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ISSUE III

THE BLACK AND WHITE ISSUE



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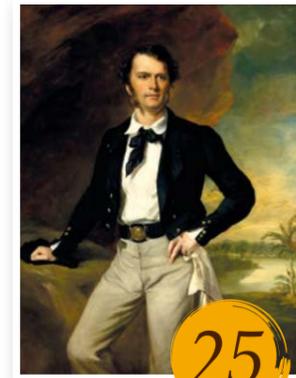
ON THE FRONT COVER

Detail from a hanging scroll showing Chinese scholars engaged in calligraphy with an inkstone clearly visible on the desk. Artist unknown. Art historians note that the scroll probably dates to the Ming Dynasty. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Read about the wisdom and artistry of Chinese inkstones on page 3.

BACK COVER

A black and white mural found in Kampong Gelam. Photo by Dawn Marie Lee. FOM volunteer docents conduct tours of Kampong Gelam on Wednesday mornings and alternate Saturdays. Check the FOM website for more details.

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PASSAGE

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Unless otherwise stated, the abbreviation FOM used in this magazine refers to Friends of the Museums Singapore. FOM is not responsible for statements expressed in the articles and interviews.

President's Blog

Hello everyone!
Hope you haven't missed FOM too much over the mid-year break, well-timed after the several big events.

There's no way I can avoid talking about our Volunteer Appreciation Night (VAN) which you can read more about on page 45. As you can see from the pictures, it was a real blast and we had lots of fun catching up with friends and disco-ing the night away! Thank you FOM volunteers for the time and dedication you give year after year.

After a two-year break, we resumed presenting the annual FOM-National Heritage Board (NHB) Heritage Grant this year. This award has since 2008 helped to strengthen the competencies of museum professionals through overseas attachments. It is matched dollar for dollar by NHB.

Stella Woo, Manager (Policy & Education) Preservation of Sites and Monuments, will be going on an attachment to several institutions in the UK: the Heritage of London Trust, Open City and English Heritage.

As we know, the Malay Heritage Centre (MHC) is now closed for a revamp. One of those working on it is MHC Assistant Curator Muhammad Zinnurain Bin Mohd Nasir. He hopes to gain fresh perspectives from his attachment to The Louvre Abu Dhabi and the Museum of the Future in Dubai - the first time a recipient will be heading to non-European institutions.

Looking forward to hearing from them both about their respective attachments and how they will apply their learning back in Singapore.

At the end of May, we held our signature Public Information Meeting or PIM. The NMS Auditorium was a full house of people coming to find out more about FOM's training offerings. We have a record number of seven for the next twelve months. Read about it on page 51. Tell your friends! We love to be kept busy!



Millie Phuah
FOM President
president@fom.sg



Presenting the FOM-NHB Heritage Grant 2023 to Stella Woo, Manager (Policy & Education) Preservation of Sites and Monuments, who will be heading to the UK for her attachment.



MHC Assistant Curator, Muhammad Zinnurain Bin Mohd Nasir heads to the Louvre Abu Dhabi and the Museum of the Future, Dubai for his attachment.



FOM Council members at the Grant ceremony with former NHB Chairman, Prof Tommy Koh and on his left, current Chief Executive, NHB, Chang Hwee Nee.

FROM THE EDITORS

Some years ago, *PASSAGE* devoted an issue to the theme of the colour blue. This yielded some interesting stories. Last year we explored the colour yellow, which took us all over the world to discover how various cultures, through the centuries, viewed this colour so differently.



This year we decided to go with two non-colours for a change: black and white. Los Bravos sang "Black is Black". But white isn't just white. It comes in hundreds of shades, from eggshell to ivory. Ask any dentist or porcelain-restorer who has the difficult job of matching the colour of white enamels.

Black and white together symbolise the plain truth expressed in black words on white paper. This angle is explored in the true story of Anna and Rama IV, king of Thailand. Living in black and white refers to the style of housing in Singapore which is a legacy of the colonial era. While the black and white minstrel, Singapore's pied piper, alludes to a common garden songbird. Black and white may be opposites but they can achieve harmony when represented on piano keys or on the ubiquitous chequered cloth of Bali. And the black and white *samfu* worn proudly by *ma jies* symbolised their sisterhood, dedication to selfless service and vow not to marry.

Black has sinister undertones. The plague in Europe was referred to as the Black Death. And in 16th century England it was believed by some that ingesting black powder (i.e. gunpowder) would provide a cure for the disease. Black powder revolutionised warfare, through its use in artillery on land and sea, until a smokeless alternative was discovered at the beginning of the 20th century. And nothing is blacker than Chinese ink, produced for centuries by calligraphers by dissolving a block of soot on a precious inkstone.

White is often used to symbolise innocence, purity and virtue. But whether the White Rajah of Sarawak can be viewed as a black or a white knight is a matter for debate. We hope you enjoy this issue.

Dawn Marie Lee and Tim Clark

Dawn Marie Lee and Tim Clark
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CORRECTIONS: 2023 Issue II

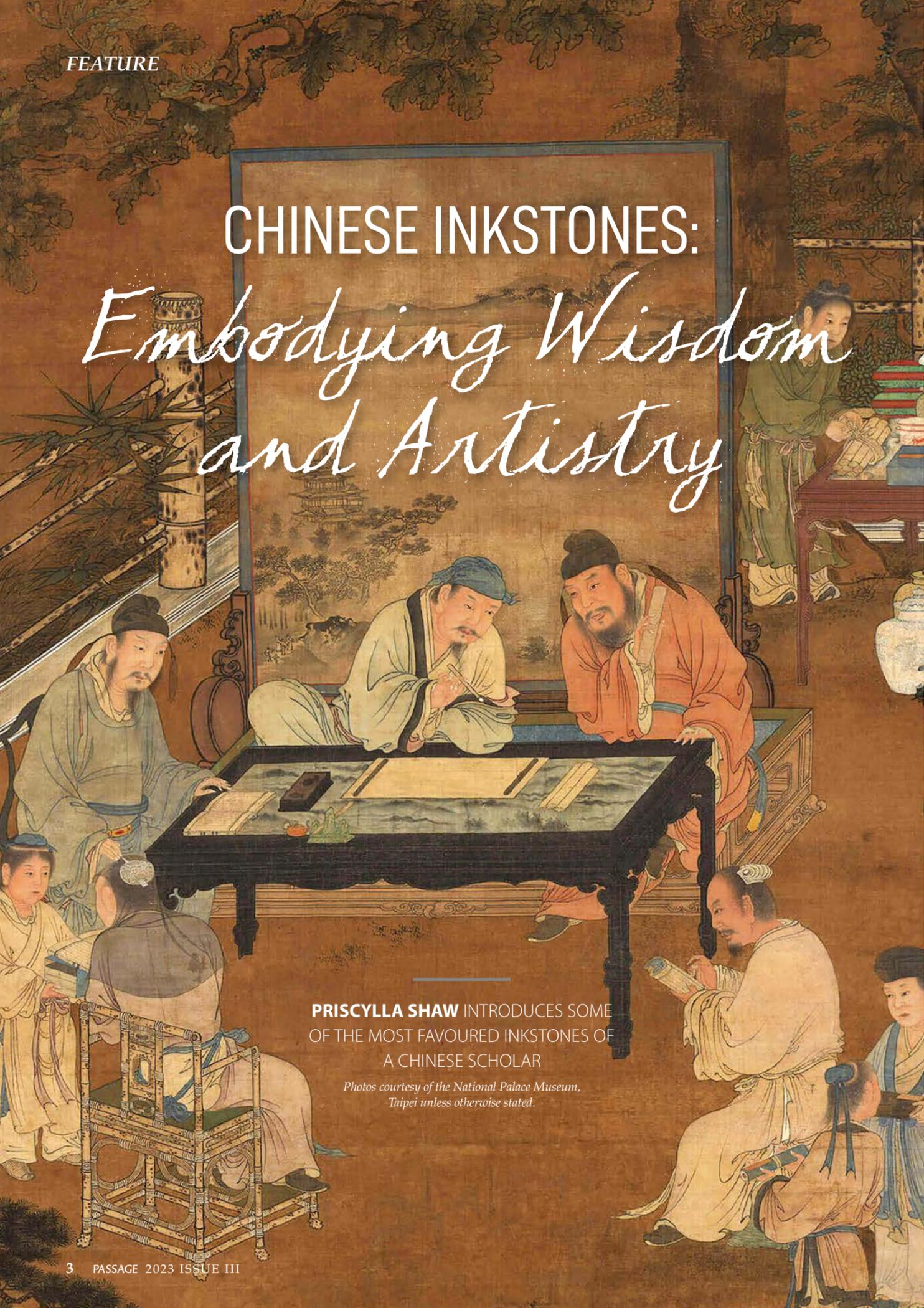
Page 32
In *Matriarchal Pride*, the reign of French king, Louis XIV, was given as 1226 - 1270. This is incorrect. It is 1643 - 1715.

Page 35
In *She Who Hears Our Cries*, the photo of the makeshift shrine at Bukit Brown cemetery does not show Guanyin but Ksitigarbha. This photo should have been used instead.



CHINESE INKSTONES:

Embodying Wisdom and Artistry



PRISCYLLA SHAW INTRODUCES SOME OF THE MOST FAVOURED INKSTONES OF A CHINESE SCHOLAR

Photos courtesy of the National Palace Museum, Taipei unless otherwise stated.



Inkstone with inscription attributed to Su Shi (苏轼), pre-eminent Song dynasty scholar. Song dynasty (960–1279). This is one of the most famous inkstones in existence due to its association with Su Shi. It is oval in shape (sometimes called “clog-shaped”), deep purple in colour, and has a deep ink pool with incised characters 東井 (Dong Jing) at the narrow end. The broader end is raised slightly on two feet. Clouds and stars surround the edge, and the stone exudes a sense of antiquity and calm. The lower section carries the Qianlong Emperor’s (r. 1736-95) comments on the inkstone.

Chinese calligraphy is instantly recognised as a symbol of Chinese culture. The practice is demanding, requiring perfection in mind and hand accord. The basic implements required for Chinese calligraphy are paper (or silk), a brush, ink and an inkstone, collectively known as ‘Four Treasures of the Study’ (文房四宝).

For Professor Dorothy Ko, Columbia University, the inkstone (砚) is the foremost ‘treasure’ as “it is the inkstone that historically enabled the transformative interaction of brush, inksticks, water and paper into the words and images that constitute the core of Chinese culture during the dynastic period”.

In any event, inkstones became more than writing equipment; they were also made and collected as works of art. Although ubiquitous in China, Korea and Japan for more than a thousand years, inkstones are virtually unknown in the West. Dr Tan Tsze Chor, whose collection is identified by its studio name, *Xiang Xue Zhuang*, was himself a calligrapher. Amongst his generous donations to the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) is a collection of inkstones. Patricia Bjaaland Welch has observed that “many of them have auspicious motifs or lineage such as the Duan inkstone with the theme of ‘100 Antiquities’, represented by nine auspicious symbols popular during the Qing dynasty”.

WHAT IS AN INKSTONE?

They are sculpted stones (or other material), commonly about the size of an outstretched hand, incorporating a flat area which provides a grinding surface for making ink with water, and a well for the ink made. They can be simple or elaborate, depending on the maker or the taste and requirements of the user. Ideally, the stone is fine-grained yet slightly abrasive to facilitate the grinding of the inkstick.

*(opposite page)
Detail from a hanging scroll showing Chinese scholars engaged in calligraphy with an inkstone clearly visible on the desk. Art historians note that the scroll probably dates to the Ming Dynasty.*

Inkstones have been in existence since the invention of paper in China sometime during the middle of the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220). As people began writing with brush and ink, so the need for inkstones grew. Inks of different density and shades of black are obtained by adjusting the amount of water used. Good inks spoil rather quickly, so they are made just prior to use.

Each natural inkstone made by hand is unique. The craft of making inkstones using the four most favoured stones discussed below is recognised in their respective provinces as intangible cultural heritage.

THE FOUR MOST FAVOURED STONES

It is generally accepted that the four best-quality inkstones are Duan inkstones (端砚) from Guangdong, She inkstones (歙砚) from Anhui, Tao inkstones (洮河砚) from Shaanxi and Chengni inkstones (澄泥砚) from Henan. Wen Zhenheng (文震亨, 1585–1645), the great-grandson of Wen Zhenming (文征明, 1470–1559), one of the four great Ming (1368–1644) painting masters, described in his *Treatise on Superfluous Things* (长物志) the best grades of stones for making inkstones. His treatise was the guideline of cultural taste in



Duan inkstone, Qing dynasty (1644-1911), Collection of the ACM, Xiang Xue Zhuang Collection in memory of Dr Tan Tsze Chor. Note the blue-green ‘parrot’s eye’ pattern. Photo courtesy of ACM.



Carving a She inkstone. By carefully observing a stone's shape, structure and texture, the inkstone maker strives to formulate a design to bring out the best in the stone's natural characteristics. Photo from Xinhua.net.

the late Ming. In his opinion, inkstones made from Duanxi stone (the area around the Duanxi River) from Zhaoqing prefecture in Guangdong were the best. An example of a Duan inkstone is the famous "Dong Jing" (East Well) inkstone shown at the top of the previous page.

DUAN INKSTONES

According to Wen, the most valuable Duanxi stones were deep purple in colour, smooth to the touch and rang brightly when struck. Although smooth, they were still perfect for grinding inksticks and fine brushes were not damaged against the stone. The Dong Jing stone is said to have a natural veining of blue-green 'parrot's eye' pattern surrounded by a 'halo'.

The round Duanxi inkstone at the bottom of the previous page, in the ACM's collection, is part of the group of eleven inkstones from Dr Tan Tsze Chor. The 'eyes' of the stone have been thoughtfully integrated in the clouds. Wen wrote that the presence of 'eye-patterning' alone did not determine the quality of a stone. Still, modern-day auction houses have highlighted this characteristic when valuing a Duan inkstone.



"Moon and cloud" She inkstone by Zhu Dai (b.1968). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Image©Zhu Dai. The inkstone is sculptural in its form. The artist has aimed for simplicity and modernity, blending traditional literati aesthetics with modern-day minimalism. The horizontal line represents the cloud line, and the inkwell occupies just a small area.

SHE INKSTONES

She inkstones are grey, light green or black slate. The stones are hard, carry gold and silver speckles and veins and appear in layers ('waves'). Particularly rare and valuable stones have 'golden stars' or jade veins. She stones hold the wetness of ink well and are valued for their age. Craftsmen believe that the oldest stones make the best inkstones.

TAO INKSTONES

Tao inkstones are crystalline and resemble jadeite. They have distinctive 'ripple bands' in layers. Tao stones are known for their emerald green-coloured sheen and are named according to their different shades of green, like 'Duck Head Green', 'Parrot Green' and 'Willow Leaf Green'. A Tao inkstone was the diplomatic gift of choice when Hongkong was returned to China in 1997: the Gansu provincial government presented a Tao inkstone to the government of the Special Administrative Region.

