxury plant favoured by royalty. Ancient writings inform us that 20 boxes of *mudan* were given by the governor of Hebei as tribute to the Sui Emperor Yang Guang (r.604 - 618 CE).

The royal fascination with *mudan* lasted for centuries with propagation increasing with each dynasty. The Tang and Song Dynasties saw the expansion of Chinese trade and the rise of a wealthy merchant class. *Mudan* cultivation developed as a luxury hobby not only of royals but also the rich.

Wild peonies are generally small, having at most two layers and less than ten petals. Whereas cultivated tree peonies have large, majestic, showy blooms like the tulle of



a ballerina's tutu, with up to hundreds of petals. A Song-era record describes a thousand petal cultivar among others. Up to the end of the Qing Dynasty (1696 -1912), the tree peony blooming season was celebrated each spring. Nobles and Chinese literati organised parties where the *mudan* was lauded in poetry and song.

In modern times, *mudan* festivals are major events in China's peony growing provinces such as Luoyang. It was at the Luoyang National Peony Park that a friendly park guide alerted me to the key differences between tree and herbaceous peonies. As we gazed at the swathes of colours created by thousands of blooming peonies, he explained that the annual Luoyang Peony Flower Fair was dedicated to the exhibition of *mudan* which bloom from early to late spring. Pointing at a nearby grouping of low plants with tight buds, he commented that the *shaoyao* was a different type of plant that blooms from late spring to early summer.

Mudan (tree peonies) have woody stems and their leaves are compound and palmate while the soft-stemmed *shaoyao* (herbaceous peonies) have sharp pointed ovoid leaves. Generally herbaceous peony blooms are smaller than tree peonies.

Peonies As Medicine

Since tree and herbaceous peonies differ in growth habits and physical characteristics, it is no surprise that they yield different medicinal herbs used in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM).

Herbaceous peony species such as *Paeonia lactifolia* and *Paeonia albiflora* yield two forms of medicinal herb - Red Peony root or *chi shao* (赤芍), derived from the whole root or root cortex and White Peony root or *bai shao* (白芍), which is the root with outer skin removed.

The *Paeonia suffruticosa* species of tree peony yields the peony root cortex which is commonly referred to as *dan pi*. Peony root herbs are generally used in Chinese traditional



(top)
Mudan (tree peonies) in bloom enthrall visitors in spring at the National Peony Park in Luoyang, China which is also home to a peony gene bank. Photo by the author.

(bottom)
Mudan (tree peonies) like these have woody stems and can live for hundreds of years, while *shaoyao* (herbaceous peonies) are soft-stemmed and die each winter. Photo by Gabriel Xu on Unsplash.



(top)
Bai shao (white peony root) is often used in brews to treat female maladies.

(bottom)
White peony root has transitioned into Western health supplements and is marketed as an immune system booster. Dried mudan buds steeped in hot water make a soothing infusion. Photo by the author.

medicine to reduce pathogenic heat from the body as well as for its antispasmodic and analgesic qualities. Different types of peony roots have distinct qualities which differentiate their use. For example, *bai shao* tends to be used in brews to treat female maladies.

Modern science confirms the chemical differences between different peony root herbs. Two key compounds have been identified – Paeoniflorin, present in root extracts from both herbaceous and tree peonies, and Paeonol which is found chiefly in tree peony extracts. Medical research continues to evaluate the potential of these peony-based compounds in the treatment of cancer, liver, heart and autoimmune diseases.

Many traditional Chinese herbs have transitioned into Western health supplements, thus one can find White Peony root extract marketed as immune system boosters. Paeoniflorin extracted from White Peony root is also used by famous skincare brands as it is said to have anti-oxidant and anti-inflammatory properties.

China's peony capital, the Heze prefecture in Shandong Province, has more than 320 square kilometers (almost half the size of Singapore) dedicated to commercial peony growing and about 120 peony-related enterprises. These include firms that process *mudan* seed oil for pharmaceutical and food purposes. Since 2011, Chinese health authorities have approved the use of *mudan* seed oil as an edible oil rich in healthy fatty acids and anti-oxidants. *Mudan* seed oil has been recognised as a potential vegan alternative to fish oil supplements. In the beauty stakes, natural tannins in *mudan* seed oil are used to treat hyperpigmentation.

Beneficial phytochemicals are said to be present in *mudan* flower petals which are used in herbal teas. Note that this floral infusion should be not be confused with a well-known style of leaf tea known as White Peony or Bai Mudan (白牡丹), made from the young leaves of the *Camellia sinensis* plant.

For a moment of calm, steep some dried *mudan* buds in a glass cup to enjoy a pleasing view of the buds unfolding.



Slowly sip the amber tea and inhale its fragrance as you contemplate the peony as a bountiful source of goodness. Certainly, the tree peony that graced Chinese palace gardens in ancient times, and their herbaceous cousins have much to offer for our health and are more than just botanical beauties or auspicious symbols. ■

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Cruelly Bound By Convention

TINA TAN EXAMINES THE UNHEALTHY PRACTICE OF FOOT BINDING IN CHINA

There have been many legends about the historical origins of foot binding in China. One popular belief is that it originated during the reign of Li Yu (937-978 CE), the last emperor of the Southern Tang during the Five Dynasties in China.

He asked that his favorite consort, Yao Niang perform a “ballet like” dance on top of a golden lotus pedestal, with her feet bound into the shape of a crescent moon with a white silk cloth. As the emperor loved this consort so much, the other dancers who wanted to get his attention copied the practice. That was reportedly how foot binding became associated with the terms “golden lotus” or “lotus feet”, and the shoes were called “lotus shoes”.

There is also another legend suggesting that this practice was instigated by a Shang Empress who had club feet. Due to her own personal disability, she demanded that all the women in the royal court bind their feet in sympathy.

Regardless of its origins, foot binding gained in popularity in subsequent dynasties and spread from the royal courts to the upper classes. Eventually the practice moved from the cities to the rural areas. By the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368 - 1912), bound feet became the ultimate symbol of Chinese beauty throughout the country. By the 19th century, it was estimated that almost 40 to 50 percent of all Chinese women had bound feet.

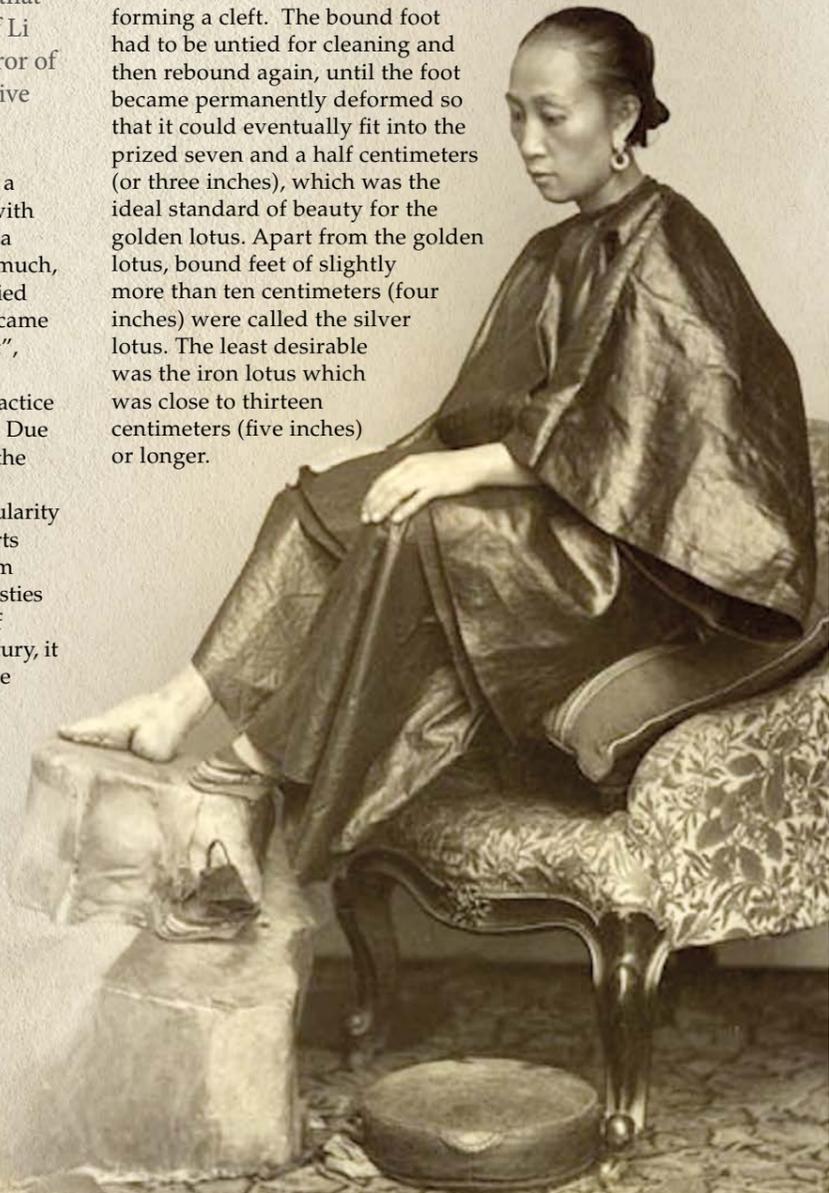
Ancient societal pressures pushed aspirational mothers to bind their daughters’ feet in the hope that they could be married off to better families. There was even an old Chinese saying:

“If you love your daughter, bind her feet; if you love your son, let him study”.

*A Chinese woman with an exposed bound foot, 1870s.
Image from Wikimedia Commons.*

GOLD, SILVER AND IRON LOTUSES

The process of foot binding took years to complete and was said to be extremely painful. From as young as five to six, when the girls’ bones were still soft, their feet would be bound with a cotton cloth to restrict their growth. At this age, they were less likely to resist despite the pain of the process. All the toes with the exception of the big toe, would be folded down and bound under the sole of the foot. The arch of the foot was also forcibly broken and bound towards the ball of the foot forming a cleft. The bound foot had to be untied for cleaning and then rebound again, until the foot became permanently deformed so that it could eventually fit into the prized seven and a half centimeters (or three inches), which was the ideal standard of beauty for the golden lotus. Apart from the golden lotus, bound feet of slightly more than ten centimeters (four inches) were called the silver lotus. The least desirable was the iron lotus which was close to thirteen centimeters (five inches) or longer.



Lotus shoes with a triangular sole. They are made of bright red and blue cotton and cream silk. Elaborate designs of dragons and flowers are embroidered on the silk. Collection of the Queensland Museum. Image from Wikimedia Commons.

A STATUS SYMBOL

It is hard to imagine why women in those times subjected themselves to such self-inflicted disfigurement. Vanity and fashion may have been an inducement, but further research has revealed a more disturbing rationale. Firstly, bound feet forced women to walk in a certain way, which built stronger inner thigh and pelvic muscles. This enhanced sexual satisfaction for the men. Secondly, it encouraged the submission of women to their menfolk. With severely restricted mobility, women could not venture far from their homes. It was believed this kept them chaste. Girls could not attend schools to get education, and they could not contribute to society in economically meaningful jobs. They had to rely on the men. Thirdly, tiny feet were a reflection of a family’s social status, implying that the family was wealthy enough so that the women didn’t need to move about to do menial chores but had servants to attend to them. Lastly and perhaps the most important reason – girls with bound feet were deemed more marriageable and sought after for the match-making. Girls with large, unbound feet were considered crude and unattractive.

SEVERE HEALTH RISKS

Foot binding resulted in women being subjugated to mere decorative and reproductive roles in ancient Chinese society. Perhaps these women did not know that foot binding carried health risks. The long bindings made it cumbersome to wash their feet often. Toenails could become in-grown and cause infections. The restriction of blood

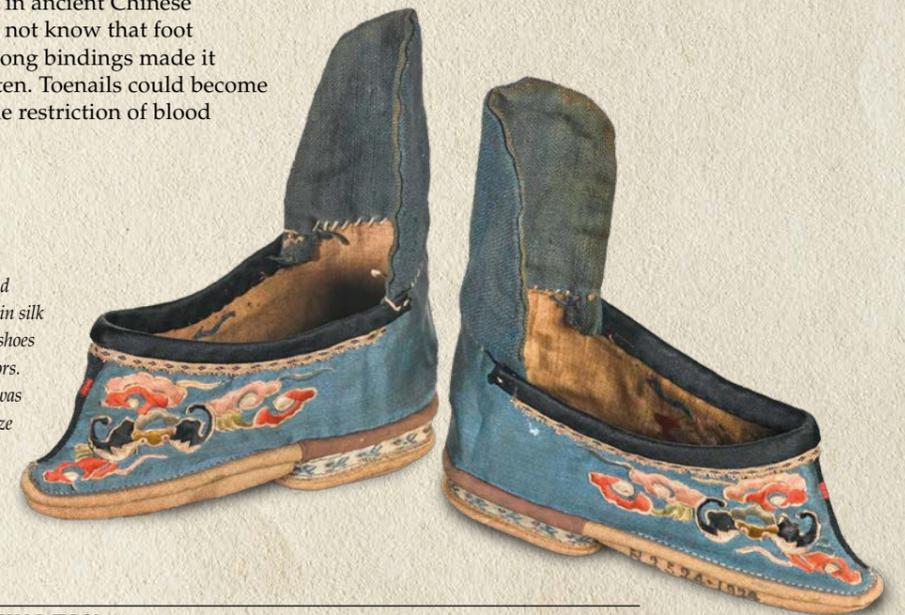
flow could cause more injury to the toes and cause skin infections. In severe cases, diseases followed infections, leading to possibly rare life-threatening septic shocks. The other complication was the loss of the normal structure of the feet which could result in the displacement of the bones and weakening of ligaments of the ankle joints. All these eventually caused difficulty in walking.