CHENGNI INKSTONES

Chengni stones are not naturally-occurring stones but are highly-manufactured ceramic stones. Chengni (filtered clay) is made from very fine silted clay that has undergone intensive processing: filtering, kneading, moulding, firing, and carving. The Song period is associated with exceptional ceramics; glazed Chengni inkstones were popular during the Song dynasty. In the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) piece on the opposite page, a carp peeps out from water vegetation in the lower section of the inkstone whilst a dragon occupies the top section. The design illustrates a well-known myth that a carp would turn into a dragon if it succeeded in swimming upstream through the Dragon Gate of the Yellow River. The large inkwell between the sections alludes to the huge task ahead for succeeding in the civil service exam.

A THOUSAND YEARS OF INKSTONE SHAPES

Inkstone shapes have undergone considerable adaptation and innovation. Han Dynasty inkstones were simply a flat stone in the shape of a disc or slab, accompanied by a small pebble. Inksticks had not been invented yet. Ink granules were ground up using the pebble. The ink obtained in this way was not satisfactory as bits of granules remained suspended in the liquid. After inksticks were invented,

pebbles became obsolete. Round and multi-legged shapes became the popular inkstone shapes.

From the Tang (618–907) to the Song dynasty the 'Chinese clog' was a popular shape. Handheld inkstones in rectangular shapes were also popular. Celadon glazes were a characteristic of Song inkstones.

During the relatively short Yuan Dynasty there were few innovations as only Han Chinese commoners continued to use inkstones. Many inkstones were relatively unsophisticated porcelain ones.

The Ming Dynasty witnessed innovation, high quality and style. Previous shapes of the Han, Tang and Song periods were revived. Ming inkstones were elaborately decorated and became artworks, not merely writing equipment. For the user, their inkstone was a reflection of their intellect and refinement. For an inkstone maker, a beautiful inkstone embodied his wisdom and ingenuity. Blue-and-white porcelain inkstones were popular with the elite. As administrative and scholastic documents were marked in red ink made from cinnabar, red ink stood out much better against porcelain compared to stone. Blue-and-white porcelain inkstones were mostly drum-shaped with patterns and inscriptions on the sides or at the back.

The Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) was the peak for inkstones. Inkstone carving centres sprouted up in main cities like Beijing, Guangdong, Anhui and Zhejiang. Kangxi (r.1662-1722), Yongzheng (r.1722-35) and Qianlong (r.1736-95) collected them as artworks and took personal interest in new designs. For example, whilst various



(top) Tao inkstone with Orchid Pavilion scene, Song Dynasty. This exceptional inkstone is oval, green with specks of yellow and has a shallow etching of the famous gathering. The craftsman has incorporated a crescent stream with twin bridges; the deep groove is the ink pond. The back of the stone is also carved, in high relief, with another picturesque scene.



(right) Chengni inkstone with dragon and carp, Yuan Dynasty. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

'warming inkstones' were already in use since the Song dynasty, the Yongzheng emperor invented copper burner 'warming inkstones' which had a warming compartment for coal, so that ink would not freeze up in winter.

I hope that this short article has been a useful introduction to the inkstone, and perhaps also a nudge to fellow FOM members to organise a calligraphy class? 

PRISCYLLA SHAW is the Features Editor of *PASSAGE*.



Copper warming inkstones collected by the Qianlong emperor.

MUSIC IN MONOCHROME

ROBERT CASTEELS TRACES THE EVOLUTION OF THE BLACK AND WHITE KEYS OF PRESENT-DAY PIANOS

The piano is a much-loved instrument found in many Singapore homes. Most of us are familiar with the typical appearance of a piano keyboard, but do we know why the keys have been arranged in this way? What was the reason for the choice of the colours? In this short article, I hope to throw light on these questions.

EARLY KEYBOARDS: THE ITALIAN LOOK

The ancestor of the piano is a whole family of plucked string instruments with keyboards. The player depresses a key which activates a complex mechanism that plucks the string in the same way as fingers might pluck the strings of a pipa, sitar, guitar, or an oud. The earliest keyboards did not have elevated keys for sharps or flats, all keys were on one level. Arguably, the earliest iconography of a stringed keyboard instrument in the familiar shape of a piano can be found in a 40 centimetre-long section of the famous Minden Cathedral altarpiece of 1425, now in the Bode Museum, Berlin. The section shows a group of angels with their hands on a keyboard.

The harpsichord, an early plucked-string keyboard instrument, was invented by the Italians around 1500. Its keyboard then, as now, was not touch-sensitive, that is to say, no matter how hard or softly one plays on the keys, the variation in volume was limited. By then, keyboards had elevated keys for sharps and flats. The white elevated keys were made of expensive ivory, whilst the black keys of the level row were made of rosewood. To this day, some harpsichords and pipe organs have retained this look of white over dark keys.

It is not known why the Italians choose this colour scheme, but for an 18th century European, it was unimaginable for a keyboard to have the colour layout of a modern piano, that is, black over white keys. When Flemish craftsmen improved the keys mechanism, they retained the Italian colours. Admire this magnificent Flemish harpsichord and notice the colours of its keys.



A Flemish-style decorated harpsichord with key colours 'in reverse'. The inscriptions in Latin read: SINE SCIENTIA ARS NIHIL EST (Without knowledge, skill is nothing) and DUM VIXI TACUI MORTUA DULCE CANO (While I lived, I was mute. Dead, I sweetly sing). Photo from Wikimedia Commons.



Pianoforte by Bartolomeo Cristofori manufactured in 1722, Museo Nazionale degli Strumenti Musicali di Roma. Photo from Wikimedia Commons.

18TH CENTURY INNOVATION

Science and art have always progressed hand in hand. Instrument makers create new acoustical possibilities that composers exploit. Composers expand expressive boundaries, thereby pushing instrument makers to innovate. Throughout history, instruments have been invented which subsequently fall into oblivion. Fortunately, some inventors did succeed. One such was Bartolomeo Cristofori (1655–1731), the custodian of the Medici family's rich collection of musical instruments.

The powerful Medici ruled the then small independent state of Tuscany, Italy. Cristofori, not one to let grass grow under his feet, strove to create an expressive harpsichord. After several failures, his breakthrough came in 1709 when he designed a mechanism in which a hammer hit the string and bounced back. If a player pressed a key at a higher speed and with more strength, he obtained a louder sound: the player could control dynamics! Cristofori's touch-sensitive keyboard revolutionised performance.

Cristofori was a shrewd businessman. He anticipated that although it was an extraordinary possibility for any player to be able to control sound, customers might still be wary of buying his new keyboard. Consequently, instead of giving his invention a new name, he called it the soft-and-loud harpsichord: *piano e forte* in Italian. The name was subsequently contracted to '*pianoforte*', then simply,

to '*piano*'. His piano keyboard had 61 keys. Additionally, so as not to alarm customers, Cristofori retained the conventional colours of the harpsichord, white for raised keys, black for level keys.

Gradually, people grew accustomed to the different sounds that could be obtained with the piano. Eventually, the harpsichord, which had its heyday from the 16th to the mid-18th century, was dethroned by the piano. Today, the modern Concert Grand piano is a 2.75 metre instrument weighing possibly 544 kilogrammes, whose string tension can amount to 20 tonnes and whose sound can successfully compete with a full orchestra in a 2,000-audience concert hall. Notice the colours of the keys of this fortepiano used by Wolfgang Mozart (1756-1791) which still look like those of a harpsichord. The fortepiano, from around 1782, was used by Mozart for both composition and performance from 1785 until his death in 1791. It was made by Anton Walter, one of the most famous Viennese piano makers of Mozart's time.

19TH CENTURY FRENCH COLOUR REVOLUTION

The 19th century witnessed the first industrial revolution, a wealthier population who had leisure time and the means to enjoy it. Public music recitals were organised in dedicated buildings and music virtuosity came under the spotlight. There were further mechanical improvements to the piano.

In 1803, French manufacturer Pierre Érard (1794–1855) impressed Beethoven with a new mechanism that enabled the same key to be depressed fifteen times per second. To show off a virtuoso pianist's hands, the French reversed the colours of the keys, resulting in their current appearance of black keys over white. This was a radical visual change and one that would remain. In the 1880s, the illustrious German American piano maker, Steinway, increased the key number to 88 (that is, seven octaves plus three notes). Even though there were more white keys than black, and even though ivory was more expensive than wood, Steinway maintained the French colours.

20TH CENTURY AUSTRIAN IMPERIAL STYLE

In the 20th century, the mechanism of pianos and its sonic power developed further through advances in technology. The transition to synthetic materials for piano keys acknowledges conservation concerns related to elephants and ivory. Italian composer Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924) convinced Austrian piano maker Bösendorfer to further increase the number of keys from 88 to 97. The idea was to emulate the extended range of the pipe organ and to enrich the harmonic vibrations of the entire soundboard of the piano. However, the extra seven keys at the far left of the keyboard disturbed the hand-eye coordination of pianists. Thus, the extra keys were made black or covered with a panel when unused. Bösendorfer launched his 'Imperial' model in 1909.



Mozart's fortepiano, made by Anton Walter, one of the most famous Viennese piano makers of Mozart's time. This piano is two octaves shorter than a modern piano, and is much lighter and smaller, weighing only 85 kilogrammes and just 2.23 metres long. Photo from Classic FM.

ORGANISATION OF THE KEYS

There are twelve keys per octave on a piano. For reasons yet to be understood, musicians of different cultures have organised the internal divisions of an octave differently. Europeans chose to divide the octave into twelve equidistant intervals, Indian musicians, into twenty-two intervals and Chinese musicians, into five non-equidistant intervals. The consequence of these choices is that the music of each civilisation has developed in different directions.

ERGONOMICS

Elevating and narrowing five keys per octave enables the hand to sit comfortably on them. Three middle fingers rest naturally on the elevated black keys. In between the 10 centimetre-long black keys, our fingers can also play on the 15 centimetre-long white keys. Our weaker left little finger corresponds to our stronger right thumb. Our stronger left thumb corresponds to our weaker right little finger. Pianists practice hard to compensate for this mirrored hand configuration, resulting in the typical occupational diseases of long-term asymptomatic arthritis and short-term bouts of tendinitis like typists on computer keyboards might experience. So why have piano makers not created ergonomic keyboards for their users like the IT industry has?



A Steinway piano designed by glass sculptor Dale Chihuly, unveiled at the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City Utah, USA. Photo from Wüstund Wüst.

Whereas typing on a computer keyboard has a direct effect of producing the required letter, the music keyboard has to deal with the mechanical interface between each of the 88 keys and the strings. The added complication is that strings are linear, such that low notes require one string, middle pitches two strings and high pitches three strings. Some piano makers have attempted to produce more ergonomic piano keyboards, for instance by gradually curving it. However, due to the required painstaking adjustment of each length of string, their attempts have not been successful thus far. Perhaps a Singaporean could one day invent this new keyboard?

COLOUR SYMBOLISM

In 1905, French composer Claude Debussy wrote a suite for two pianos entitled *En blanc et noir*, literally "in white and black", paying homage to his beloved instrument. In the context of World War I, Debussy was also referring to good versus evil. The conflict depressed him, and he was suffering from terminal cancer.

Notes can be played consecutively (a scale) or concurrently (a chord). Any group of neighbouring notes sounded simultaneously is called a cluster. A white cluster combines neighbouring white keys. A white and black cluster

combines neighbouring white and black keys. 20th century American and European composers used clusters to express emotional tension.

Some of us are old enough to remember the characteristic buzzing sound signalling the end of transmission of TV programmes. This is now known as white noise. It contains all frequencies in equal measure. White noise is supposed to be relaxing and induce sleep. You may well prefer silence, the absence of sound, called black noise.

A FINAL NOTE...

So there it is, the piano keyboard in black and white, and yet, what if inventors had imposed their favourite colours, like glass artist Dale Chihuly? **P**

ROBERT CASTEELS is a conductor, composer and pianist. He is a new FOM member and naturalised Singaporean.

BLANC et NOIR

FABIAN FORNI TRACES FRENCH PRESENCE IN SINGAPORE THROUGH LANDMARK BUILDINGS AND ICONIC BLACK AND WHITE HOUSES

You employ stone, wood and concrete, and with these materials you build houses and palaces. That is construction. Ingenuity is at work. But you suddenly touch my heart, you make me feel good, I am happy and I say: this is beautiful. That is architecture. Art enters in.

– LE CORBUSIER, ARCHITECT, ARTIST, DECORATOR, PAINTER (1887–1965)

Since the founding of Singapore in 1819, the number of French travellers to the island grew steadily with the arrival of the first missionaries, merchants and scientists, establishing landmarks in stone as the city prospered.

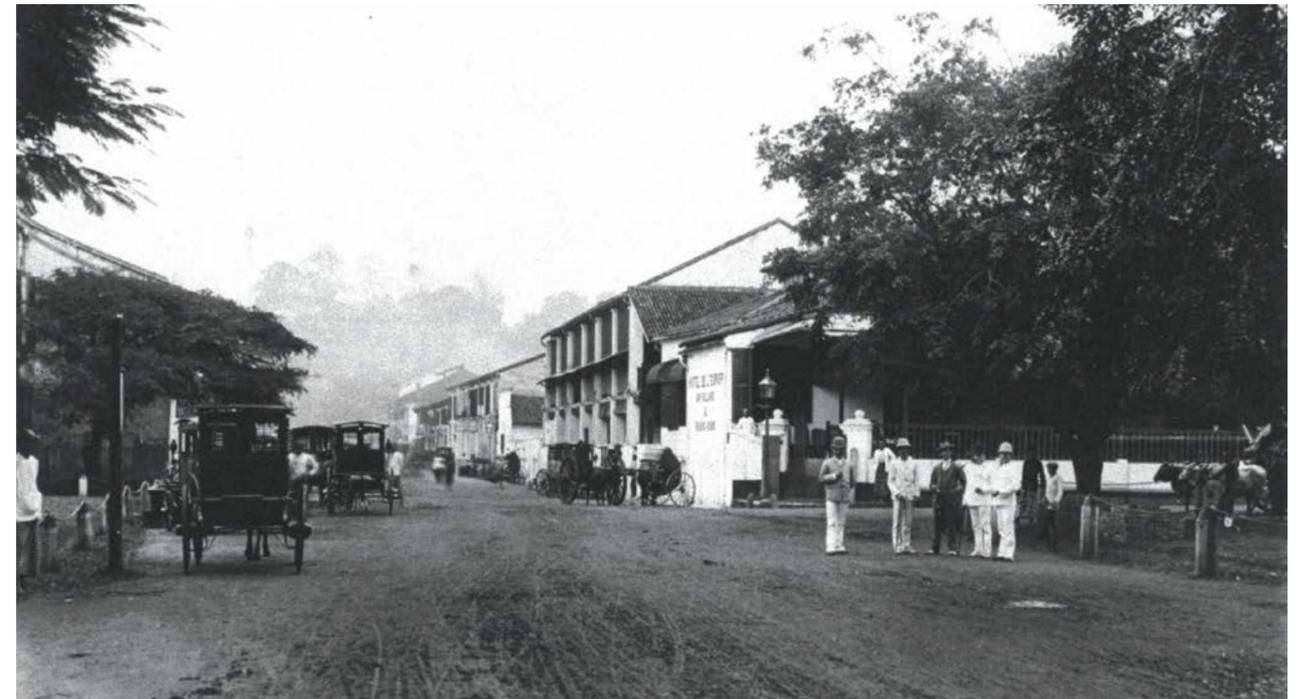
EARLY FRENCH PRESENCE AND THE ‘SINGAPORE STRAIT’

For early French travellers, Singapore was merely a necessary stopover to replenish supplies of food and water, and a place to repair ships during long expeditions to Siam and China. The French and other Europeans had established staging points in the Straits of Melaka. The ‘Singapore Strait’ was recommended as a safe sea route, connecting the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea.

There were four busy maritime routes – Old Strait, New Strait, Governor’s Strait and Johor Strait. In those days, unsurprisingly, one route would often be mistaken for another. For example, Jacques-Nicolas Bellin (1703–72), chief cartographer to the French Navy and one of the most important mapmakers of the 18th century, drew up



A 1755 map by French Navy cartographer Nicolas Bellin showing the New and Old Straits and Singapore as Pulo ou Isle Panjang (Long Island). Image courtesy of map collector Eric Rosenkranz.



Hotel d’Europe on High Street Singapore. Photo from the National Archives Singapore.

important navigational maps to guide French ships in the area, but his map shows the Old Strait identified as *Nouveau Detriot de Sincapour* (New Strait). Singapore is labelled as *Pulo ou Isle Panjang* (meaning ‘Long Island’ in Malay).

THE FIRST FRENCH RESIDENTS ESTABLISH LANDMARK BUILDINGS

Gaston Dutronquoy: London Hotel

Beginning with French merchants who arrived and decided to set up hotels, Gaston Dutronquoy was one such entrepreneur. Arriving in Singapore sometime between 1838 and 1839 as a house-painter and palanquin-painter, he opened the modest London Hotel in 1839 in Commercial Square (later Raffles Place). It seems astute of him to have named it as such, since Singapore was then under the control of the British East India Company. In 1841, he relocated the hotel a short distance away, to 3 Coleman Street, a bungalow owned by Georges D. Coleman – Singapore’s first civil architect. This house was later demolished in 1965 and is the present site of the Peninsula Hotel and Shopping Complex, completed in 1971.

In 1844, Dutronquoy relocated his London Hotel again, this time to a building at the corner of High Street and the Esplanade. High Street was one of the earliest streets in Singapore to be laid out. Here, Dutronquoy also set up a studio as the first resident photographer in Singapore, using the new daguerreotype technique.

Madame Esperanza de Thune: Hotel de l’Esperance

According to researcher Alex Ong, after Dutronquoy passed away sometime in the mid-1850s (mysteriously, and supposedly, whilst prospecting for gold in Muar, Malaysia) the hotel was bought by a Frenchwoman, Madame Esperanza

de Thune, who renamed it and ran it as Hotel de l’Esperance, from 1857 to 1864.

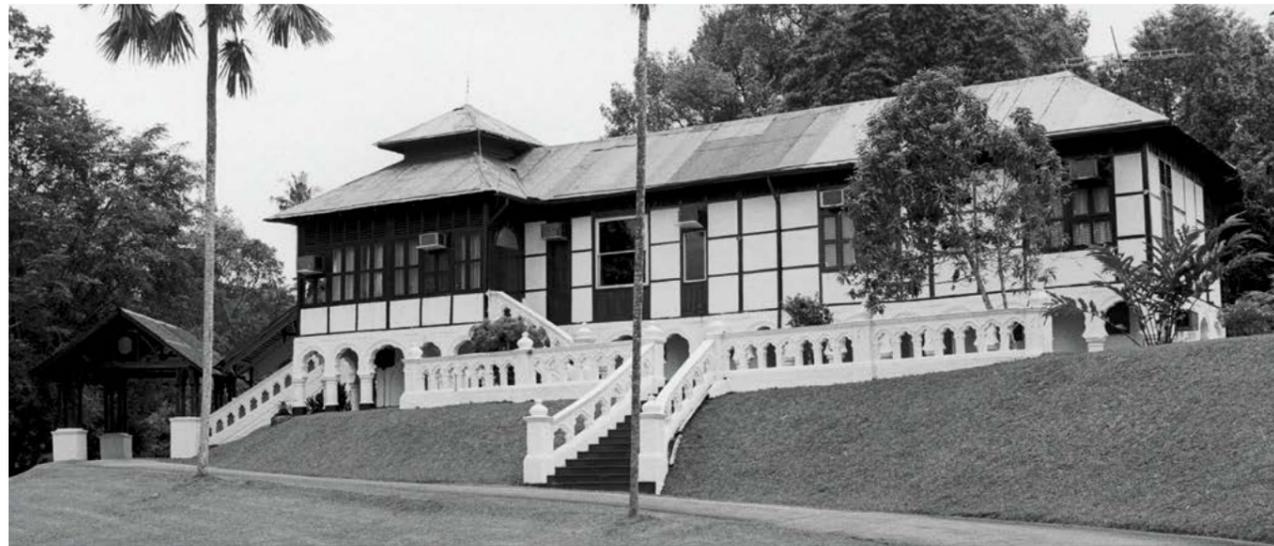
J. Casteleyns: Hotel d’Europe

Another French entrepreneur and hotelier who saw prospects in Singapore was J. Casteleyns. In 1857, he established the Hotel d’Europe at 36, Hill Street, a street perpendicular to High Street. He moved his hotel to Beach Road in 1860 but returned to the High Street location when he took over Madame Esperanza’s hotel in 1865, renaming it Hotel d’Europe.

The hotel changed hands over the course of 40 years. Finally, the original building was demolished in 1905 and in its place a new Grand Hotel de l’Europe was built, next to Municipal Building (later, City Hall). In *Singapore: A pictorial history 1819–1900* by Gretchen Liu, the Grand Hotel de l’Europe was said to be the largest and best-known hotel in Singapore and one of the finest in Asia. Sadly, by the 1920s, it had run into financial problems. Eventually, the land was acquired by the Government. The hotel was demolished, and the Supreme Court Building was completed on its site in 1939.

CHURCHES AND SCHOOLS

Sacred buildings and Catholic schools were also erected, at the instigation of the Foreign Missions of Paris. The Cathedral of the Good Shepherd, accommodating 600 seats, was inaugurated on 6 June 1847, the result of Reverend Father Jean-Marie Beurel commissioning George D. Coleman to build the first Catholic church in Singapore. Father Beurel also established Saint Joseph School in the former chapel Saint Joseph in 1852 and the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (CHIJ) in Bras Basah Road in 1854. As student numbers of all origins and religions grew, Saint Joseph’s Institution was completed in 1855. It now houses the Singapore Art Museum, whilst CHIJMES now occupies the CHIJ site.



Atbara, a black and white house located at Gallop Road was once occupied by the French Embassy. The house has sloping roofs, arched doorways, and a staircase leading down to the driveway. 1985. From the Lee Kip Lin Collection, National Library, Singapore.

BLACK AND WHITE HOUSES OCCUPIED BY THE FRENCH

Singapore became a Crown Colony in 1867. It was natural for buildings of that era to bear some English architectural influences. Two of the most beautiful and elegant buildings with connections to the French in Singapore must surely be Atbara at 5 Gallop Road and Inverturret at 7 Gallop Road. They are prime examples of black and white houses that were built from 1903 to 1941. These stately residences were the perfect combination of East and West, combining a unique style adapted to the tropics, a style which has been described as Anglo-Indian, or indigenous Malayan and mock-Tudor.

Atbara House and Inverturret

Built in 1898 by renowned architect Regent Alfred John Bidwell (1869–1918) for English lawyer John Birkinshaw,

Atbara, named after a river in the Sudan where the British had won a historic battle in the year of its completion, possessed characteristic English whitewashed walls, distinctive dark timber outlines and a terracotta-red tile roof. Writers have posited that wealthy residents like Mr Burkinshaw might have been homesick for England, or were inspired by the botanic gardens next door. Whatever the brief was to the architect, it seems that the English Landscape movement, characterised by structured informality, came through in the layout of its beautiful grounds. It was eventually sold to Charles MacArthur, then chairman of the Straits Trading Company, established in 1887. MacArthur commissioned Bidwell to build another black and white house for him, on adjacent land at 7 Gallop Road. He named that house Inverturret, to remind him of Scotland.

Besides Atbara and Inverturret, Bidwell also designed the iconic Raffles Hotel, Goodwood Park Hotel and the



In 1857, Frenchman J. Casteleyns established the Hotel d'Europe at 36, Hill Street. The hotel consisted of a number of buildings between High Street and Coleman Street, with separate bachelor and family quarters. Ownership changed several times over 40 years. It was demolished in 1905 and rebuilt facing the Padang next to the Municipal Building (later, City Hall). It was renamed the Grand Hotel de L'Europe and was one of the finest hotels in Asia. Photo in the collection of the National Museum of Singapore.



Atbara has been given a new lease of life as the Forest Discovery Centre @ OCBC Arboretum as part of the Singapore Botanic Gardens extension. Photo courtesy of the National Parks Board.

Victoria Memorial Hall, now called Victoria Concert Hall and Victoria Theatre.

Atbara and Inverturret housed the French Embassy and the French Residence from 1939 to 1999, respectively. It is notable that this period spanned World War II, the end of British colonial rule and Independence, with only a brief suspension of residence during the Japanese Occupation. Interesting memories of this period include celebrations of the French National day on July 14th, awards of French medals, and visits of personalities.

A NEW CHAPTER

Atbara and Inverturret are living a new chapter as NParks' sensitively renovated, modernised and repurposed buildings. In 2019, 5 Gallop Park re-opened to the public as Forest Discovery Centre @OCBC Arboretum, home to the Singapore Botanic Gardens' (SBG) collection of rare and endangered trees from around the region, a place where visitors may learn more about Singapore's forest ecosystems and ways of preserving them. In 2021, 7 Gallop Park re-opened to the public as the Botanic Art Gallery, Singapore's first permanent display of botanical art. According to NParks' Shee Zhi Qiang, "This is where visitors may view a selection of SBG's collection of more than 2,000 botanical paintings, as well as hundreds of sketches, line drawings and photographs".

DEEPENING FRENCH ROOTS IN SINGAPORE

It would be remiss of me to end without mentioning the Alliance Française de Singapour, the non-profit educational and cultural organisation that is affiliated to the international Alliance Française network. The strong French presence at Gallop Road coincided with the establishment and expansion of the Alliance, which opened in 1949, thanks to the indefatigable energies of Paul Clerc, a wholesale entrepreneur. During its first years, the Alliance's premises at Lucky Plaza were modest. Most students were European. As the Alliance's membership grew over the years in tandem with the number of French in Singapore, the society relocated in 1965 and in 1978,



The former Alliance Française building at 4 Draycott Road. The 19th century bungalow was originally named Draycott. It was accorded conservation status by the URA in 2003. Once the residence of James Robertson, general manager and director of Guthrie & Company, it later housed the General Officer Commanding, Singapore Base District after World War II. From 1978 to 1995, it was the premises of the Alliance Française.

each time to more spacious black and white bungalows. Finally, with the support of the French government and benefactors in the Singapore community, it moved into its own present building at 1 Sarkies Road in 1995, designed by the architect Dominique Perrault. With this building, dressed in colours, the Alliance entered into modernity. Its premises continue to be a true bridge between all communities in Singapore. Today, the Alliance serves almost 5,000 members of which 3,500 are students. 🇫🇷

FABIAN FORNI was the Cultural Counselor of the French embassy in Thailand. Since October 2020, he has been the Executive Director and Curator at the Alliance Française de Singapour.

BLACK POWDER WHITE FLANNELS

TIM CLARK UNCOVERS A SURPRISING CONNECTION
BETWEEN CANNON-FIRE AND CRICKET



Mural in a Turkish military museum showing the siege of Constantinople in 1453. Photo from Wikimedia Commons.

Black Powder, better known as gunpowder, was invented in China, in the Tang Dynasty or possibly earlier. And it is regarded as one of the four great inventions of China, along with papermaking, printing, and the compass. Two of these, papermaking and gunpowder, were described in 1822 as 'damnable inventions' by the English journalist and reformer, William Cobbett.

He was not protesting about the destructive power of gunpowder, neither was he referring to evils spread on paper by printing. He was in fact lamenting the unsightly effect these industries were having on the English countryside. Because both manufacturing processes required mills to be built on fast moving streams in the woodlands of Surrey, spoiling an idyllic landscape.



One of the bombards used in the siege of Constantinople. Photo from Wikimedia Commons.

The main ingredient used to make gunpowder is a white crystalline powder called saltpetre (more correctly named potassium nitrate). This could be excavated from mines in places like North Africa and India. It could also be derived from pigeon droppings, which gave dovecots a new importance, or from manure. Saltpetre was the main ingredient followed by sulphur and charcoal. The latter is what gave the powder its overall black appearance. These ingredients needed to be ground together in mills to be effective, which was dangerous, and explosions at gunpowder mills were not uncommon.

Gunpowder is believed to have been invented by accident by Chinese alchemists who were searching for an elixir for prolonging life. Initially it was used more for display than for destruction, but gradually, from the 10th century a whole

array of weaponry was devised using gunpowder variously as an explosive, or a propellant in rockets or as an incendiary. By the Yuan dynasty in the 13th century the first 'hand cannons' were produced. And through the Mongols, the use of such devices spread to India and the Arab world. In fact, the first recorded use of cannons in battle was between the Mamluks and the Mongols in 1260.

THE FALL OF CONSTANTINOPLE

However, it was the Europeans who maximised the potential of the cannon as an artillery weapon. And the turning point occurred at the place where Europe and Asia meet: Constantinople. An Eastern European named Orban had found a way to make enormous bronze cannons and he offered to provide these to the ruler of Byzantium,



The Battle of Trafalgar by Louis-Philippe Crépin, 1805. Image from Wikiart.



Longbowmen re-enact the 1471 Battle of Tewkesbury. Photo from Wikimedia Commons.

Constantine XI, to defend his city. Unfortunately, Constantine could not afford the cost, so Orban offered them to his Ottoman enemy.

Sultan Mehmet II commissioned Orban to produce super cannons capable of shattering Constantinople's seemingly impregnable walls. A great many bronze bombards were delivered, the largest of which was over eight metres long and weighed 20 tonnes. They were capable of firing a crippling blow at a target 2.4 kilometres away. At a closer range, firing 680 kilogramme limestone balls, Constantinople's walls stood no chance. The city fell in 1453. So, Mehmet got his prize. Ironically, although Orban got his reward, he lost his life when one of his super cannons exploded.

The fall of the Byzantine Empire is often considered to mark a shift from the Medieval to the Renaissance age. It was certainly a tactical turning point in warfare. The decisive role that gunpowder and cannons played in Constantinople's destruction meant that no castle could hereafter feel secure.

Naval warfare too would never be the same again when artillery bombardment from a distance replaced boarding

and hand-to-hand fighting. This transition occurred during the reign of Henry VIII in the 16th century. It was exemplified in 1805 at the battle of Trafalgar, when a British fleet attacked a larger combined fleet of French and Spanish; and won the day in a blaze of artillery attrition. It was not just the efficiency of the British gunners that was credited for the victory, but also the quality of British gunpowder, based on superior saltpetre from India. Still, it was a costly victory as Horatio Nelson was killed by a French musket ball.