In the late Qing period, Emperor Guangxu (1875 - 1908) with the encouragement of the reformist movements led by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao during his 100-Days reform movement, introduced the anti-foot binding policies.

A civil organisation called the ‘Foot Emancipation Society’ or anti-foot binding society was formed to support women with the objective to strengthen their physical bodies. But their efforts were thwarted by Empress Cixi and the movement failed. Though, subsequently, the Empress herself put through an anti-foot binding edict.

When the transitional government of the Republic of China was established in 1912, Dr Sun Yat Sen propagated an order to prohibit foot binding. However, the practice continued in remote rural areas where some continued to practice foot binding. Government inspectors were empowered to impose a fine on those who did not obey. It was not until 1950s that this practice gradually disappeared during the communist era. ■

A pair of lotus shoes with low heel and pointed toe, silk uppers, embroidered in silk thread over paper, 1870-1910. These shoes were clearly not meant for use outdoors. They measure 12 centimeters which was considered quite big. The ideal foot size was seven and a half centimeters. Photo courtesy of the Wellcome Collection.



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GATHERING NATURE'S GIFTS

ROSSMAN ITHNAIN LOOKS AT THE FORAGING WAYS OF THE MALAYS

All photos by the author unless otherwise stated.

Foraging for vegetables, medicinal plants and marine life is a practice of the Malays that illustrates their closeness with nature. It also highlights the role that nature plays in Malay cuisine, culture, craft and healing tradition.

I was reminded of this practice after reading *Ilham Alam-Seni Perubatan Dunia Melayu (Nature and Healing in the Malay World)*, a Malay Heritage Centre publication, and *Rustic Trails - the way of a forager*, a chapter in Khir Johari's book, *The Food of Singapore Malays*. In this article, I share my personal experiences of foraging in Singapore or *meramu* and *berkarang*, both terms which I attribute to Khir Johari's book.

MERAMU - FORAGING ON LAND

The word *meramu* is from the root word *ramu*. So it is not surprising that the Malay word for ingredients is *ramuan* or "things that have been gathered".

Generally, the vegetables and herbs used in traditional Malay cuisine are typically those that can be foraged such as bamboo shoots (*pucuk rebung*), Indian pennywort (*daun pegaga*), noni fruit, (*mengkudu*), ferns (*paku*), tapioca leaves (*pucuk ubi*) and young jackfruit (*nangka muda*) or those that are grown around the kampung house such as sweet potato leaves (*daun keledak*), turi leaf (*daun turi*), turmeric (*daun kunyit*) pandan, lemongrass (*serai*) and various types of fruits such as *belimbing buluh*, calamansi lime (*limau kasturi*), kaffir lime (*limau purut*) rambutan and rose apple (*jambu air*).

(left)

Clockwise: Simpo air leaves are used to wrap tempeh and nasi lemak; delicate bunga tanjong (spanish cherry) flowers are used to make scented hair oil; edible cendawan kukur (split gill mushrooms); durian flowers are tasty cooked in a spicy coconut milk gravy; buah bidara laut fruit is excellent for making jam. Photo of mushrooms from Wikimedia Commons.

Today, many of the places for foraging have been developed for urban living. Some of these edible plants are grown in public housing estates and parks as part of the ornamental landscape, to be admired but not touched. Look closely at some grass patches, and you might find wild edibles such as Indian pennywort - eaten raw as *ulam*, added to *nasi kerabu* or *urap* - a Malay salad with spiced grated coconut.

The tradition of foraging is passed down through experience. In my case, I learnt by accompanying my father and grandmother on their foraging trips; by observing, touching, tasting and smelling the plants. This early exposure has made me instinctively look out for edible plants whenever I go on walks.

In the past, forested land, the backyard and surroundings of the Malay kampung home were sources of vegetables, medicinal herbs and fruit. Wild flowers were gathered for medicines and perfumes, hair decoration and for ceremonial use.

As forested areas are increasingly scarce in Singapore today, more unusual ingredients once found in the wild rarely feature in modern Malay cuisine simply because they are hard to obtain. Some examples are durian flowers (*bunga durian*), *daun buas buas*, palm heart (*umbut kelapa*) and split-gill mushrooms (*cendawan kukur*), typically found growing on fallen rubber trees

In Malay cuisine, many wild vegetables are eaten raw as *ulam*, such as cosmos caudatus (*ulam raja*) and winged beans (*kecipir*) or cooked in dishes with coconut milk (*masak lemak*), tamarind gravy (*masak asam rebus*) and clear broth (*masak bening*).

A special dish that I would like to highlight is *botok botok*. This is a popular dish of the Singapore Malays of Javanese descent and is also prepared by the Javanese diaspora in the region. *Botok botok* is a spiced fish paste, usually made with Spanish mackerel (*ikan tenggiri*), that is steamed with an assortment of wild leaves in a banana leaf parcel. Traditionally, a plethora of wild leaves are foraged for this dish including piper sarmentosum (*daun kaduk*), noni leaves (*daun mengkudu*), *belinjau*, tapioca leaves (*pucuk ubi*), shield aralia (*daun puding semangkuk*) and the strong smelling

premna corymbosa (*daun buas buas*). Today, we make do with whatever leaves are available at the market. Vegetables such as asparagus, cauliflower, and French beans are new entrants to Malay cooking.

Other examples of useful fruits and leaves that can be found wild in Singapore include:

Buah bidara laut – an orange-yellow plum-like fruit that has medicinal value but is unknown to most in Singapore today. I have discovered several spots in Singapore where this coastal plant thrives and have made jams and syrups from the fruit.

Dillenia fruticosa (*daun simpoh air*) leaves used to wrap food such as *nasi lemak* and *tempeh*. *Tempeh* was once produced at Kampung Tempeh, a Malay kampung that was at Jalan Haji Alias off Sixth Avenue in Bukit Timah.

BERKARANG - FORAGING ALONG THE COAST

There were many Malay water villages in Singapore located on stilts by the sea or on our offshore islands including our Southern Islands such as Pulau Brani, St John's Island (Pulau Sekijang Bendera), Lazarus Island (Pulau Sekijang Pelepah) and Pulau Semakau, which is now Singapore's only active landfill where rubbish is processed.

The communities that once lived in these places fished and foraged in the sea for their sustenance. The Singapore I grew up in was different from the urban city it is today. Our coastlines were generally intact and still relatively untouched by land reclamation. I am fortunate to have spent part of my childhood on Pulau Brani and St John's Island where my late mother was based as a midwife. This allowed me to learn *berkarang* from my father and the islanders.

I remember distinctly foraging at low tide in the intertidal zones when I was a young child, particularly at Pulau Brani. Family picnics on weekends were typically spent on the islands or at the sandy beaches of Tanah Merah or the rocky shores of Labrador. The Tanah Merah intertidal zone was the equivalent of Chek Jawa today but far more extensive. This part of Tanah Merah has been reclaimed long ago and is now buried under Changi Airport.

My father and grandmother taught me how to handle edible sea creatures and what to avoid. In those days, our shores provided us with a wide array of edibles such as noble volutes (*siput kilah*), pearl conch snail (*gonggong*), spider conch (*ranga*), mussels (*kupang*) and surf clams (*remis*) all of which are still found on the shores of Changi Beach. My favourite is the turban shell (*siput mata lembu*) with an operculum that looks like cow's eye. We also collected *agar agar*, a type of seaweed that can be boiled and made into a jelly. Many of the shells I have listed here can still be found in Singapore coastal waters and especially on the Southern Islands.

Today, intertidal walks are extremely popular. Given the paucity and fragility of our marine life, foraging is discouraged and in some places, prohibited. There are still beaches where foraging for food is possible today but it is important to conserve marine life and gather only what you intend to eat.

MALAY LADIES AND THEIR SCENTED FLOWERS

Scented flowers are an important element in Malay culture. No Malay ceremony is complete without flowers, floral potpourri (*bunga rampai*) or floral arrangements (*sireh dara*). Typically, the components of *bunga rampai* are aromatic flowers and *pandan* leaves that were once found in the surroundings of the kampung home.

My grandmother made her own *bunga rampai* using scented flowers from her garden such as jasmine (*bunga melor*), bread flower (*bunga kesidang*), *cempaka* (both yellow and white varieties), rose and *ylang-ylang* (*kenanga*). She would often ask my father to look for *pandan* leaves and other aromatic flowers especially when she needed large quantities for weddings or engagement parties. It was common for Malays to *rewang* by contributing items needed for communal events as part of the *gotong royong* community spirit.

My grandmother would also make her own scented hair tonic by soaking Spanish cherry flower (*bunga tanjung*) in olive oil (*minyak zaitun*). The scented oil would be applied to her hair as it was pulled back into a hair bun. *Bunga tanjung* was strung and wound around her hair bun. There were and still are many *bunga tanjung* trees in Singapore.

Flowers were collected for *mandi bunga*. This is the practice of bathing with seven different types of flowers to get rid of bad luck (*buang sial*). This is practised by Malays of Javanese descent in the past but less so today. As people were gradually resettled away from their kampungs they had to look for *mandi bunga* flowers at wet markets.

HERBAL REMEDIES IN THE MALAY HEALING TRADITION

The Malays were skilled at making traditional herbal remedies from plants, roots and flowers. My grandmother used to make a bitter herbal tonic from plants she foraged such as Bile of the Earth leaf (*hempedu bumi*), Green chiretta (*akar cerita*) and Heart-leaved moonseed (*brotowali*). These are herbal remedies for hypertension and diabetes.

Today we rely more on western medicine than Malay herbal remedies, so the knowledge of useful herbal plants is lost. Some of the plants used in these tonics are actually common roadside plants or weeds. Pinecone ginger also known as Zingiber zerumbet (*lemmpuyang*) was apparently a remedy for deworming. My grandfather would gather and grate the *lemmpuyang* then squeeze out the juice which he would force feed my sisters and I daily as we would resist swallowing the bitter concoction.

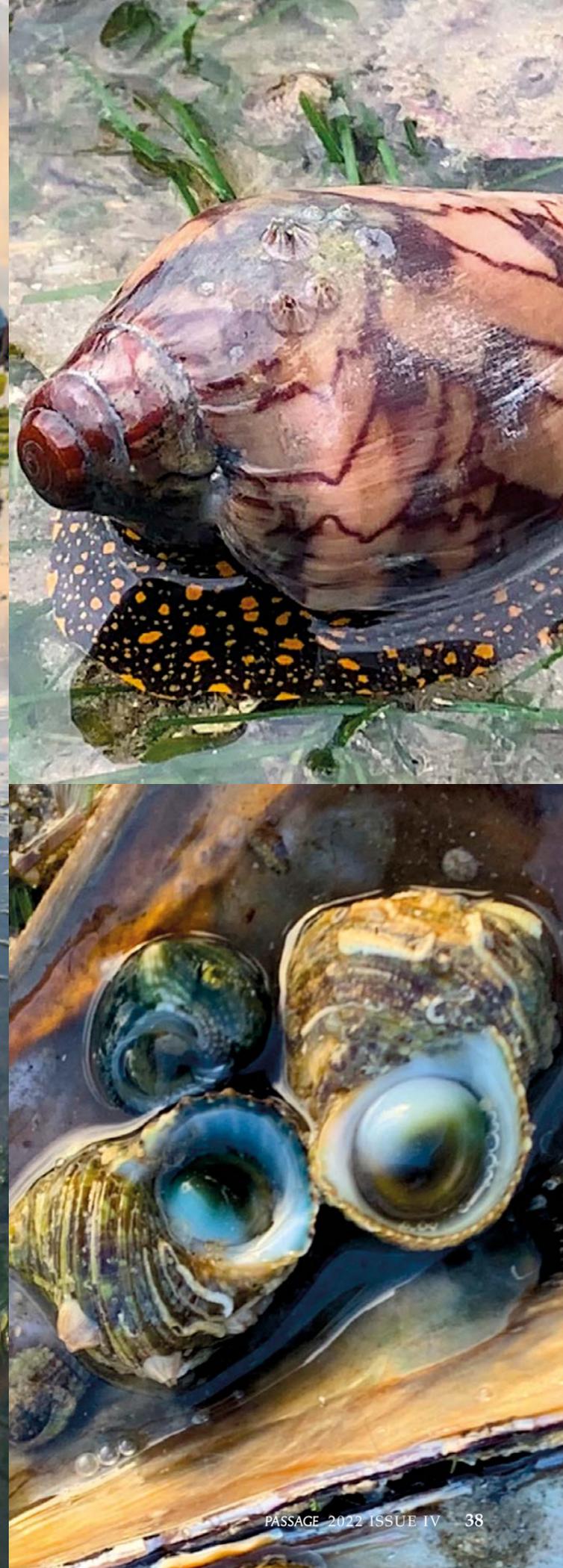
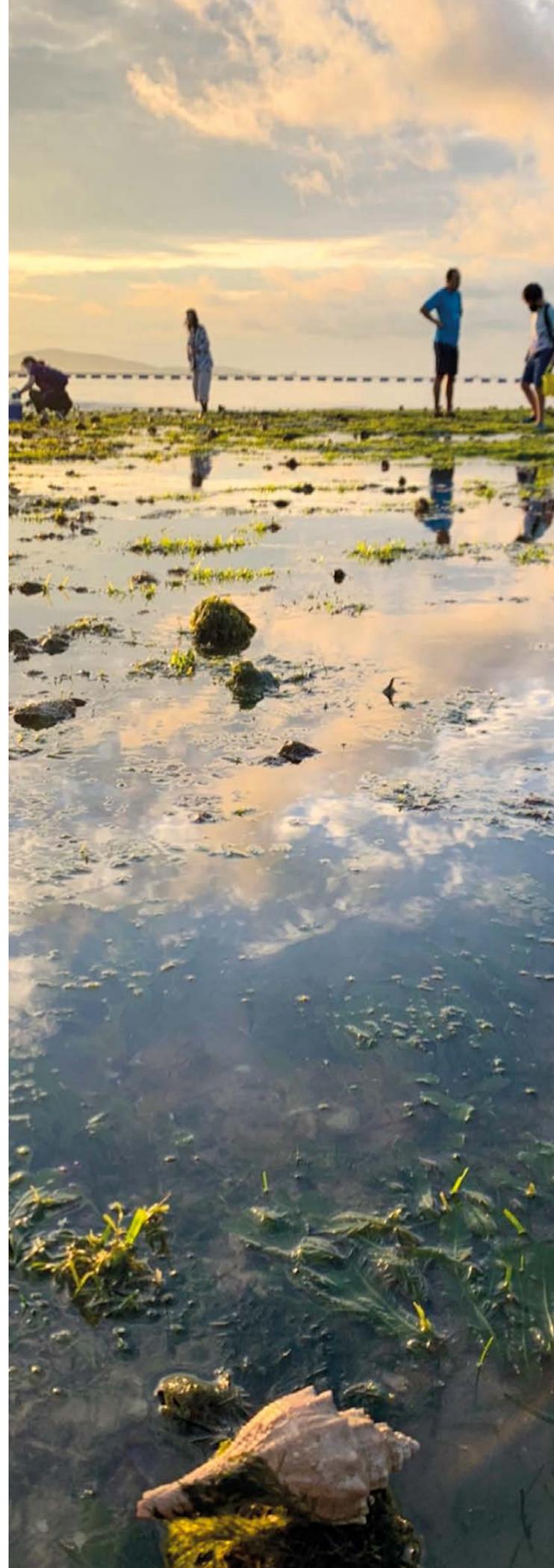
In the Malay world, traditional healers were known by many names such as *dukun* or *pawang*. They played a vital role in the community before the advent of modern medicine. The remedies they prescribed were mostly derived from the roots or bark of plants. Prescriptions and instructions for brewing the herbs were conveyed orally and certain mantras were chanted during the preparation.