TRANSFORMATION OF THE BATTLEFIELD

One of the earliest land battles in Europe in which artillery was involved was at Crecy in 1346. Although on this occasion it only played a minor role.

A retreating English army that had been engaged in ravaging Northern France was attacked by a much larger French force led by King Philip IV. And it was not firepower, but English and Welsh archers that proved to be the decisive factor in defeating the French cavalry and Genoese crossbowmen. Indeed, the supremacy of archery was to keep



Cricket match played by members of the Royal Amateur Society on Hampton Court Green, 3 August, 1836. Artist unknown. Collection of the Yale Centre for British Art. Image from Wikimedia Commons.

winning battles for the English against both the French and the Scots for the next 200 years. It was not until the Civil War in 1640s that the musket and cannon began to turn the tide. And the last battle in which archers were actively engaged was the battle of Tippermuir in Scotland in 1644.

One advantage of the musket over the longbow was that it required little training. Whereas to muster the strength to draw a longbow needed constant training from a young age. The tradition began in 1252 when Edward I decreed that every man between the age of 15 and 60 must practice archery every Sunday after church. This meant that whenever there was a war the king could summon skilled archers from all over England and Wales to present a formidable fighting force.

Another advantage of the longbow was that the archers could shoot more than six arrows in the time it took a musketeer to reload. But the musket had a longer range and could be fired horizontally at the enemy, giving it stopping power. So, archery as a weapon was doomed.

GREENS WHERE WHITES MUST BE WORN

Now what became of the spaces that were set aside in every village in England for archery training when this activity ceased to be compulsory? Please allow me to speculate. The grass would have been kept short, probably by grazing animals, to make stray arrows easy to retrieve. And this would have provided an ideal surface for ball games which had hitherto been banned by royal decree lest they interfere with archery practice.

It therefore seems reasonable to presume that gunpowder, which led to the demise of archery in warfare, indirectly led to the rise of cricket and its eventual dominion on every English village green. When it was no longer compulsory to turn up with a longbow made of yew, a bat made of willow would suffice. The only obligation was the dress code. Because, to this day, no self-respecting cricketer will appear on the pitch unless he is wearing his white flannel trousers.

But that's not the end of the connection between black powder and cricket.

THE EAST INDIA COMPANY HAS AN INNINGS

The earliest record of cricket being played was by boys at a school in the Surrey town of Guildford circa 1550s. And coincidentally, it was in a woodland valley close to Guildford that the East India Company (EIC) established one of England's earliest gunpowder mills in 1626. The company's ships were heavily armed, so they needed a reliable source of gunpowder.

The company official put in charge of this operation was one of the few survivors of a massacre by the Dutch in the Banda Islands. Managing a gunpowder factory was supposed to provide some security for this traumatised man.

The EIC control only lasted ten years but its connection with the gunpowder business continued, not just as a consumer but also as a major supplier of saltpetre from



The Chilworth Gunpowder factory cricket team 1893. Photo Courtesy of Blackheath Cricket Club.

mines in India. The introduction of cricket to India could be attributed to the EIC.

FIRE WITHOUT SMOKE

There was a tussle during the civil war over which side the gunpowder factory should supply, but Guildford was strongly parliamentary, so the King's forces had to depend on other sources.

Despite ups and downs and a few accidental explosions the factory complex continued to produce explosives for 300 years, until after the First World War. Nevertheless, it had to move with the times.

The problem with gunpowder was that it emitted a lot of smoke, obscuring the vision of gunners and giving their position away. So, by the end of the 19th century part of the production was adapted to manufacture cordite, which did not require milling and was smokeless.

THE FIELDERS WHO SUPPLIED THE FIELD GUNS

The factories were progressive as well as advanced. The workforce of 600 included a great many women especially during the war, still producing black powder as well as the improved formula brown powder and smokeless cordite. The women had their own company football team. Quite a novelty at the time. And, of course, the men had their very own cricket team.

You can still visit the ruins of the series of factories by the village of Chilworth. Some of the buildings were damaged by accidental explosions. The rest simply decayed, allowing the woodland to reclaim its place, while the stream that used to drive the mills now flows on regardless, oblivious of the industry that once harnessed it. Cobbett would have approved.

Just one activity remains. They still play cricket at the nearby Blackheath Cricket Club. And on its pavilion walls you can see photo memoirs of men wearing white who produced the black stuff. Even the roller used to flatten the pitch is an iron drum that was salvaged from one of the mills.

It just keeps rolling along. 🇬🇧

TIM CLARK is a docent at ACM and the Co-Editor in Chief of *PASSAGE*.

POTTY ABOUT OTTERS

OTTERS LOOK BLACK WHEN SLICING THROUGH THE WATER, BUT AS **JO WRIGHT** REVEALS WITH HER STUNNING CLOSE-UPS, THEY ARE REALLY BROWN, AND TRULY FASCINATING.

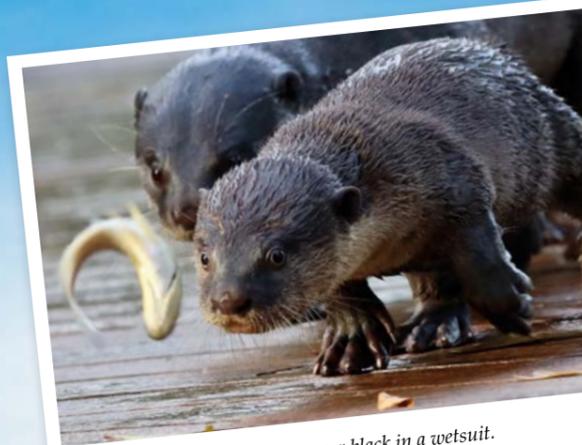
All photos by the author.

“Want to see otters on the Singapore River? I can show you where they’re staying!”

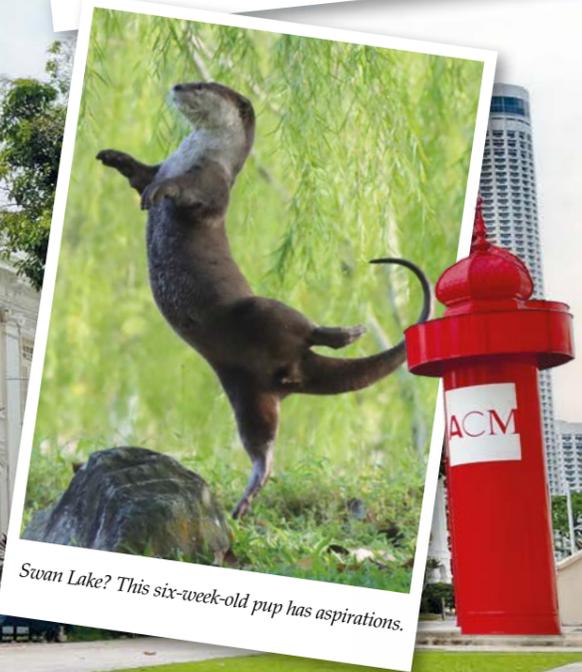
Who could resist an offer like that, delivered to me right after one of my tours at ACM? Right away, I hotfooted it upstream from the museum, past STPI and Robertson Quay and very soon came across an utterly delightful otter family, complete with a bevy of gorgeous fluffy pups tumbling around together on the grass. I stayed watching them for some time, absolutely transfixed by their antics. I was hooked!

This happened over six years ago, and I haven’t stopped watching otters since. I count myself very lucky indeed to be one of Singapore’s small band of otter-watchers.

But what is it about otters that makes them so compelling to watch?



Otters can appear black in a wetsuit.



Swan Lake? This six-week-old pup has aspirations.



Visiting ACM.



Traffic stopper.

STRONG FAMILY TIES

The otters we have on the main island of Singapore are Smooth-coated Otters (*Lutrogale perspicillata*). They are highly social animals, and, by choice, they live together in families. Each family generally has one breeding pair – the alpha male and female – who together have around one litter of pups a year. Offspring from previous years help raise the new pups. They take turns with babysitting for when mum and dad are out, helping to teach the pups how to swim, bringing them small fish to eat and showing them how to hunt for themselves.

It’s the interaction of the family members, how they work and play together, which makes them such fun to observe. Watching the tiny pups in their first swimming lesson and the way the youngsters explore the world. They are very playful creatures and their antics often make me laugh out loud! Being able to see the whole family working together to herd fish when they hunt is very special and really difficult to observe in the wild, as opposed to our “urban” otters. But most of all, it’s when they come out of the water, dry off on the grass and groom each other that their family ties become most apparent.

They tend to sleep in a group, within paw-touch of other. And although they may all seem fast asleep; they always have one or two on watch.

REVIVAL OF THE SPECIES

The presence of otters in Singapore is a huge success story for the country from a conservation viewpoint. From being completely wiped out in Singapore in the 1960s, otters have made a remarkable comeback. What made this possible was the determination in 1970s by Lee Kuan Yew to clean up the Singapore River, which at the time was so badly polluted with waste in the rush to nation-building, that little aquatic life could survive. It wasn’t just the Singapore River that was in bad shape. The nearby Kallang River held the unenviable nickname of “Dead Chicken River”!

From that early initiative, and others like it, the waterways of Singapore have been transformed, capable of hosting a variety of wildlife, including fish, birds, insects and of course otters. All testament to the quality of the water in which they live.

Family meal. Pups have to be taught to eat and catch their own fish.





Hanging loose. Otters know how to relax.

PERCEPTION VERSUS REALITY

If you believe some of the lurid headlines, you could be forgiven for thinking that Singapore is awash with otters. In 2020 during COVID-19 lockdown, for example, the news sites around the world were full of photos of otters roaming the streets of Singapore and apparently taking over the country! In fact, we know from putting together the observations on the ground, that virtually all of these sightings were of just one otter family (the so-called Zouk family) who were being particularly adventurous at the time, exploring the deserted streets of the city.

What about their apparently voracious appetite for koi carp? The reality is that otters don't like eating them and will only take them if nothing else is available. If you have pet fish in a pond and are concerned about otters, the safest course of action is to simply use exclusion measures to ensure that the otters can't come onto your property.

Enjoying cuddles! Otters are very tactile, and pups are regularly groomed by family members.



Otter attacks a Croc?

HOW TO SPOT AN OTTER

The latest population survey puts the otter count at around 170 individuals and although to some it may sound a lot, when it comes to actually finding them in our waterways and around the coast it can sometimes prove tricky. Best times to see them are when they are out and about hunting for fish, generally 7-10am and 4-7pm. Walk around Marina Bay at these times or along the banks of the Singapore River and even Bishan Park and, if you're very lucky, you may get to spot them.

And if you do happen to come across otters, do remember to enjoy them from a distance. Keep in mind that the best photos are generally taken with a telephoto lens, rather than simply a handphone. So don't be tempted to stray too close!

Want to know more about otters in Singapore? You can go to the OurWildNeighbours.sg website, which gives all sorts of interesting information about these iconic animals and useful links to further online sites.

JO WRIGHT became a FOM docent in 2009 and delights in weaving stories through the galleries of ACM. In her spare time, she watches otters.

CAPTURING HOME ON PAPER

PRISCYLLA SHAW EXAMINES THE MEANING OF 'HOME' TO ARTIST DO HO SUH

Photos by the author unless otherwise stated.

The word 'home' conjures up many images. It has been expressed visually, gastronomically, in literature and in music. The contents of museums around the world include objects which once adorned and decorated homes, be they castles or longhouses.

For contemporary artist Do Ho Suh (b. 1962, Seoul), 'home' is a theme that is carried throughout his works and which he examines both from South Korea and from abroad, where 'home' is at a distance.

Suh is one of South Korea's most internationally recognised contemporary artists today. His works span a wide range of media including installations, sculptures, drawings, prints and videos in which he explores ideas relating to home, belonging and identity. To Suh, the notion of 'home' is of universal and urgent concern.

INSPIRED BY ARCHITECTURE

Architecture forms the backbone of many of Suh's works. Amongst the better known of his works are his stitched-fabric models of selected buildings and domestic objects within his former homes in New York, Berlin and London. These include façades of buildings in a reduced size, life-sized models of 'staircases to nowhere', and models of everyday Western household equipment like washing machines, toilet bowls and cooker-ovens all made from gauze-like fabrics in single colours of pink, purple, green, red, yellow and blue. Suh calls them 'fabric architecture'.

The idea of 'fabric architecture', using a soft medium to express something traditionally hard in form, came to him after his stint at the Rhode Island School of Design in the 1990s. He also completed studies in sculpture at the Yale



A full-scale reconstruction of Do Ho Suh's childhood hanok home, MCA Galleries, Sydney, 2023. Rubbing/Loving Project: Seoul Home, 2013-2022, graphite on mulberry paper, aluminium frame. 534 x 866 x 802.5 cm. Private Collection.

University School of Art.

Suh's latest project marries 'home' and architecture. In 2013, he embarked on *Rubbing/Loving Project: Seoul Home*, addressing the subject of 'home': how do we build it, hold it and carry it? The result is a monochrome installation, a full-scale paper reconstruction of his childhood home in Seoul. It is an imposing life-size house that is at once powerful and grand, impressive in scale, real and yet appearing as if in a dream because of its non-colours, like a 3D sepia photo. As a paper reconstruction, *Seoul Home* recreates in fine detail the exterior of his childhood home. Yet, at its core, it is an intensely personal work because it is inextricably bound up with Suh's memories, sentiments and experiences in his childhood house and because of the cathartic process of creating the work. Even though it is paper on a frame, the closed doors and windows compel us to wonder about the interior – what is held inside?

CHILDHOOD AND HOME

Suh grew up in a cultured environment. His father, Suh Se Ok (1929–2020), was a respected Korean ink painter. His mother Minza Chung, is a founder of the cultural preservation group Arumjigi Culture Keepers Foundation. His childhood house was built by his father in the 1970s in the form of a *hanok*, a traditional one-storeyed Korean house made of wood, with a characteristic terracotta tiled, curved roof. The house sits within an elegant courtyard surrounded by plants. The house is itself a recreation of the master's quarters and library of a 19th century 'civilian-style' building commissioned in 1828 by King Sunjo, the 23rd Joseon dynasty ruler (r.1800–34) and constructed in the garden of the Changdoek palace complex. In the 1950s and 60s, when the palace complex buildings were torn down to make way for roads, Suh's father had salvaged some of the 200 year-old timber of the complex and used it to build his reproduction *hanok*. The wood would otherwise have been sold as firewood.



Suh's childhood home covered by the rubbing sheets. Photo courtesy of Do Ho Suh, Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York, Hong Kong, Seoul and London, and Victoria Miro, London and Venice.

CREATIVE PROCESS

Suh systematically covered the façade of his *hanok* house with hundreds of small sheets of Korean mulberry paper known as *hanji* (Korean: 한지/韓紙). It is of a soft white colour and made from the inner bark (*dak*) of the *Broussonetia papyrifera*, popularly known as the paper mulberry tree. The tree is native to Asia, including Korea, Taiwan, China, Japan, parts of South East Asia, Myanmar and India. It grows well on



Suh cutting away the sheets. The wood colour of the original house can be seen in contrast to the graphite. Photo courtesy of Do Ho Suh, Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York, Hong Kong, Seoul and London, and Victoria Miro, London and Venice.

rocky mountainsides. The mulberry tree played an important role during the Joseon dynasty (1392–1910). The bark was made into a translucent but very resistant paper, which was used for imprinting or wrapping. *Hanji* beautifully evokes a Korean 'home', as it is a native element that can commonly be found in Korean households to this day.