Singapore is a vastly different country today with many of its forested areas given over to development. As we move towards being a city in nature, our many nature reserves, "jungle trails" and little pockets of untouched land still give us an opportunity to learn about the plants that our forefathers used to forage for. 📍

(right)

The intertidal zone at Changi beach during low tide is perfect for spotting edibles such as the noble veloute (top right) and siput mata lembu which resembles a cow's eye. (bottom right).

ROSSMAN ITHNAIN is a private collector of all things Malay. He likes to explore the Malay world and share his experiences.



In The Market For Health

YEO YENPING RECOMMENDS REVERTING TO A TRADITIONAL SOURCE FOR HEALTH FOODS

All photos by Niraj R. Sharma.

The nod to Singapore's iconic hawker culture from UNESCO in 2020 has placed the spotlight squarely on the disappearing traditions of hawker fare. But, just as integral to Singapore's food culture, and equally threatened, are the wet markets, often co-located with, and inextricably linked to, hawker centres in neighbourhoods across the island.

There are 107 wet markets in Singapore. The typical local ritual is to have breakfast at the hawker centre, before proceeding to grocery shopping at the wet market. Housewives would procure fresh produce from the wet market on a daily basis to make freshly cooked meals for their families. This disappearing ritual has its roots in a time before refrigeration became widely available in the 1970s, and when peddling food was a viable way to make a living for those without an education.

The lives of wet market vendors are similar to those of hawkers. The work is labour intensive, low return and many of these vendors are old. They will have to close their stalls for good if their children, who tend to be better educated, are not willing to take over. In a world where online grocery shopping has become a way of life, the fate of these wet market vendors lies in the balance.

Currently, many locals still depend on the wet market for fresh produce. Here you can find all the ingredients essential to Southeast Asian cooking. In specialty markets like the one at Geylang Serai, you'll also find native greens commonly used in Malay cooking that are not carried by any

Various fresh herbs, flowers and herbal concoctions available at the jamu stall. These herbal remedies still play an important role in Malay culture today. Floral baths are believed to cleanse one's aura.



You'll find a wide variety of bananas on sale at the Geylang Serai Market. Pictured here: Pisang Tandok (the long ones, also called Kerala bananas), the red-skinned Pisang Raja Udang (King Prawn banana) and popular Pisang Berangan in the top right of the photo.



Ropes of fresh petai (stink beans) can be found throughout the market.

supermarket, as well as traditional Malay herbal medicine. Serai, the namesake of the neighbourhood, means lemongrass - a ubiquitous ingredient in Malay cuisine, once grown abundantly in the area.

Here are a few picks from the cornucopia of the Geylang Serai market.

Petai bean (Stink bean)

The petai bean is a popular native vegetable that can, on occasion, be found in some supermarkets. Petai delivers a pleasantly pungent taste to the palate and a whole host of health benefits. Folk wisdom claims that it cleanses the urinary tract.

Tempeh

Tempeh is a nutritious thin cake of lightly fermented soybeans. These days, it is a go-to source of protein for vegans, but it has been consumed in the Southeast Asian region for a long time. Freshly made tempeh, still warm to the touch from its active culture, can be had for only 20 cents per slab. This is undoubtedly the cheapest tempeh in Singapore.

Bananas

Geylang Serai market carries the biggest selection of bananas and plantains in Singapore. The Cavendish is the most widely marketed banana in the world, even though there are more than 1,000 known varieties. In Geylang Serai, you can find red bananas, giant varieties where an individual banana could weigh up to a kilogramme each, and bananas that taste like strawberry shortcake.

YEO YENPING is a consummate foodie and loves bringing people on food tours, including one through the Geylang Serai wet market, to share her fascination with local food culture.

Jamu - traditional herbal medicine

Before modern medicine, indigenous people in the Malay world relied on their knowledge of native herbs to deal with health issues.

Parts of plants, as well as animal derivatives such as honey and milk, served as medicine. Known as *jamu* in Java, it has received official recognition from UNESCO as part of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage. Though heavily influenced by Ayurveda from India, Indonesia is a vast archipelago with its own indigenous plants not found in India. *Jamu* varies from region to region, and the recipes are often not written down but orally transmitted across the generations. The Dutch had attempted to study and document *jamu*, in order to treat tropical diseases encountered in the East Indies.

There are two stalls at Geylang Serai market - one of them called Siti Flower Power - that sell ingredients for *jamu* preparations. On offer are a mind boggling variety of ginger and turmeric (the basis of many *jamu* concoctions), regionally sourced raw honey, an assortment of tinctures and ointments, and as the name of the stall suggests, flowers.

There is a tradition throughout Southeast Asia of bathing in flowers to dispel bad luck and general malaise. Flower baths are practised by the Malays, Chinese and Indians with some slight variations. There are many reasons why one might take a cleansing flower bath. One may be seeking to improve one's fortune in an aspect of life, or simply to improve one's luck before a game of mahjong. A packet of fresh flowers topped off with a kaffir lime costs less than \$3. That is all you need to have a fragrant home spa to refresh your senses. It may even cleanse your aura too.

There is so much to discover in the local wet markets. Do make a point to experience the Geylang Serai wet market for yourself the next time you are near the area. **P**



Different varieties of dried fish and seafood on sale.

NIRAJ R. SHARMA is an IT professional who loves to tell compelling stories with his photographs. He recently completed a course at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) in product and portrait photography.

Magic or Medicine?

JO WRIGHT LOOKS AT BEZOARS AND THEIR UNUSUAL ABILITIES

Which rather unlikely-looking object at Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) was, in its day, worth up to ten times its weight in gold and was highly valued for its life-preserving qualities? This same object unites the worlds of Harry Potter, the royal courts of Europe and was the subject of a 17th century landmark legal ruling that is still in force today. It was also the subject of a famous experiment by one of the leading pioneers in Renaissance military medicine.

The object we are discussing here is the bezoar stone. One example can be found nestled in a cabinet in the Court and Company gallery on level one of the ACM. The clue to its value lies in the rather beautiful bespoke silver case that an Indian craftsman made for it around 400 years ago.

But what exactly is a bezoar and why for much of history was it considered so incredibly valuable?



A late 17th century parcel-gilt and pierced silver case with bezoar stone. On display at the ACM.

ORIGINS IN PERSIAN MYTHS

The word itself comes from the Persian term *padzahr*, meaning “poison dispeller”. Persian sources were probably some of the first to mention bezoars in writing, from around the 8th century. They told of how bezoars were formed by wild deer, who at certain times of the year, ate snakes and other poisonous creatures and then submerged themselves in cool water until the “heat” from the poisons dispersed. Bezoars were apparently formed from their tears as they dropped to ground when the animals left the water. The theory was that as bezoars were formed by protecting the animals from poison, they would also protect any new owner from poison as well. The best bezoars reportedly came from the stomachs of Persian wild goats and deer that lived

in the highest mountains.

There are many references to bezoars in medieval Arabic and Jewish texts. The great 11th century polymath Al-Biruni himself discussed them at length in his *Book of Stones*. How do they work? Well, if you think you have been poisoned, grate a small amount of bezoar into a goblet of wine and drink the contents right away. If the bezoar was small, then you could consider swallowing it whole. Given that bezoars were so frightfully expensive, it was quite common to wait for it to transit through the body, carefully retrieve it and then (one hopes!) wash well before re-using.



Detail of an etching from the *Hortus sanitatis*, a Latin natural history encyclopaedia published in Germany, circa 1507. It shows venomous serpents and a weeping bezoar stag. Legend has it that bezoars formed when the tears dropped to the ground. A man nearby gathers the bezoars. Image from the Huntington Library and Botanical Gardens art collections, San Marino, California.

A GRUESOME MEDICAL EXPERIMENT

In 1565, French physician and leading expert of military medicine, Ambroise Paré, wrote about an episode involving a bezoar stone that had been gifted to Charles IX, king of France. The king quite naturally, wanted to make sure that the bezoar would work.

A prisoner in a nearby jail, a humble cook who had been found guilty of stealing silver cutlery and condemned to death, was offered a choice: he could either be executed, or ingest poison and then be treated with the bezoar stone. If the bezoar worked, the poison would be neutralized and the man would be rewarded with his freedom.

The cook chose the poison. Unfortunately, he died several hours later in complete agony with blood issuing from every orifice, despite being administered some bezoar by Paré. The French king immediately ordered that the discredited bezoar be cast into a fire and destroyed.

Paré concluded after this experiment that bezoars categorically did not work, but many people still believed in their curative powers.

There was a huge market for bezoars but they were very rare, so perhaps not surprisingly there was the danger, as Charles IX suspected in his case, of being given a fake bezoar that simply didn't work.

A LANDMARK LEGAL RULING

In 1603, a goldsmith in England who sold a stone claiming that it was a bezoar, was taken to court by a disgruntled customer. The customer claimed that the seller had falsely represented the value of the stone. The court decision established the legal doctrine known as “caveat emptor” or “let the buyer beware”, a legal landmark that still stands today in many countries, in which the buyer is responsible for assessing the quality of the item before buying.

With time, the belief in the power of bezoars grew and theories developed that the stones did not even have to be ingested in order to work their anti-poison properties, but simply be in presence of food before it was eaten. Elizabeth I of England and King Eric XIV of Sweden wore bezoars mounted on silver rings, while Pope Gregory XIII was presented with a bezoar from Peru that weighed over one and a half kilogrammes. Bezoars became increasingly sought-after and were often used as valuable gifts in international diplomacy.

It was even reckoned that bezoars could cure the plague, smallpox, epilepsy and dysentery as well as heart conditions and depression, so it was no small wonder that the stones were in high demand!

GOA STONES

Demand for bezoars vastly outstripped supply, so in 17th century India, Jesuit priests who settled in Goa started to manufacture their own version called Goa stones and claimed that they were just as efficacious as “natural” bezoars. Goa stones were formed using crushed shells, silt, resin, amber and sometimes, even tiny amounts of bezoar.

Bezoars of all sorts continued to be popular up until the mid-18th century, then their use started to decline.



A lidded enamel and gold cup made from a bezoar belonging to Hapsburg Emperor Rudolf II, 1600. Collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

When many people today hear about bezoars they assume that they are a prime example of medieval medicinal quackery, albeit ones housed in beautiful cases. But were all the stories about the life-preserving properties of bezoar stones a complete fabrication, or was there a kernel of truth in the apparently far-fetched tales?

DID THEY REALLY WORK?

Before we go further, it's important to understand that bezoars are actually solidified masses of undigested matter (plant material, hair, fruit etc.) found in the gut of animals (and humans!)

Just a few years ago, some scientists working out of the Scripts Institution of Oceanography in San Diego, USA, set out to answer this very question – could bezoars actually prevent poisoning? They tested different types of bezoar and poisons and after exhaustive research found that bezoars made of hair contained a mineral that effectively neutralised the poisonous parts of arsenic, which was one of the most popular poisons in the past.

So it just could be that over a millennia ago, some poor wretch in Persia who had been poisoned by arsenic was given a bezoar made from ingested hair and survived. This might be proof that at least some of the myths about bezoars are to some degree based on fact.