A NINE-YEAR LABOUR OF LOVE

For nine years, Suh rubbed over every centimetre of the external surface of the house using graphite and his fingertips, tracing the volume, contours, shape and silhouette of the house. For the entire period, the papers remained in place, taking on the patina of age, weathering and dust. He finally completed his rubbings in 2022.

After nine years, the sheets had become like a skin of the house. Suh cut away the sheets carefully piece by piece and transferred them onto a life-sized aluminium framework model of the house. Suh said that removing the sheets was like 'skinning an animal'.

According to Megan Robson, Associate Curator of Exhibitions, Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), Sydney, in building the childhood house in the way that he did, Suh's father was motivated by conservation. With *Seoul Home*, it seems that Suh captured Korean cultural heritage and developed it into a contemporary architectural space.

As strangers to his childhood home, it seems that we can never fully appreciate the full impact of this work. The *hanok* holds for Suh remembrances of all the events that had happened to him and his family members there. To him, the house 'embodied the lives lived within it'. In an interview with Rachel Kent, Chief Curator, MCA, he describes the house as a self-portrait, but also as a portrait of his father, who formed the house during his lifetime.

Due to the length of the project, the graphite rubbing is inevitably imbued with Suh's emotions from the start of the project through the nine years it took to complete. For example, his father passed away whilst he was working on the project; he can probably recall this juncture in the rubbing. Surely, it is unlikely that any third party can experience Suh's feelings.

Suh put an enormous amount of energy and concentration into the graphite rubbing to capture every millimetre of the house. He had to work with rhythm and constancy to achieve evenness in the rubbing and not miss any areas.

He said that there was a lot of devotion and caring in the process, hence, the title *Rubbing/Loving Project: Seoul Home*. He also said that a sense of nurturing and protection underscored this project because it represented his origins. Additionally, with this work, Suh believes that he has produced a unique installation that captures not just his life and that of his father and his family but also his DNA. As his fingertips were worn away by the constant rubbing, he believes that the sheets contain more than just the details of the surface of the house, they contain his DNA too.



Detail of rubbings of roof end-tiles showing dragons (bottom) and phoenixes (top).

'Home is what we carry with us' - Do Ho Suh

Seoul Home was a spiritual quest for Suh, in which he sought to capture in rubbings the physical and emotional memories of a space that is so much a part of his identity. According to Megan Robson, Suh believes that the memory of a space can be captured through mapping its architectural details. By transcribing a space onto paper, he attempted to 'memorialise the internal space'. During the rubbing process, he tried to capture 'a space that had human activity in it', for example, by capturing changes in texture which indicate where areas had been worn down with use over time, or 'marks of habitation such as the remnants of a nail that had once held a coat hook'.

It is clear that *Seoul Home* is an installation that can be held and carried, dismantled and re-assembled and it is eminently portable, being a series of rubbings on paper. Suh has reduced the shades of brown wood, tiles, and other colours



Detail of reconstructed sections of the house.



Roof of the reconstructed paper house with its exposed beams.

of the house to just black and white, to minimise distraction. Secondly, he has turned something that is notionally as old as antiquity into a present-day reproduction. Thirdly, he has captured the minute external details of his childhood home in a large architectural installation whilst making us focus on the interior.

THIS IS HOME, TRULY

But what is 'home' to a Singaporean? For Singapore, 'home' has been a work-in-progress since our early nation-building days. We have come a long way since then. Singaporeans these days would recognise their deep sense of home, whether they would be in Singapore or abroad. A change in bricks and mortar has not eroded Singaporeans' sense of home. The vast change in the landscape of Singapore since the 1960s, thanks to far-sighted public housing programmes, urban renewal and private enterprise, has been accompanied by a deepening sense of home amongst Singaporeans. Singaporeans might upsize their homes with the growing size of the family, or downsize in old age. So, how do Singaporeans hold their home? Perhaps, as that popular National Day song says, 'home', that nebulous concept, is simply carried and held in our hearts and in the hearts of loved ones around us. ■

PRISCYLLA SHAW is the Features Editor of *PASSAGE*.

THE WHITE RAJAH

DAWN MARIE LEE RECOUNTS THE TALE OF JAMES BROOKE, THE ROGUE ADVENTURER WHO CLAIMED A CROWN

In Rudyard Kipling's short story *The Man Who Would Be King*, two scruffy British adventurers concoct a dangerously mad plan to become kings of Kafiristan, a remote region of British India. One of them declares,

"If I want a crown I must go and hunt it for myself."

They ultimately succeed, but at great cost. The story was inspired by a real-life adventurer, James Brooke.

A CHILD OF THE BRITISH RAJ

Born on 29 April 1803 near Calcutta, James Brooke was the son of an English high court judge. He spent an idyllic, privileged childhood in India before being sent to England at 12 years old to be educated at the Norwich School, from which he ran away. He did however, learn to sail during his three years at Norwich, a skill that would fuel his taste for adventure and later set the course of his life. At 16, he returned to India as a junior officer in the Bengal Army of the British East India Company (EIC).



James Brooke as a child. Image from the Brooke Trust.

WOUNDED IN BATTLE

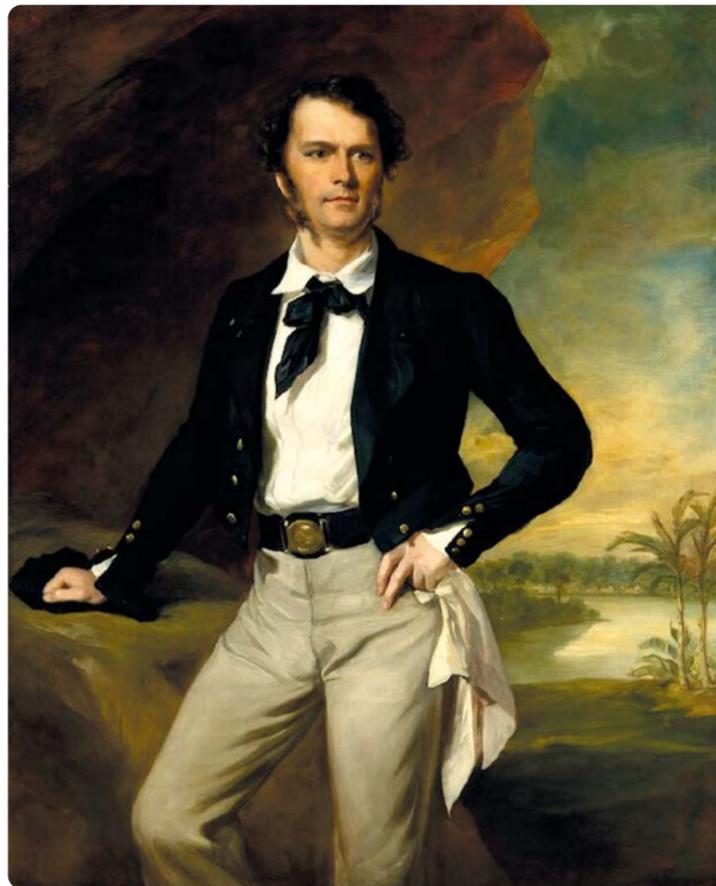
In 1825, he saw action in Assam during the First Anglo-Burmese War and was mentioned in military dispatches for conspicuous gallantry and leadership. Brooke spent all of two days in battle, but was so seriously wounded that his convalescence lasted five years. His injury all but ended his military career.

In 1830, he set sail for India on the EIC ship *Castle Huntley*, but failed to re-join his unit in Bengal and resigned from his commission. He was gleeful about his resignation and wrote, "I am like a horse who has got a heavy clog off his neck...Here goes a puff of my cigar, and with it I blow the Company to the devil or anywhere else so they trouble me no further!"

THE LURE OF THE FAR EAST

Brooke sailed with the *Castle Huntley* to Penang, Melaka and Singapore until its final destination in Canton, China. Inspired by this voyage, he yearned to return to the Far East. The EIC was in full expansion and trading in the Far East promised adventure and glory.

Upon his return to England, he grew restless and nagged his father to buy him a ship and merchandise to trade. For Brooke, 'trade' was an excuse to satiate his lust for an exotic adventure. His father, having already acceded to his older son's demand for an elephant, reluctantly indulged Brooke. However, he warned, "About trade, you are quite ignorant...There is no pursuit to which you are less suited." True to his father's words, Brooke failed in his initial attempts to trade in the Far East and lost his ship to debt.



Portrait of James Brooke in semi-naval uniform painted by Francis Grant, 1847. Collection of the National Portrait Gallery, UK.



Kuching in 1844. Etching by Frank S. Marryat. Image from Wikimedia Commons.

THE ROYALIST

In 1835, Brooke's father died and left his children £30,000 each (£3 million in today's currency). Despite his previous losses, Brooke used his inheritance to purchase a 142-tonne schooner, the *Royalist* and set off for Borneo in 1838.

He had enormous confidence and craved distinction. He published a prospectus in a London literary magazine and invited fellow adventurers to join him, declaring that his mission was to "banish the darkness of paganism and the horrors of the slave-trade in the Far East" and to "resist Dutch influence in Borneo". What started as a gentleman's voyage of exploration ended with Brooke becoming the lord of a jungle kingdom that was the size of England.

A LAND OF PIRATES

Borneo was known for piracy, which was the result of local vessels in the Malay Archipelago being excluded from Portuguese then Dutch trade monopolies in the region. Aided by the monsoon winds, Illanun pirates from South Philippines attacked trading vessels and coastal settlements. Their fast *prahus* outpaced most sailing ships. Their stronghold was in Mindanao but they had hideouts in remote coves close to Borneo. They ruthlessly raided ships for cargo, kidnapped their victims and sold them as slaves.

The northern half of Borneo was ruled by the Sultan of Brunei and the rest of the island was under Dutch influence. Dense jungles fragmented by rivers and mountains made it hard to rule the territory. Malay chiefs managed most coastal towns, and commerce was split between Chinese and Malay merchants. The native Dayaks largely ignored any form of administration and went about their business of gathering food, hunting heads and occasionally clashing with rival tribes.

A TUSSELE FOR 'SINGAPORE STONE'

Before Brooke's arrival, the Sultan of Brunei, Omar Ali Saifuddin II, took great interest in exports of Sarawak's antimony ore. 'Sarawak' is the Malay word for antimony because the territory was rich in the mineral. Antimony was also called 'Singapore stone' as the merchants in Singapore dominated the trade. Borneo natives used it as a cosmetic and as dye for their sarongs, but in the West there was a great demand for it to make tin cans and bullets.

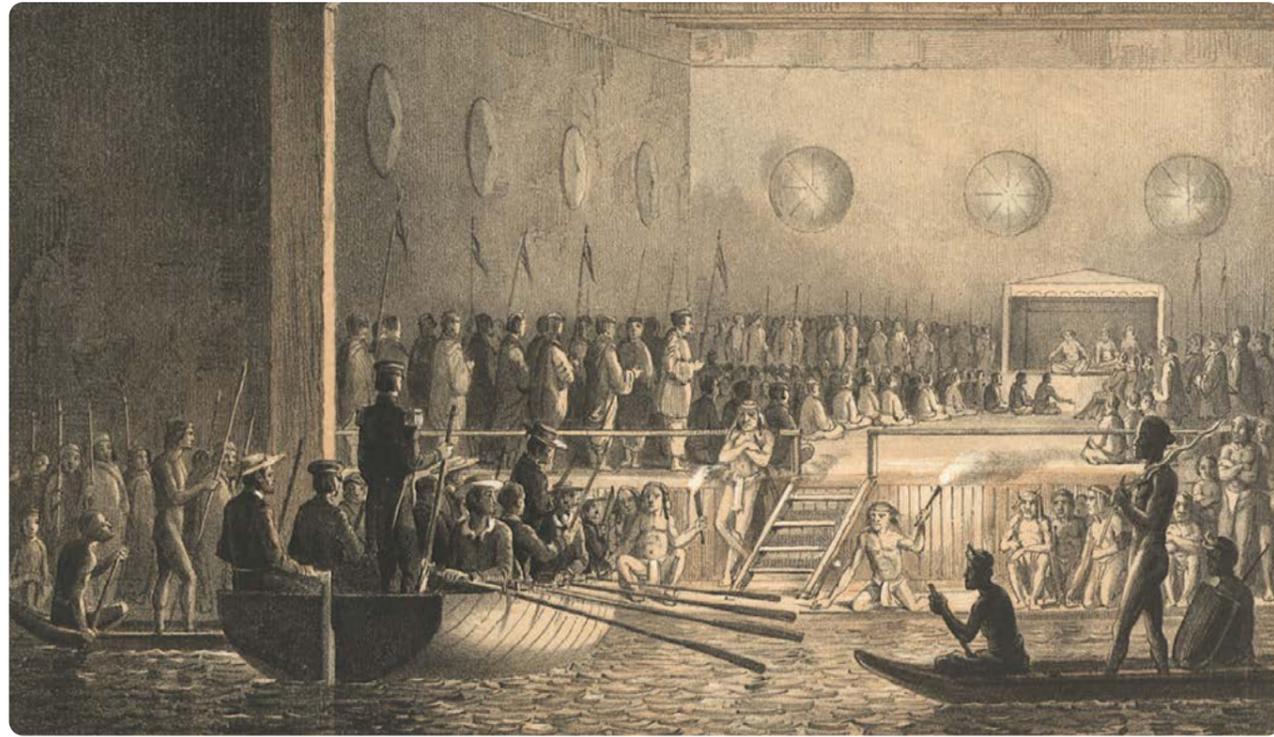
When Sultan Omar realised how valuable the ore was, he tried to establish absolute control over the Sarawak economy. He seized antimony mines and used forced labour for mining. He also implemented oppressive taxes on exports of the ore. This led to a violent rebellion by the ruling chiefs of Sarawak from both Malay and Dayak factions.

A VERY HELPFUL MISUNDERSTANDING

The *Royalist* sailed into Sarawak in August 1839 just as the uprising gained momentum. Brooke's crew fired off a 21-gun salute to show their peaceful intentions and size of their ordnance. They were welcomed by Rajah Muda Hashim, a cousin of Sultan Omar.

While Brooke did not claim to be a British official, he flaunted the fact that the *Royalist* was formerly part of the Royal Yacht Squadron and had the privileges of a man-of-war. It could receive naval salute and fly the white ensign, which implied that the commanding officer of the ship carried the Queen's commission. With the ship, Brooke also bought the right to wear a semi-naval uniform. He was so proud of it that in 1847, he wore it to have his portrait painted by Francis Grant.

The *Royalist* was laden with gifts and gunpowder from British merchants in Singapore. The year before, a British ship had come to grief on rocks near Sarawak and the crew



James Brooke and the British delegation arrive by boat to negotiate the cessation of Labuan at the Sultan of Brunei's court. The sultan sits cross-legged on the throne at the upper end of the chamber. Etching by Frank S. Marryat. Image from Wikimedia Commons.

took refuge in the jungle. Hashim sent for them and not only housed and fed them but salvaged their cargo and returned them to Singapore at his own expense. In gratitude, the merchants sent extravagant gifts and an official letter of thanks from the Governor of Singapore.