Where in all this does Harry Potter fit in? In JK Rowling's books the boy magician, Harry, learns about the healing properties of bezoars in Professor Snape's potions class (“good for all poisons apart from that of the Basilisk, obviously!”). Harry puts that knowledge to good use when his best friend, Ron Weasley is poisoned when he drinks a glass of adulterated Butterbeer. Harry saves Ron's life by shoving a bezoar down his throat.

The author certainly did her research and it's always good to know that the famed anti-poison properties of bezoars continue to live on – at least in the pages of children's literature. 



Oval goa stone, Europe, 1601-1800. Collection of the Science Museum, London.

JO WRIGHT is a docent with FOM who started life working as an engineer in the UK avionics industry and now delights in finding out the stories behind some of the most unlikely objects in the galleries at ACM.

Medieval Islamic Healing

MICHELLE HERTZ GUIDES US THROUGH THE HISTORY OF PERSIAN MEDICINE

Photos courtesy of the ACM.

Imagine you were a Kurdish herder in the 16th century. While tending to your sheep on Zagros Mountain range, you had the unfortunate luck of being stung by a scorpion. You might have survived the sting, but would you have survived your medical treatment? The next time you're in the Islamic Gallery of the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM), look out for three artefacts that provide clues into the medical practices of the Safavids (1501-1736) in the Persian Empire.

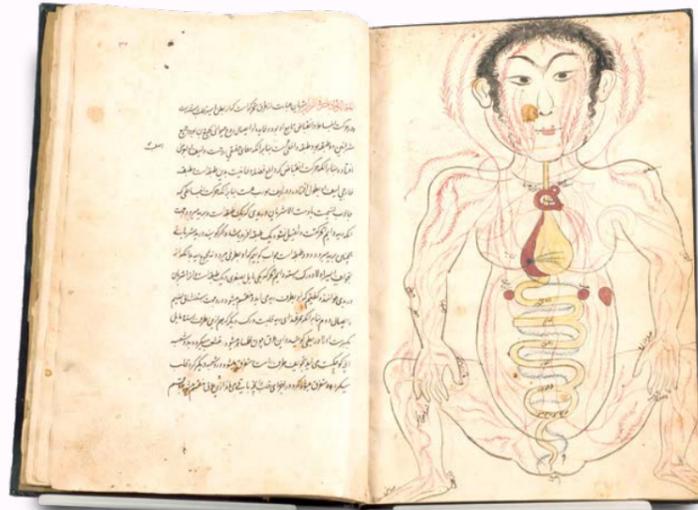
The Safavids are celebrated for their striking military successes, efficient administrative systems, and elaborate architecture that ultimately raised Persia to the status of a great power. Their advancements in medicine however, are less known. Through these artefacts we will explore some of the medical practices of the Safavid period.

The Golden Age of Islamic Medicine is associated not with the Safavids but rather, with the 9th – 12th centuries, in cities such as Baghdad and Damascus where medical books from neighbouring regions were translated from Greek into Arabic. They included works by the Greek physician Galen of Pergamon who promoted the theory of the four humors; black bile, yellow bile, blood, and phlegm that formed the basis of what is called Galenic medicine.

MANSUR'S ANATOMY

The Safavids remained ever faithful to much of the same medical therapies practiced in Galenic and Avicennian traditions. Aside from minor changes, these works were faithfully copied during the Safavid reign.

This anatomical illustration of a squatting human figure is currently on display at the ACM. It is part of a 17th century manuscript copy of the *Tašrīḥ-e manšūrī*, or *Mansur's Anatomy* and focuses particularly on the figure's vascular and nervous systems. The manuscript was first composed in Shiraz in 1398 by physician, Mansur ibn Muhammad ibn al-Faqih Ilyas. It is organised into five chapters each featuring a system of the body: skeletal, nervous, muscular, venous and arterial. The text is clearly



Medical drawing from the 17th century manuscript, Mansur's Anatomy.

based on Galen, however Mansur challenges some historical assertions, particularly those about embryonic development. For example, he disputes Hippocrates' belief that the brain is the first of the body's organs to develop. Instead, he finds favor in the assertion that the heart is the first of the organs to form. Many copies of *Mansur's Anatomy* still survive today which lends proof to the importance of anatomical knowledge among physicians and surgeons in the Islamic world and their continued reliance on the Galenic tradition.

DE MATERIA MEDICA

During the Safavid period a large number of physicians left Persia and emigrated to India. They did so for many reasons, including internal conflicts, religious intolerance, but most of all, for lucrative incomes at the Mughal courts.

A folio from the *Kitab-i hasha'ish* or *Book of Herbs* from India, is on display at the ACM. It is a Persian translation of the *De Materia Medica*, a manuscript compiled in the first century CE by the Greek physician Dioscorides. It lists and describes around 700 plants and over 1,000 drugs along with descriptions of their medicinal effects.

This Indian folio, commissioned around 1595, is strikingly similar in style to an incomplete, unbound manuscript housed at the University of Pennsylvania Library. Historian and collector, Simon Digby attributes the manuscript to the Court of Bijapur, during the reign of Muhammad Adil Shah II (1580-1627).



Folio from the Book of Herbs from India, 1595.

The folio contains colourful, surreal drawings of three plants and their descriptions written in a fine Nasta'liq cursive. Even if court rulers themselves were not physicians, scientific books were held in the highest esteem and likely to be found in their libraries.

While the movement of Persian physicians and texts to India during the 16th - 18th centuries is well established, Professor Fabrizio Speziale at the School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS), Center for South Asian Studies, Paris, considers the transference of Ayurvedic medicine from India into Safavid Persia a lesser known Golden Age of Medicine. "This process of introducing Indian medical knowledge through Persian language can be considered among the great translation movements in the field of medicine realised in the Muslim world".

BRASS BOWL WITH ARABIC WRITING

While it is clear that medical texts such as *Mansur's Anatomy* and *De Materia Medica* had an impact on the health of the elite, they did

A Magico-medicinal brass bowl etched verses from the Qur'an.

not do much to heal the masses. This is because physicians trained in Galenic medicine served urban areas, and their numbers were inadequate even for the cities in which they lived. Moreover, they would have treated mainly the wealthy. The majority of the Persian population was rural and would not have had access to hospitals. They relied primarily on folk medicine that has its roots in antiquity.

Persian folk medicine is composed mostly of natural elements, folk remedies and metaphysical cures passed down the generations. Water has long been associated with cleansing and healing, as well as being the source of all creation, per the Qur'anic dictum: "And We made from water every living thing" (21:30).

The ACM's 17th century brass bowl from Iran employs the ancient healing properties of water. Arabic writing can be seen on both the interior and exterior of this bowl. In order to further enhance the healing properties of water, the bowl is densely engraved with various Qur'anic verses. Pious invocations and prayers infused with Quranic citations are essential ingredients of Prophetic medicine, which is a tradition of fusing the Prophet's advice on health, medication, hygiene with popular cures. Much of the success of Prophetic medicine can be attributed to its dynamic nature. Not only did it recognise and often include Galenic medicine, Prophetic medicine typically also incorporated folk medical traditions.

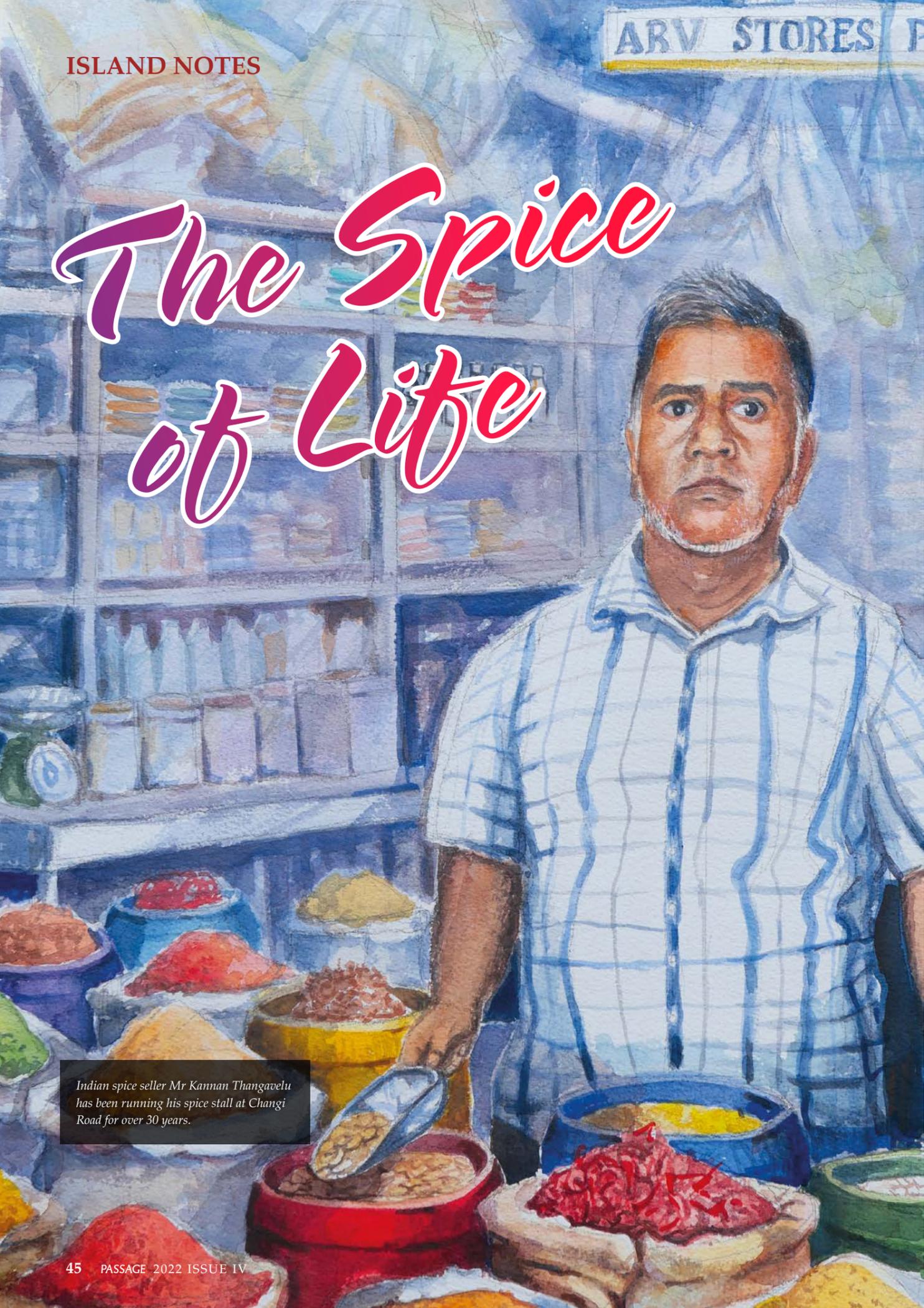
To use the bowl, water is poured in and comes into contact with the Quranic verses, making the liquid healing and protective. Magico-medicinal bowls were used to treat most illnesses as well as acute events such as snake bites or scorpion stings. It was popular for easing childbirth pains, especially if saffron was added to the water. The bowl has a raised central boss in which the user places three fingers to gain added control in handling the bowl. Historically, Persian royals drank wine from bowls of similar form made of precious metals. They would have benefitted from the extra hand control especially if they were intoxicated. In the ACM's brass bowl, the raised boss could aid the patient in drinking water while reclining in bed. If the patient was too ill to drink, an assigned proxy could drink the water on their behalf.

In the case of the Kurdish sheep herder that was struck down by a scorpion, his chances of survival were rather low. Given his agrarian lifestyle, he most likely would only have had access to folk medical treatments. However, by drinking plenty of holy water, through faith, he might have survived. Exploring the medieval Islamic medical artefacts doesn't stop here. Find your way to ACM's second floor and enjoy many more examples of healing and protective objects of the past beautifully displayed in the Islamic Gallery. 📍

MICHELE HERTZ has been an ACM docent since 2017. She has a background in nursing and is a proud mum of 13-year-old twins.

The Spice of Life

ARV STORES P



Indian spice seller Mr Kamnan Thangavelu has been running his spice stall at Changi Road for over 30 years.

DARLY FURLONG LOOKS AT THE HEALING POWERS OF AYURVEDIC SPICES AND **ZAINAL ABIDIN RAHMAN** PRESENTS POPULAR MALAY HERBAL REMEDIES

Paintings by Yusoff Abdul Latiff

AYURVEDIC SPICES

Ayurveda is the ancient Indian science of preventative and curative medicine, dating back more than 3,000 years. It is derived from the Sanskrit words *ayur* meaning 'life' and *veda* meaning 'knowledge'. Indian mythology credits Brahma, the creator of the universe, with revealing Ayurvedic principles to Indra, God of Thunder. When humankind was overcome by disease and pestilence, Indra unveiled those principles to the ancient sages.

These principles dictate that the optimal way to ward off disease is through balanced meals, yoga, and meditation. Every meal should incorporate six tastes: sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent, and astringent. Spices play an important role in creating balanced meals as they add flavour and are packed with healing power.

Writing about spices reminded me to augment my spice box at home, I headed to Tekka market and chatted with one of the spice shop owners. He claimed that his mutton curry spice blend was the most popular, but his curry and sambar mixes (a spiced dish made with pigeon pea lentils) were popular among Indian vegetarians. Spice shops can be found in your local wet markets, but Little India might have the largest concentration of them. For a different perspective, I also met the owner of a spice shop on Kreta Ayer Road, he proudly told me that he learnt how to make successful blends from his grandmother and others in his kampong, as a young boy. He claimed his Indian curry spice and masala chai blends are popular, not only with his Indian clients, but also with European and Japanese clients.

While all spices are superstars, here are four picks used extensively since the ancient times:

TURMERIC has anti-inflammatory, anti-viral, antiseptic, antitumour and antioxidant properties. A mixture of turmeric, water and oil/milk is applied to the bride and groom for the 'Haldi' ceremony (Indian pre-wedding ceremony) to give their skin a glow.

CUMIN has antioxidant, antibacterial and anticancer properties. Also, it aids digestion, improves symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome and boosts memory.

FENNEL has antioxidant and antibacterial properties. Fennel tea is a popular ayurvedic remedy for indigestion, easing menstrual cramps and enhancing mental alertness.

BLACK PEPPER has antibacterial, antifungal, and antitumor properties. It also improves appetite, boosts metabolism, and treats depression. A concoction of black pepper, ginger, basil leaves, cinnamon, and honey helps to ward off colds.

Ayurvedic spices are delicious and have a balancing effect on physiology. Add them to your meals in small quantities daily, to enjoy their aromas and flavours, thereby enhancing your health and well-being.

MALAY HERBS

One of the two Malay *jamu* (herbal) stalls at Pasar Geylang Serai is run by Hidayah Abdullah and her sister-in-law Siti Norhuda Salleh, a fourth-generation *jamu* seller. They sell fresh rhizome herbs such as ginger and turmeric root, as well as processed herbal products.

These herbs are part of the ethnobotany of the Nusantara (an old Javanese term referring to the Southeast Asia). Anyone with a health concern or beauty need will visit this *jamu* stall. I watched a few customers snapping up bottles of chilled, fresh *kunyit* (curcumin) juice, good for lowering blood sugar and blood pressure.

Of all the herbs sold at a *jamu* stall, the glossy, heart-shaped *sireh* (Piper betel) leaves are one of the most important in Malay culture. In Yusoff's painting, Hidayah holds a bunch of *sireh* leaves in her hands. Loose leaves are sold in small stacks or folded into cones to hold *bunga rampai*, a beautifully scented Malay potpourri of finely-sliced fragrant *pandan* leaves infused with rose water, shavings of kaffir lime rind and topped with *cempaka* and *cananga* flowers.

For traditional Malay weddings, *sireh* leaf cones filled with *bunga rampai* are arranged in a pyramid-like bouquet known as the *sireh dara* at the front corner of the bridal dais together with the *bunga pahar*, a pyramid of hard-boiled eggs on glutinous rice at the other corner. These are given out to guests as wedding favours at the end of the wedding solemnisation as a token of appreciation. Guests bring home the lingering aroma of the *bunga rampai* which reminds them of the happy occasion.

Sireh leaves are also used as a beauty product. A bride who wants to look radiant on her wedding day will grind several fresh *sireh* leaves with water and turmeric to a smooth paste and apply it to her face. When the paste has dried and is washed off, she is left with a glowing complexion.

It is also believed that if a baby is crying because of a bloated tummy, a *sireh* leaf that has been warmed over a fire can be applied to the tummy and it will soothe the baby.

In the past, guests in a Malay home would be offered *sireh* to chew as a sign of hospitality. Thin slices of areca nut (areca catheca) are wrapped in a fresh *sireh* leaf smeared with a dash of lime paste. Chewing betel nut is said to increase alertness, a sense of wellbeing and euphoria, so naturally, the conversation would be smooth and convivial. Betel nut also has been known to stimulate the appetite and get the digestive juices flowing.

Ageing men looking to boost their virility could grind a few *sireh* leaves with water, add a slice of *halia* (ginger) and some honey, stir, strain and drink the concoction.

Over generations, the *kunyit*, *cekor*, *temu lawak*, *halia bara* and more have become essential items both in Malay food and medicine.

In the 1950s, my late maternal grandmother would grind different herbs like ginger, curcumin, garlic, cloves, cinnamon and coriander into a paste and simmer it in coconut oil in a hot wok for an entire day to produce a spicy herbal oil called *minyak urat*. This oil would be cooled, bottled and kept handy at home for use on wounds, swellings, muscle sprains, bacterial infection and massage. Regrettably nobody inherited the recipe and expertise from her. 📖

Caroline Carfantan



Caroline with her husband Marc and their daughter Mila in 2018.

PATRICIA BJAALAND WELCH REMEMBERS HER FRIEND AND ACTIVE FOM MEMBER WHO PASSED AWAY on 11 AUGUST 2022

“I got upgraded to a window seat!” Caroline texted me one day with a selfie of her smiling, seated by a window, but it was a hospital window where she was undergoing chemotherapy. If there ever was a person who believed “when life gives you sour grapes, make wine”, it was Caroline, only in her case, her favourite ‘wine’ was champagne. She enjoyed life, and it was that playful spirit that also won her a best outfit prize at the 2019 ACM Docent Christmas Party.

She was someone you could call and ask, “There’s a new exhibition at Gilman Barracks; want to go?” and you’d usually get a “Yes”. Then the day arrived when she was wearing a turban, and I knew she was sick, but we never talked about the cancer in those early days. We just carried on as usual going to exhibitions, meeting for coffee, recommending a newly discovered book or article to one another, or grabbing lunch at Privé.

Caroline was an active docent at the Malay Heritage Centre (MHC), Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) and Indian Heritage Centre (IHC). She guided more than 200

tours for FOM, as well as serving as the French docent coordinator at MHC from 2017, and working with Jyoti and Sadiah on the Volunteer Appreciation Committee.

She had a fine mind and was a loyal friend. She was also the contributor we could always depend on for well-researched, interesting articles for *PASSAGE*, submitted on time!



Caroline dressed up in a Santa hat for the ACM Docent Christmas party in 2019.

Her positive attitude pervaded so much of her life even after she learned she had a very aggressive terminal cancer. After she joined the Southeast Asian Ceramic Society, she joined our trips to famous kiln sites (Jingdezhen, Changsha, and the dehua kilns) where we dug through barrels of ‘bargains’ together. She got up at dawn to search riverbeds for shards. She was always keen to learn and kept on reading and guiding as long as she could. She had a wonderful husband, Marc, who supported her in all her interests, and she was terribly proud of their daughter, Mila, and her equestrian achievements.

Many of us are going to miss Caroline very much, and our heartfelt sympathy goes out to her entire family. 📌



Caroline with friends on a study trip to Xiamen, China in 2017.

DARLY FURLONG is a passionate volunteer of museum-based learning for children and leads other causes in Singapore that facilitate social justice.

ZAINAL ABIDIN A RAHMAN is the president of the Society of Malay Heritage Medicine. He actively documents and promotes Malay healing practices.

YUSOFF ABDUL LATIFF is a watercolour artist based in Singapore. Check out his work on Instagram: @yusofflatiff



Hidayah Abdullah and her sister-in-law Siti Norhuda Salleh, a fourth-generation jamu seller, run their stall at the Geylang Serai Market. They sell fresh herbs such as piper betel leaves, ginger and turmeric root, as well as processed herbal products.

BATIK, IT'S PERSONAL

DARLENE KASTEN REPORTS
ON THE *BATIK KITA* EXHIBITION AT
THE ACM

Photos courtesy of the Asian Civilisations Museum.

The current special exhibition at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) *Batik Kita: Dressing in Port Cities* is a

celebration of individual experiences within a shared cultural heritage in port cities across Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Southeast Asia.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU WEAR

What could be more reflective of our individuality than the clothes we wear? In the case of this magnificent *kain dodot* which lauds over the entrance of the special exhibition gallery, it is clear that the wearer was someone of royal bearing. Literally double the size of the usual batik *kain panjang* or long cloth, it is made by sewing two batiks together along the selvedges. Its size signals that it was meant to make an impression for an important ceremonial occasion, as the photograph beside it confirms, showing an aristocrat regally wearing a voluminous dodot for his wedding, draped and folded as an overskirt, with a train of fabric hanging to one side.

The *dodot* is filled with powerful and protective motifs. The wearer's pure spirit is represented by the diamond-



Dodot (ceremonial waistcloth). Java, Solo, around 1900 or earlier. Batik tulis and goldleaf prada work.



Sawunggaling (fighting roosters) in Batik Indonesia style. Central Java, Solo, around 2000. Batik tulis. On loan from the family of Mr and Mrs Lee Kip Lee.

shaped central panel, his noble bearing identified through the *dodot*'s overall pattern design in sombre soja brown and indigo blue. The background contains the overall *semen* vegetal pattern featuring the double winged garuda, or *sawak* which, during Dutch colonial rule, could only be worn by the highest ranking nobility in the Central Java sultanates.

A NEW BATIK FOR A NEW INDONESIA

In the mid-1950s Indonesia's first president Soekarno understood the importance of a national identity, and sought a unifying symbol of Indonesian culture and the new modern republic. He turned to KRT Hardjonagora Go Tik Swan, the most revered batik maker of the time and asked him to craft a new batik style called Batik Indonesia. With Indonesia's recent declaration of independence, restrictions on who could wear the royal batik motifs had been lifted and Go Tik Swan made them available to the world through new and innovative designs.

One such Batik Indonesia is a bright orange *kain panjang* on loan from collector Peter Lee which contains the mythical bird *Sawunggaling*. Go Tik Swan drew inspiration for the motif from several disparate Indonesian cultures. The idea came from a ritual cock-fight he witnessed in Bali during a Hindu festival there. The legend behind the motif originated in East Java and the regalia of two Central Javanese sultans provided the components of his imaginative *sawunggaling* bird. It comprises the *sawung* (rooster) representing bravery and the *galing* (peacock) which stands for authority. Finally, the bright orange background is inspired by the colourful coastal batiks of northern Java.

AUSPICIOUS SYMBOLS IN NORTH JAVA

Cirebon on the north coast of Java has been home to Chinese Muslims for centuries who settled in Java thanks to trade. The design of its court batiks reflected the cross-cultural nature of the region. Cirebon is home to motifs inspired by the imperial Chinese courts.

The most recognisable is the raincloud or *mega mendung* recalling clouds found on Chinese imperial dragon robes. On display is a rare late 19th century court batik belonging to Yogyakarta's Sonobudoyo Museum. The clouds have a three-dimensional quality due to a time-consuming multi-layered wax and dye method, making them look ready to burst with abundant rain, signifying fertile crops and prosperity for the wearer and the people.



ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT ON THE NORTH COAST

The entrepreneurial spirit of European and Eurasian women living on the north coast of Java in the late 19th and early 20th centuries can be seen in a batik style still favoured by Peranakan nonyas today. The women established batik workshops employing hundreds of local craftspeople in Pekalongan and environs. There they created a new style, the *sarong buketan* with art nouveau-inspired floral patterns depicting European flowers in a *buketan* (from the Dutch/French word "bouquet") utilising newly introduced European synthetic dyes in feminine pastel colours. They preferred the smaller *sarong* size hip wrap, allowing a more form-fitting silhouette for the wearer. Dutch entrepreneurs such as sisters Christina and Eliza Van Zuylen were among the first to literally put their marks on their creations by adding a signature to their designs.



(top)
Kain panjang mega mendung. Western Java, Cirebon, late 19th century Batik tulis. On loan from Sonobudoyo Museum, Cultural Office of Yogyakarta Special Region.

(middle)
Kain sarong (unsewn sarong cloth) buketan by Oey Mho Tjoe. Central Java, Pekalongan, Kedungwuni, 1960's. Batik tulis.

(right)
Mid-20th century batik style including a Sarong Kebaya uniform of Singapore Airlines.

One fine example of a *sarong buketan* on display is the lilac and yellow daffodil bouquet-patterned sarong synonymous with the epitome of Peranakan Chinese ateliers in Java, Oey Soy Tjoen, who took the style to a new level. He was the first to add flamboyantly large butterflies showing the full span of both wings to his designs. You can see them along the top of the sarong along with the signature of its maker and the founder's cousin, Oey Mho Tjoen of Kedungwuni.

THE NEW SINGAPORE STYLE

Finally, what could be more emblematic of modern Singapore than the instantly recognisable Singapore Airlines uniform? The exhibition contains a 1982 example of the design by French couturier Pierre Balmain. The original took its inspiration from kebaya "suits" with matching batik tops and bottoms popular at the time, one of which on display nearby has been reproduced for the exhibition by Kiah's gallery in Singapore.

New Singapore styles by contemporary designers Tan Sheau Yun for the Tong Tong Friendship Shop and Oniatta Effendi for Baju by Oniatta draw from tradition fused with global inspiration. For example, one of Sheau Yun's designs is a full-length Chinese-inspired cheongsam silhouette using an African batik made in Holland. Oniatta added a traditional Javanese *kemben* (breast cloth) to her seersucker kebaya but ties it with a Japanese obi belt.

And men are not excluded from the renaissance of batik styling in Singapore, as evidenced by Harris Zaidi's *mega mendung kain panjang* paired with a sapphire blue Chinese *magua* jacket by Lai Chan on display, or the bright orange Iwan Tirta silk tiger shirt belonging to Suhaimi Lazim.

These modern examples demonstrate that artistry and craftsmanship connected to community, culture, and heritage, matter as much today as they did when batik first emerged. *Batik Kita - Our Batik* - is a symbol of the identity of the region and the continued vitality of its culture.



DOCENTS PUT ON A CURATOR'S HAT

DURRIYA DOHADWALA SHARES HOW THE NATIONAL GALLERY SINGAPORE'S LATEST EXHIBITION IN THE WU GUANZHONG SERIES EXPLORES WANDERLUST

Photos courtesy of the National Gallery Singapore.