With his heavily-armed ship bearing lavish gifts and official papers, it was no wonder that the Brunei court believed Brooke to be an envoy of the British government, while he was in fact, just a wealthy tourist.

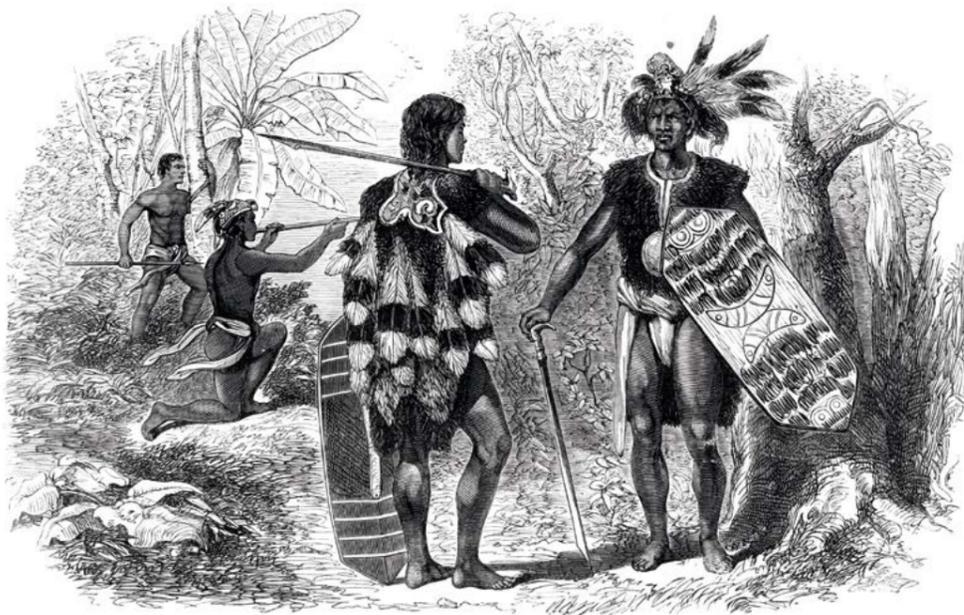
KING OF THE JUNGLE

Brooke struck up an easy friendship with Hashim, who asked for his help to quell the rebellion. The Malays had formed an alleged alliance with the Dutch, and the Bruneians desperately wanted to keep the Dutch threat at bay. They had no idea that they were forming a political alliance with an opportunistic young man and not the British government.

With skilful military strategies and powerful canons, Brooke successfully helped to crush the rebellion. As a reward, he was given governorship of Sarawak in September 1841. In 1842, the Sultan ceded complete sovereignty of Sarawak to Brooke and he assumed the title of Rajah.

RECOGNITION AT LAST

News of Brooke's success in Sarawak gained attention in Britain. Brooke was determined to eradicate piracy in the region. The British dispatched Royal Navy ships to assist Brooke in his anti-piracy operations, which began in 1844. Among them was Navy officer, Henry Keppel. In his accounts, Keppel wrote that Brooke's vigorous campaign against pirates and subjugation of Sarawak natives was often violent. He recounts colonial forces committing acts



Dayaks in their war dress, 1864, *The Illustrated London News*.

of plunder, looting and razing villages to the ground. These actions were deemed necessary to bring about order under the White Rajah's rule.

Backed by the Royal Navy, Brooke's power grew and he annexed more territories from Brunei. In 1846 the Sultan of Brunei ceded the island of Labuan to the British and Brooke was appointed British Governor of Labuan. In 1848 he became Consul General of Borneo and was created a Knight Commander in the Order of Bath. Brooke finally received the recognition he craved.

PROTECTOR OF THE LAND DAYAKS

Three groups confronted Brooke in his state-building efforts – the Malays, Sea Dayaks (Iban) and Land Dayaks (Bidayuh). Brooke made known that he protected the Bidayuh who were "forced to work in the mines by the Malays without pay, were robbed of their homes, and even of their wives and children". Brooke found them to be a "mild, industrious race who are remarkably honest" and didn't seem to mind that they preserved their enemies' heads as tokens of victory. In contrast, he viewed the Iban as vicious, piratical tribes who aligned with the Malays to usurp him.

During his rule, Brooke dealt with three attempted coups, one by Chinese miners in 1857 and two by Malay nobles who plotted against him. Brooke protected himself with a private army of 200 Bidayuh warriors.

HOUNDED BY A NEWSMAN

In 1849, Brooke became the centre of a controversy when he was accused of using excessive violence in his campaign against piracy. Robert Carr Woods, the first editor of *The Straits Times* in Singapore resented Brooke over a perceived snub. He charged that Brooke's bloody suppression of Iban pirates earlier that year was actually a massacre of peaceful traders. In 1851, Woods petitioned the British government for an inquest. Brooke was ordered to Singapore in 1854 to face a Commission of Inquiry. After investigation, all charges against him were dismissed.

AN EFFECTIVE RULER

Brooke set up an efficient system of government in Sarawak by integrating British administrative practices with conventions of the Malay monarchy. He extended an olive branch to insurgents and invited them to collaborate. He built forts to safeguard the area from rampant piracy. Once a quiet riverside hamlet, Brooke's efforts soon transformed Kuching into a seat of power.

The British government backed Brooke politically, but he received little financial support. To Britain, Sarawak was a troublesome territory, populated by pirates and headhunters and was perennially short of income. Brooke attempted to tax his subjects who often resisted and his efforts at trade ran in the red. Fortunately, he had wealthy supporters, the most notable of which was Angela Burdett-Coutts.

GODDESS OF THE DAYAKS

The daughter of a banker, Baroness Burdett-Coutts was widely known as the "richest heiress in England". In 1837 she inherited her grandfather's fortune of £1.8 million (about £200 million today). Edward VII described her as "the most remarkable woman in the kingdom", only second to his mother, Queen Victoria.

Burdett-Coutts spent her wealth largely on philanthropic causes. She was instantly drawn to Brooke when they met as guests of Queen Victoria. Some historians believe that

she was in love with him. One of Brooke's biographers wrote, "Born to great wealth, she was determined to use her money to advance her humanitarian ideas, and when the Rajah spoke to her about his beloved Land Dayaks enslaved by Malays and plagued by pirates, her heart went out to them."

In 1859 Burdett-Coutts and Brooke began a fervent correspondence that lasted nine years until his death. Her large donations enabled Brooke to govern Sarawak and continue his war on piracy. He purchased an armed steamship, which he named *Rainbow* after the baroness to "honour her beauty, the goddess of the Dayaks and the calm following a storm".

She was said to have proposed marriage but Brooke politely declined given his affection for certain young men. He trusted her so much that at one point he willed Sarawak to her before finally deciding on his nephew Charles as his heir.



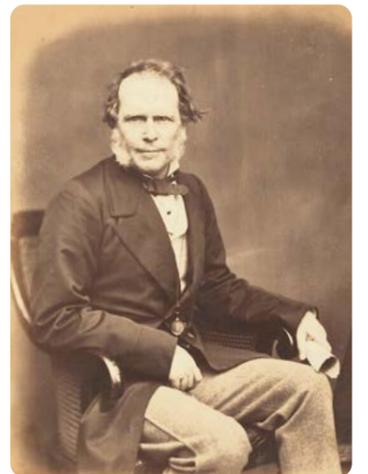
Baroness Angela Burdett-Coutts, 1840. Artist unknown. Collection of the National Portrait Gallery, UK.

SAVIOUR OR SCOUNDREL?

Sir James Brooke died in England on 11 June 1868. He was a charismatic yet controversial figure who is lauded for establishing a stable government in Sarawak and suppressing piracy in the region. Despite his achievements, he was accused of exploiting the region's resources for personal gain and his suppression of rebellions was seen as heavy-handed acts of imperialism.

Sarawak continued to be ruled by the Brooke Rajahs until it became a British Crown Colony in 1946.

The Brooke Trust was established by his descendants in 2010. In 2016, they set up a museum in Fort Margherita, Kuching, to tell the story of the White Rajahs. The Fort was built by the second White Rajah, Charles Brooke. ■



Sir James Brooke photographed by Albert Watkins in the late 1850s. Albumen print. Collection of the National Portrait Gallery, UK.

DAWN MARIE LEE is Co-Editor-in-Chief of PASSAGE.

The Truth In Black And White



A still from the famous 1956 film, *The King and I*, starring Yul Brynner as King Mongkut and Deborah Kerr as Anna Leonowens. Until today, the film continues to be banned in Thailand for its disregard for the truth and incorrect portrayal of King Mongkut. Photo from Wikimedia Commons.

ERIC ROSENKRANZ UNCOVERS THE TRUE STORY OF ANNA AND THE KING OF SIAM

"Shall we dance?"

Millions have been thrilled by these words as Anna Leonowens began to polka with the King of Siam in the hit film and Broadway musical *The King and I*.

The fictional Anna's story is well known to movie and theatre goers. In the film, she was born in Wales and married a dashing British Army officer who died of sunstroke on a tiger hunt, leaving Anna alone with her only child, Louis. Receiving a job offer to be governess to the children of King Mongkut, Rama IV of Siam, she takes a ship to Bangkok where she eagerly awaits the house outside the palace that was promised to her.



Anna Leonowens (1831-1915). Photo from Wikimedia Commons.

She meets the King, a handsome young libertine with a multi-wife harem, and his children, among whom is the heir apparent, a rude child named Chulalongkorn. She teaches the Prince civility, and the King many things including the notion that the world is round. She encourages the King to abolish slavery at the court, and in response he sends a letter to Abraham Lincoln in the US offering elephants to help him in the fight against slavery and the Confederate Army during the American Civil War. Anna is by the King's side as he dies and the young prince, now Rama V, vows to put into place all that he has learned from Anna.

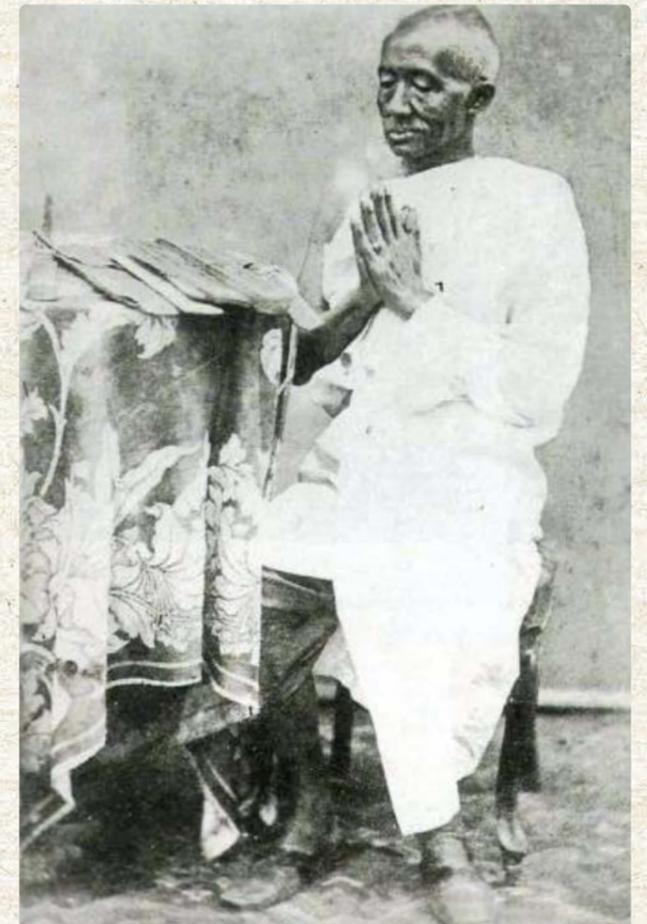
Unfortunately, none of this is true. But the truth is far more interesting.

WHITE LIES?

Ann Harriett Emma Edwards was born in Ahmednagar, India of mixed parentage, one of her grandmothers being Indian. She went to a school for mixed race children in Bombay. She never lived in England until after she left Thailand as an adult.

At the age of 14 she ran off with a 30-year-old reverend from her parish in India and travelled unchaperoned with him to the Middle East. At 17, Anna married Thomas Leon Owens, a busted down private who eventually left the army to provide supplies as a non-military quartermaster. They lived for a while in Perth, Australia, and then moved to Penang where Thomas kept a hotel and died, officially of apoplexy (unofficially of syphilis), leaving Anna with a young son and daughter.

(As a side note, Anna had a younger sister whose grandson, William Henry Pratt, moved to America, changed his name and found fame and fortune in Hollywood under the name of Boris Karloff. He was famous for his roles in horror movies including *Frankenstein* and *The Raven*.)



Ordained as Monk Vajirayan at age 20, Mongkut stayed in the orders until he was 47. Photo from Wikimedia Commons.



King Mongkut with his second consort (and niece) and mother of King Chulalongkorn. This photograph was taken the same year Anna arrived at the Siamese Court. Collection of Mr and Mrs Lee Kip Lee.

THE SINGAPORE CONNECTION

Anna moved with her two children to Singapore, where she reinvented herself as a Welsh born widow of an army major. She founded a school for the children of British Army officers but it was not a success. Failure loomed, but enter Tan Kim Ching.

The son of Tan Tock Seng, founder of Tan Tock Seng Hospital in Singapore, Tan Kim Ching was one of the richest men in Singapore at the time, with factories on Boat Quay and warehouses in Tanjong Pagar. He was appointed Siamese Consul in Singapore by King Mongkut. When King Mongkut needed an English tutor for his children, he asked Tan to recommend someone and the post fell to Anna.

THE BLACK WIDOW?

Anna and the King most likely never met in private, although she was probably introduced to him at a court function. She taught English for six years (not as governess, a more prestigious position) and was shunned at court by English society for her dark complexion, leading her to demand a house outside the palace as living in the palace had become insufferable.

Falling sick, she went to England for her health and, while there, King Mongkut died of malaria while conducting experiments relating to a solar eclipse. Anna applied to return but was rebuffed and never saw Thailand again. Later, when she met King Chulalongkorn on his travels to Europe, he commented that “she has supplied by her invention that which is deficient in her memory.”

Far from being a sex-crazed, slave owning playboy, Mongkut had become a Buddhist monk at age twenty. When his father died, he was passed over in the line of succession for an older brother born of a concubine, not the Queen, and

Mongkut decided to stay in the monkhood. He remained there for 27 years but left to become King at age 47. (He was 58 when Anna arrived.) Having been celibate all this time, he made up for lost time by fathering 82 children from the various women offered to him. It was customary for minor nobles to offer their daughters to the King so that their children would return to their hometowns to be minor lords and ladies.

LILY WHITE?

Mongkut was a highly educated person, very westernised for the time. He encouraged western learning, especially of geography and astronomy, and brought multiple tutors from England to instruct the court.



Chulalongkorn visiting Singapore. Collection of Mr and Mrs Lee Kip Lee.



(top)
Chulalongkorn's children taking pictures. Collection of Mr and Mrs Lee Kip Lee.

(left)
King Chulalongkorn with a few of his many children. Collection of Mr and Mrs Lee Kip Lee.

He hired mercenaries to teach western warfare and brought in an American to found the first newspaper.

He banned forced marriages and the sale of a wife to pay debts. Any of his official concubines who could not have children with him were allowed to leave court and find their own husbands (twelve did). However, he continued the long time practice of slavery, which included people (mostly Burmese) captured in war and others who voluntarily became slaves in order to escape debts.

He did write a letter to Abraham Lincoln's predecessor, James Buchanan, before the Civil War started, offering elephants as beasts of burden in the US. The offer was kindly rejected by Lincoln several years later.

When Mongkut died of malaria, his ninth eldest son, but first to be born of a royal queen, ascended the throne at age 15.

THE BLACK SHEEP?

What of Chulalongkorn, the petulant child? Rama V may be the most popular and respected of all the historical Thai kings and, among many other things, he truly brought Siam out of the Middle Ages by finally abolishing slavery, modernising the army, instituting land reform, and abolishing prostration.

It was his keen interest in photography that led to the Thai royal family's fascination with the art form down to the present day, when the recently deceased Rama IX was well known as a keen photographer and was often portrayed carrying a camera. Photography was introduced to Siam during Mongkut's reign, and the photograph of that King was the first ever representation of a Siamese monarch, but it was his son's passion that caused multiple European photographers to make their way to the kingdom.

King Chulalongkorn bought cameras for his many

wives who took numerous photos of life behind the scenes in the palace.

There have been several remakes of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical for both stage and screen. The film has always been, and continues to be, banned in Thailand for its incorrect portrayal of King Mongkut and disregard for the truth. 

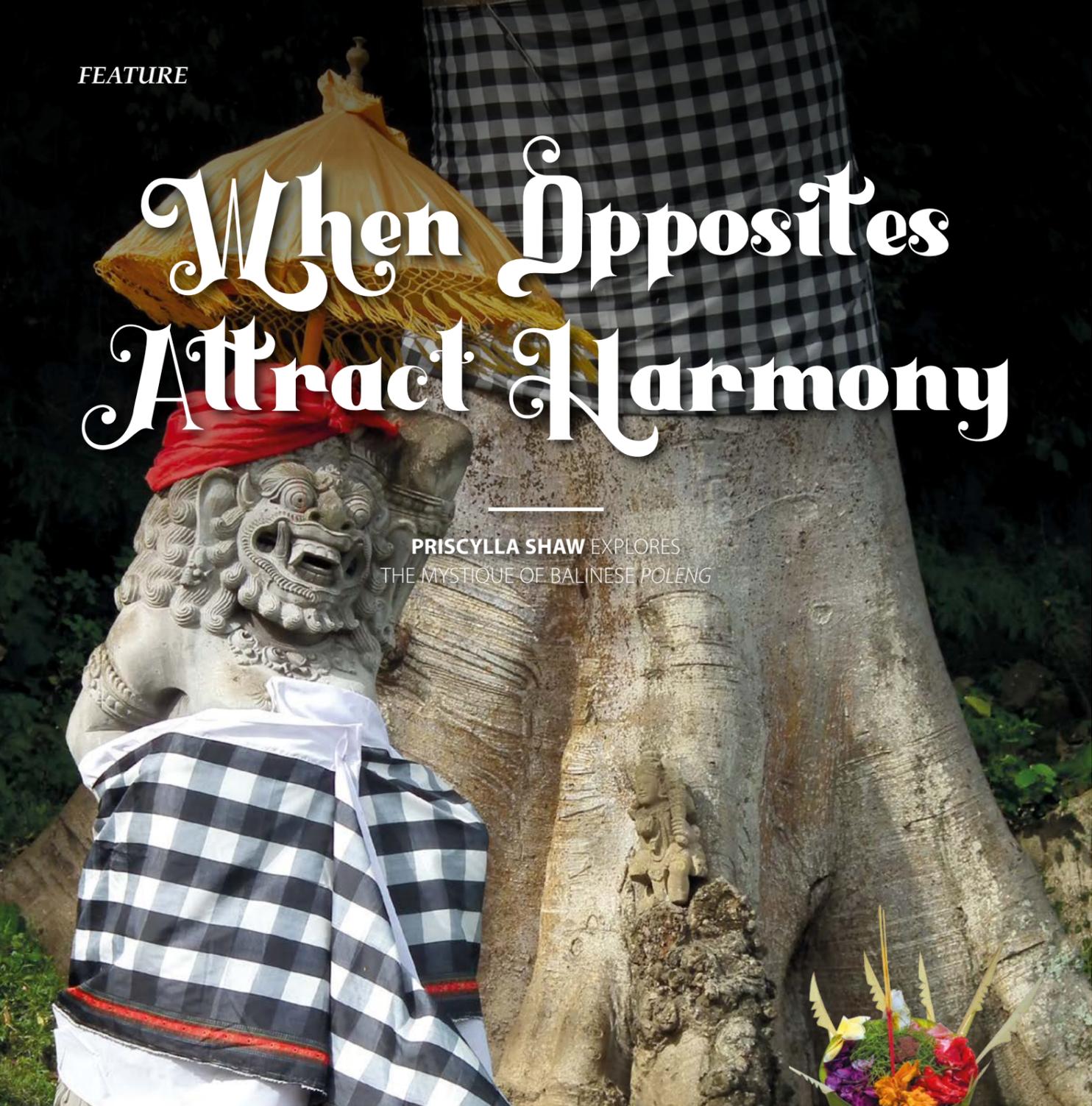


Erb Bunnag (1879-1944), photographer and royal consort to King Chulalongkorn, taking a photograph of her father. Image courtesy of the National Archive of Thailand.

FOM member **ERIC ROSENKRANZ**, among other things, teaches branding and marketing at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, founded in 1899 as a school for training royal pages.

When Opposites Attract Harmony

PRISCYLLA SHAW EXPLORES
THE MYSTIQUE OF BALINESE POLENG



(top)
A charming little Balinese stone statue at the foot of a large tree, wearing saput poleng with a red border. The golden umbrella signifies his status as a deity, and his red cap is for self-protection. Image from Wikimedia Commons.

(right)
A typical Balinese offering to appease spirits. Image from Wikimedia Commons.

With its world-class hotels, incredible scenery and delicious food, Bali is familiar to many Singaporeans as one of their favourite destinations for a carefree holiday away-from-it-all. Exploring the Island of the Gods, visitors are likely to come across the interesting sight of black and white chequered textiles that are wrapped around temple columns, stone statues, tree trunks and rocks, or made into canopies of umbrellas that are placed outside temples. What is this striking chequered cloth and what does it symbolise?



Poleng, Lombok, cotton, woven, 1265 cm x 245 cm. Bak Collection. Image courtesy of Mr Eng Bak Hern.



Poleng, sacred cloth, Bali, silk and cotton, woven, 201cm x 79 cm. Bak Collection. Image courtesy of Mr Eng Bak Hern.



Poleng sacred cloth, Bali, cotton, woven, 146cm x 56.5cm. Bak Collection. Image courtesy of Mr Eng Bak Hern.

SYMBOL OF BALI

The textile is known as *kain poleng* (cloth of cheques) or *saput poleng* (blanket of cheques), as the case may be. For the Balinese, the chequered pattern, *poleng*, is a symbol of their culture. The most obvious aspect of *poleng* is the specific combinations of black, white, grey and red colours of its cheques. The second aspect of *poleng* is how it is used. Both these aspects are interconnected and derive from the Balinese-Hindu religion of the island.

BALINESE-HINDUISM

It is believed that Indian traders who arrived in the Indonesian islands around the first millennium brought with them their Hindu-Buddhist beliefs. These beliefs were assimilated into the ancient indigenous animist and ancestor worship practices of Eastern Indonesia, resulting in Balinese-Hinduism.

Balinese-Hindu adherents believe that duality surrounds us in our daily lives: the contraposition of day

is night, likewise, good and bad, chaos and order. The two contradictory positions are called *rwa bhineda* (two opposites) in Bali. Thus, at the core of Balinese-Hindu practice are actions to achieve equilibrium and preserve balance between polarities, humanity, the unseen world of the gods and spirits, and the environment, a concept called *trihita karana*.

For example, Balinese believe that spirits reside in Bali's fields and forests, beaches, volcanoes and river canyons. To maintain peaceful human and spirit-world coexistence, daily offerings, rituals and prayers are essential. Offerings by way of little fresh flowers can be found everywhere in front of doorways, morning and evening.

THE MEANING BEHIND COLOUR COMBINATIONS

Poleng is symbolic of Bali because it expresses the Balinese desire for balance and harmony. Visitors to Bali experience the sense of calmness the moment they arrive. Nothing is too much trouble for the hotel staff, problems are resolved one way or other and blood pressure drops.

The most common *poleng* combination is black and white, the two colours universally understood to symbolise opposites. Other colour combinations are black, grey and white, and black, red and white. In rarer instances, yellow may be added to these combinations. Colours carry different symbolism in different societies. In Balinese culture, yellow is a sacred colour reserved for religious purposes. Black, white, grey and red too carry specific symbolic meanings.

Putu Astari Hendrawati of Udayana University, Bali, in her study of the colours of *kain poleng* and their meanings, explains that in Balinese society, black is the symbol of something negative and white is the symbol of something positive. Thus, a black and white combination (*poleng rwa bhineda*) expresses balance.

The second combination, in which black squares transition to grey before they are white (*poleng sudhamala*), expresses a search for conformity between positive and negative. The third combination is where black and white are livened up by red (*poleng tridatu*), like the *saput poleng* worn by the little statue. Within this combination, black symbolises the negative quality of laziness, thus requiring red, which represents liveliness, to restore harmony or reach resolution (white). All three combinations of colours are a reminder to man that continuous endeavour is needed to achieve balance and harmony in a world which is constantly in flux. Yellow being a sacred colour, it is only woven in cloth used for religious purposes.



Black and white *poleng* cloths on guardians of a temple. A barong is seen in the doorway. The barong is a panther-like creature in Balinese mythology and is believed to be the king of spirits and leader of the good. Photo from Unsplash.



Door guardians wearing *poleng*. Photo from Adobe Stock Images.



The *poleng* is also used as a symbol of protection for sacred trees in Bali. Photo by Sarah Yana Akib.

SPOT THESE AROUND BALI

Hendrawati groups the use of *poleng* and names the colours appropriate in each case. *Saput Poleng* wrapped around *palinggih* (sacred Hindu shrines) are commonly in black and white. The people who perform the “dressing” and the worshippers both benefit. The dresser gets merit for his act of appeasement and for helping to protect his community. The worshipper looks upon the cloth and feels a sense of comfort that they are safe and that their karma is balanced. *Poleng* used in this way is protective and comforting.

Likewise, when shrines and wrathful statues (*arca*) are wrapped in *poleng* cloths of black, white and grey, people are reminded of the need to strive for balance, which can be achieved by calming and appeasing the gods.

When *kain poleng* are wrapped around banyan trees and rocks, it is believed that the cloth protects people against destructive forces (*mala*) in these objects of nature and purifies or tames them. For example, *saput poleng* around a stone statue is thought to keep wrathful energy inside the stone so that people are not harmed by the spirit. When Balinese see a shrine or tree wrapped in *poleng* cloth as they pass it, they express respect and honour towards it by clapping their hands in a prayer gesture or by hooting their car horn, for failure to do so might anger the spirit within and attract bad luck.

Saput poleng are also worn by *pecalang* (security guards). When they are dressed in *poleng* as they go about their duties, it comforts the people in that community to know that “imbalances” are being restored.

Kecak dancers (trance dancers) who perform excerpts from the Ramayana also use this textile as part of their dance costumes.



Poleng used for religious purposes is traditionally handwoven with natural fibres, not machine made. Photo from Threads of Life.

HANDMADE FOR SACRED USE

Traditionally, when a textile of *poleng* is used for religious purposes or in religious ceremonies, it is woven by hand, not machine-made, and the threads are organic cotton or silk, signifying purity. However, with modern production methods, hand weaving has been dying out. Over the last twenty years, handwoven *poleng* textiles have been steadily replaced by inexpensive white polyester that lacks the visual symbolism.



Kecak (trance) dancers wearing *poleng*. Photo from Wikimedia Commons.

For that matter, complex religious ceremonies have also been truncated. For example, 30 to 50 years ago, ceremonies were guided by a *sulingih* (wise man) who was considered to have *jnana* (spirit), someone whose clear purpose was to help the community in their rituals and act as a bridge to the nature-spirits. He would, of course, have been dressed in handwoven *poleng*. Today, these life cycle ceremonies are shortened, and the meanings and chants have become forgotten. Faced with a changing set of consumers and practices due to changing times, how does *poleng* survive?



Award-winning Balinese fashion designer Tjok Abi has put the traditional *poleng* to contemporary use.

NEW LIFE FOR AN ANCIENT PATTERN

On the bright side, *poleng* has become commoditised. Its “sacred” use has been expanded to profane uses. Therefore the possibilities for its use have been expanded. Fashion designer Tjok Abi is an award-winning Balinese clothing designer who has adapted *poleng* successfully in his designs. As a designer, he knows that he is free to be creative, but he declares that he still maintains the philosophy of *poleng* within his designs and is conscious of the ethics of using *poleng* in them, to preserve the value of *poleng* which central to the lives of the Balinese. Indeed, balance and harmony prevail. As one door closes on *poleng*, another door opens. **P**

PRISCYLLA SHAW is the Features Editor of *PASSAGE*.

Sisters In Service

CHARLOTTE DAWSON PAYS TRIBUTE TO THE MA JIES OF SINGAPORE GARBED IN BLACK AND WHITE



Detail from a painting showing Tang ladies preparing silk. Collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Some mā jié, once worked in the silk industry of the Pearl River Delta. Image from Wikimedia Commons.

There is a unique group of women who worked in Singapore from the 1930s through to the 1970s as housekeepers and nannies. Today, I offer you a case study of a very special lady who looked after two prominent families in Singapore: Madam Ouyang Huan Yan. Hers is a story reflecting the demure and austere lives of the mā jié.

A LIFE OF DISTINGUISHED SERVICE

In the 1930s, there was an influx of women to Singapore, having left their homes in Guangdong, China, to seek work elsewhere. Madam Ouyang was 18 years old when she left her home in XiXi village with her aunts and sisters.

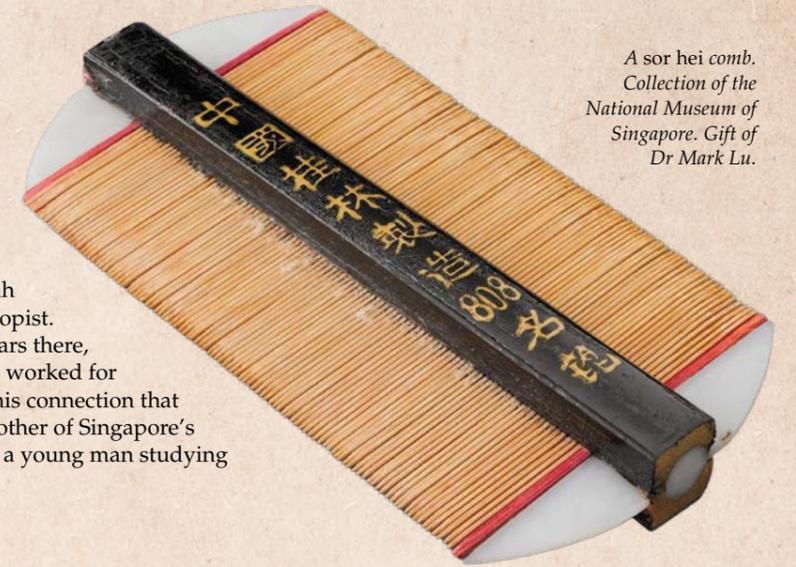
When she arrived in Singapore, she found employment in Tan Kah Kee's household. Tan Kah Kee was a prominent businessman and philanthropist. Not much is known of Madam Ouyang's nine years there, but it is said that she often visited her friend who worked for Tan's neighbour, the Lee family. It was through this connection that she began working for Madam Chua Jim Neo, mother of Singapore's first Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, when he was a young man studying law at Cambridge.