Wu Guanzhong is one of the most significant Chinese artists of the 20th century, renowned for his distinctive style of integrating Western and Chinese art traditions. The National Gallery Singapore (NGS) is home to one of the largest public collections of his work, and in 2015 it launched a series of exhibitions to investigate the artist's life and art practice. **Wu Guanzhong: Travelling with the Master** is the sixth exhibition in the Wu Guanzhong Exhibition Series.

Unlike the previous five exhibitions in the series, which were developed by museum curators, this exhibition adopts a new approach. Along with the museum professionals, it has been co-curated by four docents - Gertrude Tan, Queenie Chow, Stella Rong and Tina Nixon - who have all been guiding at NGS since 2015.

The process began with an Open Call inviting non-museum professionals to submit proposals for an exhibition on the artist using artworks from the museum's collection. Once a proposal was selected, the team, which comprised of docents from both the English and Chinese language docent groups, worked with NGS's curators to select works from its collection of 129 artworks to develop a narrative, design, texts and public programmes.

Conceived and executed during the pandemic (2021), when travel was largely curtailed, the exhibition explores various aspects of travelling from the perspective of the four docent-curators. All four felt a kinship with the artist for different reasons. While some loved travelling and were well-travelled like Wu, one in particular felt a connection because she grew up close to the artist's hometown in China.

I had the chance to chat with the docents, and all of them felt that while the experience of curating was exciting and novel, it was also a challenging one. As docents, their usual role is to be the intermediary between the museum and the viewer... convey the curatorial intent, bring in personal stories and anecdotes and open the artworks to the audience to interpret in their own ways. To take on the curatorial role was to wear a very different hat! They initially tried to curate as they felt museum curators should, employing a more academic approach. However, the curatorial team reminded them that they should develop their own style as they were docent-curators, and not just curators. The result is a beautifully flowing exhibition of 47 works that appropriately begins with abstract works in the section *Daydreaming*, continues on to *Exploring*, journeys to *Beyond the Horizons* and then wraps up with *Rhapsodies*. This final section captures Wu's desire to indigenise oil painting and modernise Chinese painting with his unique brushstrokes and style. Unique to this exhibition are the postcards next to certain artworks that share the docent-curators personal observations and anecdotes, allowing visitors to draw on their own memories and make connections with the artist's works.

The exhibition runs until 30th October 2022 at the National Gallery Singapore.



A Lotus Flower Island by Wu Guanzhong. 2003. Oil on canvas. Gift of the artist. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.



A Fleet of Boats in Indonesia by Wu Guanzhong. 1994. Oil on canvas. Gift of the artist. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.



Left to right: Docents who co-curated this exhibition: Queenie Chow, Gertrude Tan, Stella Rong, Tina Nixon and NGS curator Jennifer Lam.

A SECOND MOVEMENT

SABINE GEBELE-PHAM

CELEBRATES THE FIRST 20 YEARS OF STPI

When artists from various fields work together with masters in printmaking, their collaboration often results in the new and unexpected, creating outstanding art that pushes the boundaries of paper and printmaking.

Second Movement, the Annual Special Exhibition of the Singapore Tyler Print Institute (STPI) held in the summer of 2022, showcased the first two decades of STPI collaborations, one that saw the transformation of traditionally two-dimensional printmaking in Singapore into multi-dimensional high art.

Second Movement took its name from a series of works by German-American artist Anni Albers, created in 1978 in collaboration with Ken Tyler, the American master printer whose equipment forms the bulk of the the STPI Creative Workshop. Three works from the series, part of the Ken Tyler Collection in Singapore, were presented at this special exhibition, along with another 41 works by 22 artists produced at STPI during its first 20 years.

Anni Albers (1899-1994) was an outstanding artist of the Bauhaus school (1919-1933) that combined crafts and the fine arts. After studying at the Bauhaus she taught there and ran the weaving workshop. In the 1930s she emigrated to the USA with her Bauhaus painter husband Josef. Albers' career in the graphic arts began with a serendipitous visit in 1963 to the Tamarind Lithography Workshop in Los Angeles, an institution at the forefront of a revival in fine art printmaking that was taking place in America at that time. Her husband Josef Albers was working at Tamarind as a Fellow and she was encouraged to try lithography for herself.

In lithography, as opposed to weaving, the artist was able to, in her own words "take a line for a walk", as the line was no longer locked into the loom. More experimentation followed and in 1970, she collaborated with Ken Tyler for the first time at his studio Gemini GEL, marking the beginning of what was to become a fruitful, collaborative relationship with the master printer. Albers never again worked on weaving, but instead focused solely on printmaking until her death in 1994.

Second Movement II is an example of the turning point



South Korean artist Haegue Yang (in black) working on her Edibles Hexaptych during her time at STPI. Image courtesy of STPI.

in Albers' artistic career – from the medium of weaving to printmaking. Albers uses two geometric shapes: the square and the rhombus. If you look at the work from a distance, the square of the paper, the black and the mustard-colored square emerge, which become smaller towards the inside. At the same time, a rhythmic movement results from the diamond-shaped bands which divide the coloured squares into smaller squares.

Seen from close-up, the rhombuses form individual units, from which the whole work is built. Although balanced and harmonious in composition, there is a tension that draws the viewer's eye inward. The work impresses with its typographical brilliance – the result of the exceptional collaboration between Albers and master printer Ken Tyler.

This special exhibition also showcased 22 international visiting artists who produced their works in STPI's creative workshop in Singapore.

During her second residency at STPI, South Korean sculptor Haegue Yang created a series of works entitled *Edibles* where she sent various leafy vegetables through an actual printing press. The leaves released vegetable juice in varying strengths to create imprints in different intense monochrome yellow to green tones. Eitaro Ogawa, STPI's chief printer in 2013, remembers the collaboration, saying "the whole workshop felt Yang's energy and wonder ... the artist helped me to appreciate simple things".

All the artists represented in the exhibition found their strong, independent "artistic voices" before their residency at STPI. But in cooperation with the excellent printers and papermakers, they found a different form of artistic expression in printmaking.



Second Movement II by Anni Albers. 1978. Etching, aquatint on white Arches cover mould-made paper. Photo courtesy of the artist.

#SGFASHIONNOW

DARLENE KASTEN REPORTS ON AN EXHIBITION THAT REDEFINES SINGAPORE FASHION

The 2022 iteration of #SGFASHIONNOW, a collaborative and experimental contemporary fashion showcase, takes centre stage in the Contemporary Gallery at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) to further explore the question posed at last year's inaugural exhibition, "What is Singapore fashion?" The exhibition offers an updated snapshot of Singapore's current fashion landscape, celebrating our diverse fashion senses and championing the next generation of contemporary fashion designers.

Presented in collaboration with LASALLE College of the Arts' School of Fashion, and the Textile and Fashion Federation (TaFF), the exhibition explores the fashion space based on the winning curatorial theme "Architecture of Drape" by Ethan Lai from LASALLE's BA (Hons) Fashion Media and Industries programme.

Responding to the theme, 16 fashion ensembles and for the first time, another ten accessory pieces, are presented by the next generation of Singapore's contemporary fashion designers. The gallery too reflects the architectural theme. It has been transformed into a construction site with an edgy industrial finish, framing Singapore's fashion identity as a work in constant progress that is generative, evolving, and open to change, its design conceived by the Singapore multi-disciplinary design studio FARM.

The ensembles and accessories on display are organised around their visual similarities, be it Construction, Deconstruction or Freestyle. Among the pieces in the Construction showcase is the one-seam shift dress marvel by Thomas Wee. He removed all the elements he considered unnecessary – zips, buttons, hooks, belts and joints – until all that was left on his contemporary rendition of the little black dress was a single seam.

Max Tan was inspired by the extensive possibilities of the *sarong* for his piece found in the Deconstruction showcase. Tan reimagines heritage by adopting the wrapping identifiers of the iconic cultural garment. Deconstructing the *sarong*, he transforms it into its imagined counterpoint, an elegant jumpsuit silhouette.

Similarly the one-of-a-kind batik corset piece by Putri Adif recalls the body conforming quality of the kebaya, a traditional garment, and serves as an empowering tool that amplifies the wearer's confidence.

A highlight in the Freestyle showcase is Latika Balachander's laser-cut neoprene fabric take on the birthday



suit, part of her Blurred Bodies collection. Meant to represent the skin's natural folds as it ages, the contemporary and colourful jacket is inspired by the skin's organic ability to morph, droop and sag.

#SGFASHIONNOW runs till 16 October 2022. In conjunction with the experimental contemporary fashion showcase, members of the public can look forward to a series of student curator tours, interactive activities, and workshops focusing on fashion, craft, and design.

Shang Antique

Established Since 1984



Hevajra - Angkor Wat period, 12th century, Ht. 79cm



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Explore Singapore!

SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER 2022

Please look out for announcements in MMLs, FOM newsletters, Facebook and Instagram for the latest updates.

SINGAPORE'S JOURNEY TOWARDS WATER SUSTAINABILITY

Date: Thursday, 8 September 2022
Time: 8am - 12pm
Fee: \$45 for FOM Members (Guests: \$55)



Have you ever wondered how Singapore, one of the world's most densely populated countries with no natural water resources, manages to supply all its households and industries with an ample supply of clean water? The issue of water sufficiency and security is one of the government's top priorities. Since its independence from Malaysia in 1965, the government has embarked on an innovative, comprehensive approach to meet the nation's water needs and ensure an adequate and affordable supply of water for future generations.

Join Explore Singapore! on a tour to find out about the Four National Taps to achieve this goal. First we will go on a guided tour of the NEWater Plant with its state of the art technology and equipment which turns waste water into ultra-clean water fit for drinking. Then we will go to the Marina Barrage where we will tour the Marina Bridge, the Sustainable Singapore Gallery and the Green Roof. During our bus ride, you will learn about the historical background and visions behind this remarkable journey.

SINGAPORE'S WILD, WILD WEST – KRANJI COUNTRYSIDE TOUR

Date: Thursday, 15 September 2022
Time: 8am - 1pm
Fee: \$70 for FOM Members (Guests: \$80) Lunch included.



Do you want to see a completely different side of Singapore? Then travel with Explore Singapore on a bus trip through the Kranji countryside. No high rise buildings to be seen - only peaceful, green farms and small holdings. Our first stop will be a farm growing wheatgrass, pea sprouts and various types of mushrooms. Then we will see a new way of growing vegetables in vertical farming. At the last stop we go on a guided walking tour through the charming Bollywood Farm. We end the morning with a delicious lunch of produce grown on the farm (included in fee), before we head back to urban Singapore.

LITTLE INDIA HERITAGE AND MURAL ART TRAIL – SERANGOON IN THE 1900s

Date: Thursday, 29 September 2022
Time: 9:30am - 12pm
Fee: \$30 for FOM Members (Guests: \$40)



The early 20th century was a defining period that shaped today's Little India as migrants from India, China and Britain settled in the area and established a diversity of trades and institutions. We will visit some of the most important locations that trace the history of these early settlers in the Serangoon district in the 1900s. These include Chinese clan associations, the Sri Veeramakaliamman Temple, Abdul Gaffoor Mosque, Sakya Muni Buddha Gaya Temple and the Tekka Market, amongst many more.

During our walk we will uncover the origins and history of the many fascinating street names. We will also learn about the original cattle trade that gave its name to Kandang Kerbau Hospital (KKH), and the first race course in Singapore. Learn about the changes and developments that took place at the turn of the century. In recent years many beautiful street murals showcasing Little India's history have sprung up. Our guide will highlight some of them, including the mural of Traditional Trades of Little India by local artist Psyfool. Join us on this tour to learn about the history of Little India, and follow up with the Deepavali Walk in October to learn about this important Indian festival.

JAPANESE CEMETERY TOUR

Date: Thursday, 6 October 2022
Time: 9am - 11:30am
Fee: \$35 for FOM Members (Guests \$45)



Nestled in a suburban residential area of private houses is a peaceful and tranquil park with lush greenery, pretty floral arches and borders. Not many people, including Singaporeans, know about this place, and many will be surprised to learn that it is the largest Japanese cemetery outside Japan.

Established in 1891, the Japanese Cemetery Park, was initially used to bury Japanese prostitutes (known as *karayuki-san*, meaning "women who have gone overseas") who died destitute in Singapore. Later, after 1920, as the Japanese community grew, people from other professions and trades were buried here. These include those involved in agriculture, retail and publishing. In addition, there are remains of World War II casualties and those tried for war crimes.

Over nine hundred tombs can be found here, with styles varying from the very raw and simple to ornate and elaborate, adorned with sculptures of Jizo (Japanese deity) and western Corinthian-style columns. There are tombs of notable Japanese, with intriguing life stories, such as the sailor who became the first Japanese resident in Singapore, the Supreme Commander of Japanese Forces in South East Asia, and several others.

This tour will let you discover another little known part of Singapore and learn another aspect of its history.

DEEPAVALI WALK THROUGH LITTLE INDIA

Date: Thursday, 13 October 2022
Time: 9:30am - 1pm
Cost: S\$45.00 for FOM Members (Guests \$55) Lunch included.



Take a walk with us through the streets of Little India and see how Singapore's Indian community prepares for Deepavali – the vibrant and unique festival of light. FOM docent Abha Kaul will share with us the meaning of Deepavali, explaining the rich customs and traditions associated with this festival, which Hindus consider one of the most important to celebrate. Why is it called the festival of lights? What are the stories surrounding Deepavali or Diwali? Not only is this a very festive and auspicious time but one which is associated with wonderful food. Enjoy a light lunch together to conclude the programme (included in fee). Walk with us and find out more about Deepavali.

HISTORY THROUGH ART AND ARCHITECTURE IN TANJONG PAGAR

Date: Thursday, 20 October 2022
Time: 9:30am - 11am
Fee: \$30 for FOM Members (Guests \$40)



Come and join us on a guided walking tour in Tanjong Pagar, one of the four historical precincts of the iconic Chinatown district in Singapore. We will wander around a precinct full of rich and unique buildings from different historical periods to find out what is the history behind them. Our guide will explain in detail the unique architecture of the Singapore shophouse, a common building design developed during the colonial era. Moving from the past to the current, we will find out how the global phenomenon of street art was integrated into the local Singaporean culture. By the end of the tour you will know more about the story of this city and its people.

TRADITIONAL CHINESE CRAFT WORKSHOPS - JOSS STICKS, FIGURINES AND FUNERAL PAPER OBJECTS

Date: Thursday, 3 November 2022
Time: 10am - 12pm
Fee: \$30 for FOM Members (Guests \$40)



Chinese people pray to gods and deities with lighted joss (incense) sticks. Have you ever wondered why? And do you want to know how they are made? The same powder used for making joss sticks can also be fashioned into an array of figurines. Join us for a visit to a fascinating craft shop to find out the answers. A few doors away is another wonderful shop which makes objects for the dead to ensure they have a comfortable life in the next world. You will be fascinated by what Chinese Taoist believers provide for their deceased family members. Be it big mansions with up-to-date amenities, the latest electronic gadgets – iPads, smartphones, luxury cars, or even maids to serve them, you can order anything you want for your dearly departed.

THIAN HOCK KENG – SINGAPORE'S OLDEST CHINESE TEMPLE

Date: Thursday, 17 November 2022
Time: 9:30am - 11:30 am
Fee: \$35 for FOM Members (Guests \$45)



In 1819 the new British settlement of Singapore attracted traders and coolies from China. In the 1820s-1830s, political turmoil and economic hardship in China gave impetus to the influx of Southern Chinese, mainly Hokkiens from Fujian. Earlier generations of Hokkiens who had settled in Malacca also flocked to Singapore seeking opportunities for a better life; amongst them, pioneers like Tan Tock Seng and Tan Kim Seng. They became leaders of the Chinese community in Singapore, supported the clan associations and built a temple to Mazu, Goddess of the Sea and the great protector of all who made a living from the sea.

Built in 1840 along what was once the seafront at Telok Ayer Street, the Thian Hock Keng temple was beautifully restored in 2001. The temple has won several awards, including a UNESCO award for heritage conservation. Join us for a tour led by a descendant of the two pioneers that will cover history, architectural features and symbolism, and Chinese cultural and religious heritage.

SINGAPORE WET MARKET AND HAWKER FOODS

Date: Thursday, 24 November 2022
Time: 9:30am - 12.30pm
Fee: \$40 for FOM Members (Guests \$50) Food and drinks included.



One of the attractions of Singapore is the wide variety of delicious food that is cheap and easily available at hawker centres.

For many Singaporeans eating is a passion and hunting for that 'best stall' for a particular dish is a national pastime. The many races of people living here have contributed to an interesting melting pot of market and street food.

Local 'wet' markets are fascinating for the variety of foods not found in supermarkets, as well as other non-food items. Step into any food court or hawker centre and you will be greeted with colourful signs beckoning you with dishes such as Char Kway Teow, Hokkien Mee, Chai Tau Kway, and more. If you would like to discover the history of these places and taste some of the local favourites, come and join this tour.

HISTORIC CHURCHES WALKING TOUR

Date: Thursday, 8 December 2022
Time: 9am - 11.30 am
Fee: \$35 for FOM Members (Guests \$45)



A crest of the King of Portugal, a badge in the shape of an anchor to guide youths, a chapel with a secular purpose and an underground space for the worship of God: where will you find these four things in Singapore and what do they have in common?

Come on this walk that will take us to historic churches of Singapore and discover the many different branches of Christianity found here. They are housed in historic buildings, all unique in style and architectural form, ranging from the austere to the elaborate. Each has its own story to tell about the early missionaries and the people who formed the first congregations.

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, many of these churches will also be beautifully decorated to usher in one of the most important festivals of the Christian calendar.

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ABOUT FOM

Friends of the Museums Singapore (FOM) is a non-profit society that provides members with opportunities to learn, share and experience Asian art, history and culture through a myriad of activities organised by our volunteers.

As an FOM member, you will have the incredible opportunity to share your passion for museums with visitors by joining our docent training programmes that prepare volunteers to become guides and docents for Singapore's museums and heritage-related organisations.

You can also join a book club, attend an enlightening lecture series, participate in a charity event or immerse yourself in the world of Asian textiles. We even have a film club! Join a guided tour to explore Singapore or sign up for an overseas study tour for an unforgettable experience.

FOM members enjoy free access to NHB museums as well as discounts at selected retail outlets, theatres and restaurants along with a subscription to *PASSAGE* magazine.

Come and be a part of a truly vibrant, diverse community of like-minded people, form friendships and create memories that last a lifetime.

For more information, visit our website at www.fom.sg or contact the FOM Office.



MUSEUM DIRECTORY AND EXHIBITIONS

Please check individual museum websites for latest information on guided tours by FOM docents.

COMPILED BY DURRIYA DOHADWALA

ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555
Tel: 6332 7798
www.acm.org.sg

Opening hours:
Daily 10:00 am - 7:00 pm
Fri 10:00 am - 9:00 pm



FOM guided tours:
Please consult the museum's website at www.nhb.gov.sg/acm/whats-on/tours/daily-guided-tours

Understanding Asia through Singapore
The new and renovated galleries at the ACM use Singapore's history as a port city as a means of understanding the interconnections among Asian cultures and between Asia and the world.

CHANGI CHAPEL AND MUSEUM



1000 Upper Changi Road North, Singapore 507707
Tel: 62142451 / 62426033
www.nhb.gov.sg/changichapelmuseum

Opening Hours:
Closed on Mon except Public Holidays
Tues - Sun: 9.30 am - 5.30 pm

FOM guided tours: Fri, 11am

The newly revamped Changi Chapel and Museum (CCM) features new content and artefacts presented in an intimate and engaging format to tell the story of the prisoners of war and civilians interned in Changi prison camp during the Japanese Occupation. As part of the revamp, the National Museum of Singapore which manages CCM has been collecting stories and personal objects from families of former internees that emphasise their personal experiences. The museum's narrative is centred on remembrance and reflection, encouraging visitors to contemplate both the hardships that the internees underwent, as well as their courage and resilience in the face of difficulties.

INDIAN HERITAGE CENTRE

5 Campbell Lane, Singapore 209924
www.indianheritage.org.sg

Closed on Mon
Opening Hours:
Tues - Thurs
10:00 am to 7:00 pm
Fri and Sat 10:00 am to 8:00 pm
Sun and Public Holidays 10:00 am to 4:00 pm



FOM guided tours: Tues to Fri
Please consult the centre's website at <https://www.indianheritage.gov.sg/en/visit/guided-tours>

The Indian Heritage Centre (IHC) celebrates the history and heritage of the Indian diaspora in Singapore and the Southeast Asian region. From early contacts between the Indian subcontinent and this region, the culture and social history of the community after the arrival of the British, through to the early stirrings of nationalism and political identity, and the contributions of Singapore's Indian community - the five galleries take visitors on a fascinating journey through the Indian diaspora. Located in Singapore's colourful and vibrant Little India precinct, the centre opened in May 2015 and is our only purpose-built museum.

MALAY HERITAGE CENTRE



85 Sultan Gate, Singapore 198501
Tel: 6391 0450
www.malayheritage.org.sg

Opening hours:
Tues - Sun 10:00 am to 6:00 pm (last admission 5:30 pm), closed on Mon

FOM guided tours:
Please consult the centre's website at www.malayheritage.gov.sg/en/visit#Free-Guided-Tours

MHC will close in October 2022 for a revamp.

The Malay Heritage Centre (MHC) provides wonderful cultural exposure and learning opportunities for visitors of all ages and interests. Situated amidst the Istana Kampong Gelam, Gedung Kuning and the surrounding Kampong Gelam precinct, the Centre acts as a vital heritage institution for the Malay community in Singapore. Through its exhibits, programmes and activities, the Centre hopes to honour the past while providing a means for present-day expression.

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE

93 Stamford Road, Singapore 178897
Tel: 6332 3659
www.nationalmuseum.sg

Opening hours:
Daily 10:00 am - 7:00 pm



FOM guided tours:
Please consult the Museum's website at www.nhb.gov.sg/nationalmuseum/visitor-information/nmsquicklinkretailvenue/retail/guided-tour

The National Museum of Singapore is the nation's oldest museum that seeks to inspire with stories of Singapore and the world. Its history dates to 1849, when it opened on Stamford Road as the Raffles Library and Museum.

ON/OFF: Every day Technology that changed our Lives - 1970s to 2000s (Until 30 October 2022)

Step into this immersive showcase and explore how everyday technological tools changed and shaped the lives of Singaporeans from the 1970s to 2000s. Set against the backdrop of the nation's industrialisation and rapid transformation period, the showcase takes visitors through familiar local settings at home, work and other social spaces with a small, yet specially curated selection of technology icons from Singapore's past. Visitors can look forward to getting to know and reconnecting with some of these technologies, through several themed installations with complementary gamified experiences including an escape room activity

Hawkerpura: Atmosphere, Character and Flavours (Until 31 December 2022)

In visualising and creating various everyday and specialty dishes across generations, Singapore has proudly carved its own identity and passion centring around the subject of food. With the introduction of dedicated spaces for hawker stalls and their constant development over the years, the uniquely-Singaporean hawker culture continues to remain strongly rooted in the hearts of locals

NUS Museum, NUS Centre for the Arts
University Cultural Centre
50 Kent Ridge Crescent, Singapore 119279
Tel: 6516 8817
www.museum.nus.edu.sg

Free admission

Opening hours:
Tues - Sat 10:00 am - 6:00 pm, Closed on Sun and Public Holidays.
Monday: Visits by appointment for schools/faculties only.

Fistful of Colours: Moments of Chinese Cosmopolitanism (Until 31 December 2022)

Fistful of Colours: Moments of Chinese Cosmopolitanism brings together artworks from the late Qing Dynasty to the present moment to explore the social history of art, with a particular emphasis on the situatedness of Chinese ink works amidst its political milieu. With reference to the concept of Chinese cosmopolitanism as proposed by scholar Pheng Cheah, the exhibition connects the artistic and scholarly advocacy embodied by the artists presented, telling a story of the social life between artists and society through both modern and contemporary experiences of the overseas Chinese intellectual and mercantile communities, their pursuits of Chinese modernity, and their collective cultural commitments at the dawn of globalisation.

NUS BABA HOUSE

157 Neil Road, Singapore 088883
Tel: 6227 5731
www.babahouse.nus.edu.sg

Guided tours Mon - Fri, 10:00am, online registration required

For opening hours and guided tour information, visit the NUS Baba House website at babahouse.nus.edu.sg/plan-your-visit.

For enquiries, email: babahouse@nus.edu.sg.

Conceived as a heritage house facilitating research, appreciation and reflection of Straits Chinese history and culture, the NUS Baba House was built around 1895 and was once the ancestral home of a Peranakan Chinese family. During the one-hour guided tour, guests will be introduced to the history and architectural features of the house, and experience visiting a Straits Chinese family home in a 1920s setting, furnished with heirlooms from its previous owners and other donors.



THE PERANAKAN MUSEUM

(Closed until 2023)
39 Armenian Street, Singapore 179941
Tel: 6332 7591
www.peranakanmuseum.sg



This intimate museum possesses one of the finest and most comprehensive collections of Peranakan objects. Galleries on three floors illustrate the cultural traditions and the distinctive visual arts of the Peranakans. The museum is currently closed to prepare for its next phase of development.

SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

71 Bras Basah Road, Singapore 189555
Tel: 6332 3222
www.singaporeartmuseum.sg

The Singapore Art Museum (SAM) focuses on international contemporary art practices, specialising in Singapore and Southeast Asia. The main building of the museum (located along 71 Bras Basah Road) is currently closed to prepare it for its next phase of development. While we wait, SAM is not missing in action but a Museum In Action: bringing art experiences into everyday spaces around Singapore and actively collaborating with partners and communities.



SAM AT TANJONG PAGAR DISTRI PARK

Opening hours:
Daily 10:00 am - 7:00 pm.
SAM at Tanjong Pagar Distripark is the museum's new contemporary art space. Find out more at <https://www.bit.ly/SAM-MuseumInAction>.

Natasha - Singapore Biennale 2022 (16 October 2022 - 19 March 2023)
The 7th Singapore Biennale 2022 or Natasha, opens with an exceptional line-up of over 50 artists and collaborators. Audiences can look forward to projects that create spaces for interaction, reflection and which invite public participation.

Can Everybody See My Screen? (Until 11 December 2022)

Can Everybody See My Screen? looks at the various ways in which artistic practices engage with an increasingly digitalised world - from technological mediation of the senses and the body, to social critique, to how digital spaces may engender possibilities for self-identification, kinship, and love. Drawing from works in the SAM Collection and through new commissions, the exhibition highlights recent explorations while tracing back to earlier practices in the decade following 2000.

STPI CREATIVE WORKSHOP AND GALLERY

41 Robertson Quay, Singapore 238236
Tel: 6336 3663
www.stpi.com.sg

Opening hours:
Mon - Fri: 10:00 am - 7:00 pm, Sat: 9:00 am - 6:00 pm, Sun: 10:00 am - 5:00 pm
Closed Public Holidays

FOM guided tours:
For the FOM guided tour schedule, to learn

more about STPI's public programmes, special evening tours, and programmes in Japanese, Korean, Mandarin and French, please visit stpi.com.sg.

STPI is a dynamic creative workshop and contemporary art gallery based in Singapore. Established in 2002, STPI is a not-for-profit organisation committed to promoting artistic experimentation in the mediums of print and paper and has become one of the most cutting-edge destinations for contemporary art in Asia.



Print Screen: Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan (Until November 20 2022)

STPI presents three consecutive solo artistic presentations at our pop-up space, ArtSpace @ HeluTrans, under the umbrella of PRINT SCREEN. The first component of this pop-up will feature the print and paper works created through the artists' residency with STPI. The second component is a screening room which will feature the artists' films, or films that are related to their works. The first two editions will see the works of Isabel & Alfredo Aquilizan (b. Philippines, based in Australia) and Melati Suryodarmo (Indonesia). The last edition with the final artist will take place near the end of 2022.

SUN YAT SEN NANYANG MEMORIAL HALL

12 Tai Gin Road, Singapore 327874
Tel: 6256 7377
www.wanqingyuan.org.sg

Opening hours:
Tues - Sun 10:00 am - 5:00 pm,
Closed on Mon

FOM guided tours:
Please consult the Memorial Hall's website at <https://www.sysnmh.org.sg/en/visit/free-guided-tours>.

Built in 1902, this double-storey villa was the nerve centre of Dr Sun Yat Sen's revolutionary movement in Southeast Asia. It re-opened to the public on 9 October 2011 and the revamped Memorial Hall pays tribute to the vital role played by Singapore and Nanyang in the 1911 Revolution. Focusing on the contributions of Dr. Sun Yat Sen's key supporters in Singapore, the refurbished museum sheds light on the lesser-known details of Singapore and Nanyang's involvement in the 1911 Revolution.



Free general admission to all NHB museums for FOM members and one guest.

BURIED TREASURE CHESTS



The betel box my parents bought in the 1970s while we were living in Manila.

TALIA WEBB DESCRIBES HOW A CHILDHOOD GAME SPARKED AN ADULT OBSESSION WITH COLLECTING

Photos by Vincent Kasten unless otherwise stated.

I rediscovered a treasured object from my childhood during the Circuit Breaker at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in Singapore in 2020. Many used this “lockdown period” to take up new hobbies; some reconnected with past loves. I combined both of these with betel chewing - not the actual habit but with the accoutrements surrounding the custom.

I was preparing to give a lecture on Zoom for fellow Asian Civilisations Museums (ACM) docents. The topic was *sireh* or betel chewing. *Sireh* is the betel quid, whose basic ingredients are piper betel leaf, lime paste and slices of areca nut. It is claimed that chewing the quid produces a sense of well-being and euphoria, heightened alertness and increased capacity to work. However, regular betel chewing may also lead to serious health issues similar to those associated with tobacco use.

In Singapore, betel chewing was once an integral part of Malay and Peranakan cultures. It was used to welcome a guest into your home and also played a role in matrimonial customs. I was amazed that a custom once so entrenched here could virtually disappear within a generation.

What intrigued me even more was the beauty of the betel boxes themselves. One box that I came across in my research caught my attention - a silver and brass box from Mindanao, southern Philippines, whose looks sparked memories of a similar one my parents have.

When the Circuit Breaker ended and I was able to return to the ACM, I was excited to come face to face with the Mindanao betel box in the Islamic Arts gallery. Lo and behold, it looked identical to one my parents had acquired in the 1970s while we were living in Manila. The box travelled back to Australia with us where it happily resides on the coffee table in my parents’ living room. As a child, I did not know it as a receptacle for betel chewing ingredients, but as a secret treasure chest for hide and seek games with my brother.

Imagine my surprise and delight when my parents sent me our beautiful betel box! Not only was it almost a perfect match for the one in the ACM gallery, it still contained tiny treasures in one of its lime-encrusted compartments left over from an abandoned childhood game!

Once my eyes were opened to the wonders and beauty of betel paraphernalia, I found that in my travels as an adult, I had already unintentionally started my own collection with a silver betel container from Cambodia and areca nut cutters from Bali.

It’s been two years since I reignited my *sireh* obsession and my collection has grown to include a small lacquer betel box from Myanmar, a Peranakan *chelpa* (portable container) and several more unique areca nut cutters, my favourite being the naga one pictured here with a betel leaf and sliced areca nut.



My favourite areca nut cutter with naga motifs.

TALIA WEBB credits her parents Jan and Gerard Webb with not only facilitating her *sireh* collection but also igniting her love of history and travel, both of which have come in handy being a docent at ACM.

Friends of the Museums (FOM) presents MONDAY MORNING LECTURES September - December 2022

Currently as per FOM Council decision, Autumn 2022 MML season will be held both in-person (1st, 3rd and 5th Mondays of the month) and on Zoom (2nd and 4th Mondays of the month). The in-person lectures will be held at the ACM auditorium and are open to the public. Zoom lectures are open to the FOM members only. Visit the Community Events page on the FOM website to sign up and read more about each speaker. The lectures will begin promptly at 11am.

05 SEPTEMBER, 2022
THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF THE PERANAKANS: REPRESENTATION, IDENTITY AND TASTE
In-Person Lecture. Speaker: Kenson Kwok

The talk will trace the representation of Peranakan material culture in museums in Malaysia and Singapore, and suggest what is unique - and not so unique - across a range of material categories including ceramics, beadwork and furniture.

12 SEPTEMBER, 2022
ZOOM LECTURE: THE EARLIEST RAMAYANA DEPICTIONS IN INDIAN ART
Zoom Lecture. Speaker: Prof Naman P. Ahuja

This talk discusses the oldest known depictions of a Ramayana narrative in Indian art. A substantial number of plaques and pots, of terracotta and ivory, that show the abduction of Sita, can be dated between the 2nd century BCE and 2nd century CE. Prof Ahuja shows how this narrative was popular at Jain and Buddhist monuments as well. These early discoveries force us to link these depictions with versions of the Ramayana story in the earliest known Buddhist texts, versions of which are available in Chinese and Pali.

19 SEPTEMBER, 2022
SINGAPORE ON THE FRONT LINE: DEFENCE IN KONFRONTASI, 1964-66
In-Person Lecture. Speaker: Brian P. Farrell

Singapore was repeatedly attacked during Indonesian Konfrontasi by small incursions of raiders from the Riau Islands. But it’s defenders also had to plan and prepare for a potentially more serious attack. How they did so can tell us something about continuities and changes in things that relate to defending Singapore. This talk will analyse that experience, those actions, and those considerations.

26 SEPTEMBER, 2022
THE ART OF CARTOGRAPHY: ILLUSTRATIVE ELEMENTS IN HISTORICAL MAPS OF SOUTHEAST ASIA
Zoom Lecture. Speaker: Jane M. Jacobs

Historical maps often contain illustrative features that are decorative and documentary in their function. The talk introduces the audience to this rich illustrative tradition using maps of Southeast Asia, explaining some of the key elements: cartouches, scenic depictions and illustrations of people, maritime vessels and imagined creatures.

03 OCTOBER, 2022
THE NATIONAL COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAM AND THE MYTH OF MERITOCRACY IN CHINA
In-Person Lecture. Speaker: Zachary Moss Howlett

China’s National College Entrance Exam, known as the Gaokao, is taken by ten million high school seniors every year. Continuing China’s long historical legacy of meritocratic exams, the Gaokao enshrines the ideal of open, anonymous, and competitive meritocracy. In present-day China, Gaokao-based meritocracy is mythical in both senses of the word: an inspiring cultural model and a chimeric ideal.

10 OCTOBER, 2022
HISTORY OF THE CHINESE WRITING SYSTEM
Zoom Lecture. Speaker: Hongyuan Dong

This lecture provides an introduction to the development of the Chinese writing system from more than 3,000 years ago to the present time, drawing on research in linguistics and archaeology. Debates on whether the Chinese writing system is ideographic will also be discussed. New perspectives shed light on these issues, towards a better understanding of the Chinese language and culture.

17 OCTOBER, 2022
THE PANCHATANTRA: UNFORGETTABLE FABLES FROM ANCIENT INDIA
In-Person Lecture. Speaker: Abha Dayal Kaul

Indian children grow up with stories from the Panchatantra, a classic work of ancient India’s literature. This talk brings you intriguing fables of humans and animals, set in five major threads. Meet some star characters who act out the flaws and foolishness as well as the wisdom and goodness of human conduct, via the illustrative story, one that teaches by example in the most simple, yet effective way.



31 OCTOBER, 2022
EMPRESS DOWAGER CIXI (1835-1908) IN LATE QING CHINA
In-Person Lecture. Speaker: Chan Ying-kit

The Empress Dowager Cixi (1835–1908) remains a symbol of national humiliation and weakness in modern Chinese history. Scholars attribute Cixi’s “rule behind the curtains” responsible for the ultimate decline of the Qing dynasty. This talk examines the conditions that enabled Cixi’s rise to power during the Tongzhi reign (1861-1875). Hanlin academics regarded her as a potentially capable regent whom they could count on to manage state affairs. Cixi forged a political alliance with Han Chinese grand councilors to rule behind the curtains. Another secret to Cixi’s success as a regent was her manipulation of bureaucratic opinion, which she was able to sway in her favor by permitting protests over political issues.

7 NOVEMBER, 2022
THE SHADOWS OF EMPIRE: HOW IMPERIAL HISTORY SHAPES OUR WORLD.
In-Person Lecture. Speaker: Dr Samir Puri

Dr Samir Puri considers how imperial history can shed a new light on some of the biggest issues of our time. As Asian countries rise to new heights, Europe is facing unprecedented difficulties. By placing these trends against the grand backdrop of imperial history, he considers how the past can better inform our understanding of the future.

14 NOVEMBER, 2022
THE EARLY SEAFARING COMMUNITIES AND THEIR ENDURING LEGACY IN SOUTH EAST ASIA
Zoom Lecture. Speaker: Himanshu Prabha Ray

A regular maritime network across the Bay of Bengal was sustained historically by diverse communities including those of religious scholars, artisans, merchants, sailors and adventurers. This presentation will focus on the spread of Buddhism and portable Buddhist ritual objects, such as bronze

icons, reliquaries and clay votive tablets, and discuss these in the context of coastal shrines that dotted the littoral in the early centuries of the Common Era.

21 NOVEMBER, 2022
“THE REQUISITE SUPPLY OF THE PURE ELEMENT”: A HISTORY OF DRINKING WATER IN EARLY COLONIAL SINGAPORE
In-Person Lecture. Speaker: Timothy Barnard

The availability of drinking water is pre-requisite for the establishment of any community. This talk will discuss the early history of the “pure element” in Singapore, and how it reflects the intersection of environment, modernisation, engineering and economics as an island in Southeast Asia developed into the centre of British imperial power and trade in the region.

28 NOVEMBER, 2022
SUSTAINABILITY AND CULTURE: LINKING THE ARTS AND THE SOCIAL IMAGINATION
Zoom Lecture. Speaker: John Robert Clammer

The idea of “sustainability” has not surprisingly (given climate change, ecological devastation, pollution and other problems now of global consequence) become a key word in contemporary discourse. But the role of the arts in promoting sustainability is not much discussed. Today we will explore the role of the arts not only for their own value, but also as agents in promoting positive social change and transformation.



05 DECEMBER, 2022
SAME BUT DIFFERENT: CHANGING HYBRID FASHIONS IN 19TH- AND EARLY 20TH-CENTURY SINGAPORE
In-Person Lecture. Speaker: Peter Lee

Singapore inherited a volatile and diverse Southeast Asian legacy of hybrid port city culture that was several centuries old. Once it was founded as a colony in 1819, it instantly became a melting pot of people, goods and ideas. With no single cultural arbiter, and away from motherlands, its residents began to dress and shop as they pleased, sourcing from an array of available global goods perhaps wider than anywhere else in the world. Singapore residents combined ensembles of textiles and garments from across the globe in their own way, and often used them in completely different contexts from where they originated. These inconsistent and individual styles raise questions about the idea of traditional dress in Asia, and elucidate how Singapore was an early centre for an egalitarian attitude to fashion.

12 DECEMBER, 2022
ENDANGERED GUARDIANS OF THE FOREST – THE BADUY FOREST-DWELLER IN CENTRAL BANTEN, INDONESIA
Zoom Lecture. Speaker: Dr Alexandra Landmann

The Indonesian Baduy forest-dwellers have occupied their ancestral domain for at least 500 years, yet their origins remain a mystery. Since pre-Islamic times, they reinforced bonds with political elites in the lowlands through ritualised diplomatic relations. While the Hindu Kingdoms and Islamic Sultanates in West Java have passed into history, the Baduy continue their way of life. This talk will elaborate on their self-imposed isolation, practice of strict ancestral rules and rejection of certain aspects of modernity.



**NANYANG
TECHNOLOGICAL
UNIVERSITY**
SINGAPORE

School of Art, Design
and Media
College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences

MA in Museum Studies & Curatorial Practices

Intake in August 2023

Young and research-intensive, Nanyang Technological University (NTU Singapore) is ranked 19th globally. It is also placed 2nd among the world's best young universities. The School of Art, Design and Media (established in 2005) is Singapore's first professional art school to offer a full suite of undergraduate and graduate programmes.

The School offers MA in Museum Studies and Curatorial Practices that prepares graduates for professional positions in the diverse museum landscape and expanding spaces of the curatorial, which require knowledge, experience and creativity. The MA places emphasis on theoretical and practical challenges of contemporary and historic art and culture, with a focus on South East Asia.

**Applications open till 15 March 2023
for August 2023 intake**

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