VOWING TO REMAIN SINGLE

Though she was just a teen when she arrived in Singapore, Madam Ouyang was a *zi shu nü* (literal translation: self-combed woman).

Going back hundreds of years, there was a group of women in the Pearl River Delta who worked in the silk industry. They enjoyed the independence of having their own income, so did not marry by choice. Instead, they formed sisterhoods, dedicating themselves to Guanyin, Goddess of Mercy.

It is said that the human personification of Guanyin refused an arranged marriage, choosing instead to remain celibate and to become a nun, which is why the *zi shu nü* revered her. They took *sor hei* (combing up) vows in a temple.



A sor hei comb. Collection of the National Museum of Singapore. Gift of Dr Mark Lu.



Mā jié showcase at the National Museum of Singapore. Photo by the author.



Madam Ouyang Huan Yan with Lee Kuan Yew's daughter, Lee Wei Ling. Photo from Association of Employment Agencies Singapore (AEAS) article Life with the Lees.

As a woman stood in front of a statue of Guanyin, the Master of Ceremony combed her hair eight times then coiled it up into a bun. Each stroke had an auspicious meaning: luck, longevity, contentment, safety, freedom and other blessings. This *sor hei* vow bound the woman into the sisterhood, which was an alternative to marriage.

The date for a *sor hei* ceremony was selected using an almanac, much like how a wedding date is chosen. Afterwards, a great celebration feast was held; *ang pow* (red packets) were given to guests who gave presents in return. Married to the sisterhood, the woman was now independent and could no longer live in the home of her natural family, though filial piety remained a heartfelt duty. It is through this *sor hei* vow that the woman earns the title of *zi shu nü*.

THE COLLAPSE OF THE SILK INDUSTRY

Two things happened to change the course of the *zi shu nü* in China: the Great Depression caused mass unemployment globally, and subsequent mechanisation made them redundant in the silk industry.

Accustomed to self-sufficiency, the women sought work elsewhere – choosing the life of service to families as *amahs* (nannies). The vow of celibacy was thought to make a

woman more desirable as a domestic employee, suggesting that she would be more dedicated to the family she worked for since she had no spouse.

For the woman's family back home, the celibacy vow ensured money would be remitted back to her parents. And for the *zi shu nü*, it allowed for greater independence away from the confines of the institution of marriage. These women held a unique status within their natural families as the breadwinners and were accorded a higher degree of respect and recognition than their married peers.

NOT ALL AMAHS WERE MĀ JIÉ

With the decline in the silk industry, many women left China and sought work as *mā jié*. It is important to note that whilst the *mā jié* were *amahs*, not all *amahs* were *mā jié*. The term *mā jié* combines the Chinese words *mā* (mother) and *jié* (older sister.) It is appropriate given that childcare, housekeeping and cooking were the primary duties of the *mā jié*. Most of them lived with the families they worked for. They led simple lives, sending some money home and saving for their own retirement. The women were recognisable in their black trousers and white *samfu*, often wearing their hair in plaits or buns.

WORKING FOR LEE KUAN YEW'S FAMILY

Madam Ouyang started working for Lee Kuan Yew soon after his marriage to Kwa Geok Choo. In the early days, Madam Ouyang took care of the household chores, but once the Lee children were born, she was responsible for their care – cooking their meals, seeing them off to school and tending to their needs. Madam Ouyang fondly remembers Mrs Lee as a humble and kind employer. She felt honoured that Mrs Lee called her *jié* (older sister).

The *mā jié* were well known for their strong sense of duty, fierce loyalty, and professional conduct. Madam Ouyang was no different. Her service to the Lee family ended after 40 years when she decided to return to China to take care of her ailing sister.

SPINSTER HOUSES AND VEGETARIAN HALLS

Upon retirement, many *mā jié* did not return to China unless with her fellow sisters. Most retired in Singapore to *kuporuk* (spinster houses) or vegetarian halls.

Having no children of their own, communal living was a desirable option for the *mā jié*. The lodgings were comfortable and they had the resources to organise proper funerals for their sworn sisters who passed on. Afforded a sheltered existence, they led a quiet life away from the worries of the world.

The period when the *zi shu nü* left China to work as *mā jié* overseas was a short-lived one in the 1930s. In 1938 the British colonial government put a monthly quota on female immigration into Singapore.

Two social changes in China contributed to the change as well. It started with the decline of the clan association system in the 1930s and 40s, which aligns with a decline in *zi shu nü* practices. But it was the Communist marriage laws introduced in 1950 that put an end to the self-combed women. The new laws afforded women more protection by raising the minimum age for marriage, banning polygamy and arranged marriages and gave women more equality.

From the 1970s, *mā jié* all but vanished from the Singapore streetscape as most had retired or passed on. Today we remember their contributions through photographs, oral histories, and memories shared. You can learn more about the *mā jié* by joining one of our FOM-URA Chinatown Heritage Trails. Many lived in the Bukit Pasoh area and prayed at the Cundhi Gong dedicated to Guanyin. ■

CHARLOTTE DAWSON is a URA-FOM Chinatown Heritage Trail Docent, guiding in Bukit Pasoh.



Cundhi Gong at Keong Siak Road where *mā jié* prayed to Guanyin. Photo by the author.

BLACK AND WHITE MINSTREL



A Magpie-Robin.
Photo by Elvin Chua.

TIM CLARK SINGS THE PRAISES OF A SINGAPORE SONGBIRD

Painting by Yusoff Abdul Latiff.

The Magpie-Robin is often seen in the parks and gardens of Singapore. Being black and white (pied), it resembles the European Magpie, which is a member of the crow family (*Corvidae*). However, the Magpie-Robin clearly doesn't belong to this family. Being an accomplished singer, it was long thought to be, like the European Robin, a member of the Thrush Family (*Turdidae*). An incorrect conclusion.

The same false assumption was once made of the Nightingale. In fact, the Oriental Magpie-Robin, like the Nightingale, is now recognised to be a member of the flycatcher fraternity (*Muscicapidae*).

The Magpie-Robin's talent for singing, sadly, has tragic consequences. Not content to listen to birdsong from a distance, humans simply cannot resist the urge capture it.

Poachers would trap this attractive songbird by smearing the sticky sap of the rubber tree on branches where the bird might perch. This technique was so effective that the Magpie-Robin became a threatened species. It did not fare well in captivity. Being an insectivore, it is unlikely to have received its accustomed healthy diet.

William Blake railed against the practice of caging songbirds in his poem *Auguries of Innocence*: "A Robin Redbreast in a cage puts all heaven in a rage".

WHEN BIRD-LOVERS FLOCK TOGETHER

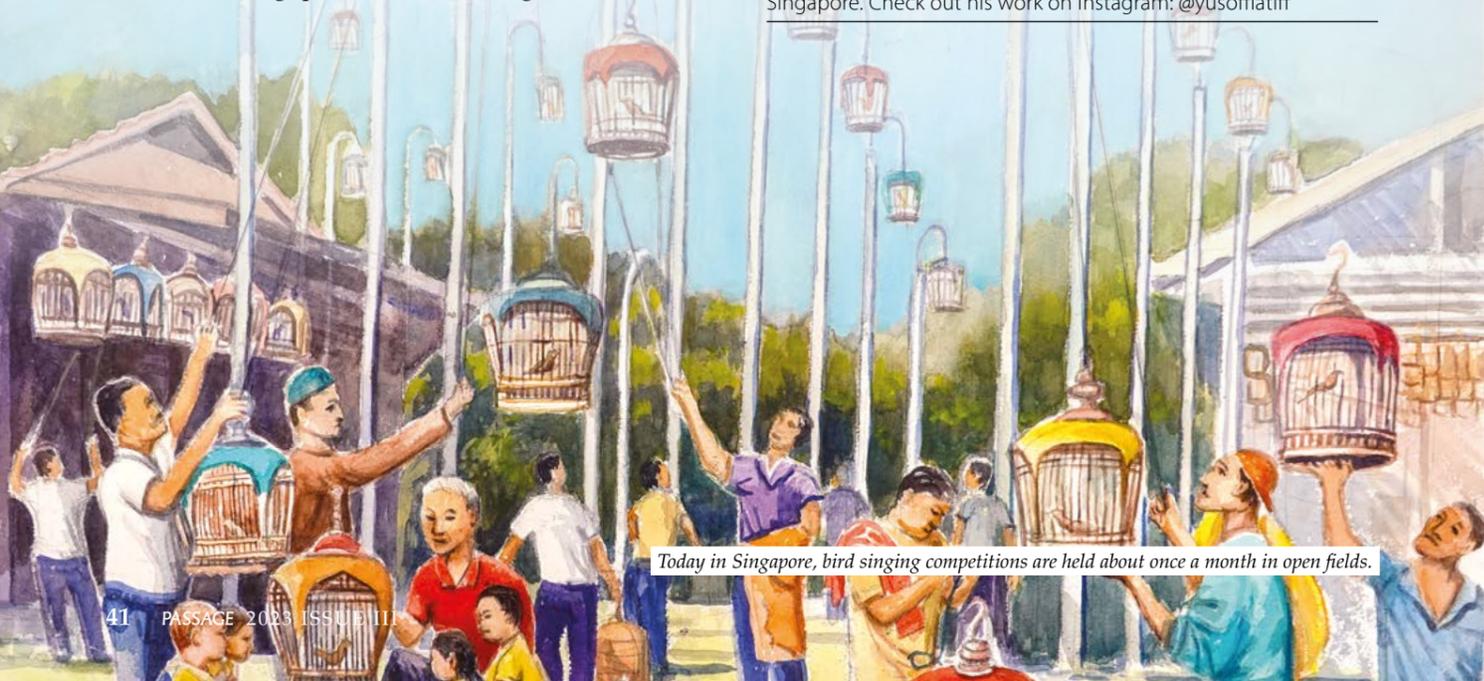
Of course, arguably, not all birds suffer in captivity. A pet bird may be as well-loved and cared for as a pet dog or cat. And it can be a source of pride. Bird-lovers sometimes like to share their enthusiasm by congregating at places where their birds can be displayed. The spectacle is also a feast for the ears when the birds sing in chorus.

In the early 1980s an enterprising coffee shop owner in Tiong Bahru noticed how birdcages at a nearby pet shop attracted crowds. So, he erected a metal structure outside his coffee shop from which customers could hang their bird cages. It became a popular meeting place for dozens of bird fanciers until the business closed in 2003. In its heyday, a number of bird singing competitions were held there sponsored by KLM airline.

Today the bird singing scene in Singapore is kept alive by amateur clubs such as the Kebun Baru Birdsinging Club which organises regular competitions for enthusiasts. These competitions, held about once a month in open fields in Ang Mo Kio and Yishun, attract not only locals, but tourists from all over the world as well as documentary filmmakers.

TIM CLARK prides himself on being a birder not a twitcher.

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



Today in Singapore, bird singing competitions are held about once a month in open fields.

Sian Appleyard

DOCENT. LEADER. FRIEND.



ANNE H PERNG AND FOM PAST PRESIDENT **CARLA FORBES-KELLY** PAY TRIBUTE TO A PIONEER OF FOM DOCENT TRAINING



Carla Forbes-Kelly, Anne Perng and Sian Appleyard at the Volunteer Appreciation Morning, 2013. Photo by Gisella Harrold.



Sian on a private trip to Jaipur in January 2011. Photo by Susanne Paulli.

Sian Appleyard, a long-time FOM member passed away in England earlier this year. Her friends wished to express their great sadness at this loss and acknowledge the significant contributions she made to the FOM community.

During her second stay in Singapore, Sian finished her docent training for the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) in 2007 and joined the ACM training team the following year. She later became Head of Training for the Peranakan Museum in 2008-09, overseeing the first docent training programme there. Sian lent her leadership skills, sitting on FOM Council as a co-opted member from 2009 to 2013 and as an Overall Head of Docent Training, culminating in a series of binders for the museum heads of training, aspects of which are still used today.

In 2012, the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (MICA) awarded Sian as one of the recipients of

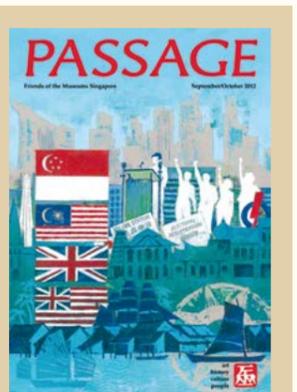
the MICA Special Recognition Awards, recognising outstanding individuals who have been active volunteers in organisations falling under the MICA umbrella for a minimum of five years.

FOM member Susanne Paulli remembers her fondly, "Sian shone her light very brightly on everyone she met. Her smile and laughter touched me deeply as well as her kind and creative nature."

She will be missed by many of the docents mentored by her through the years and the friends she had made in the FOM community through study tours, training teams, Council meetings and other FOM events.

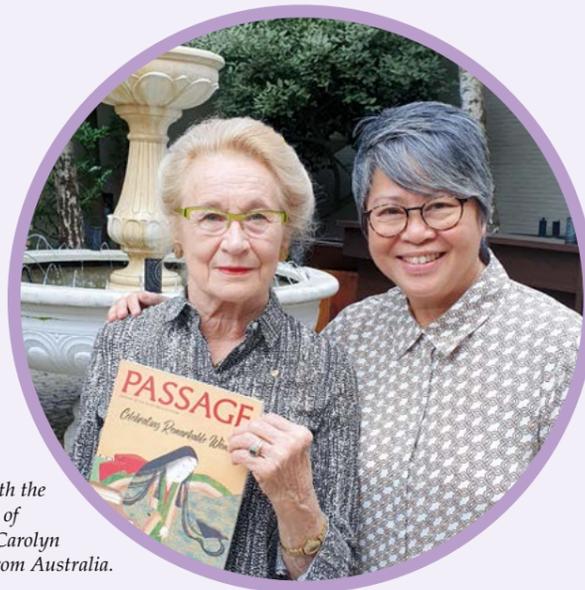


Sian receiving the MICA Special Recognition Award from Yaacob Ibrahim, then Minister for Communications and Information.



Sian created the cover art for the September/October 2012 issue of *PASSAGE*. The illustration depicts Singapore through the centuries – from the pre-colonial and the colonial era, the growing multi-cultural population, Singapore's road to self-government, independence and finally to the modern day. The illustration serves to introduce seven of this issue's feature articles, each of which focuses on an artefact from our museums. The artefacts represent the history of Singapore in seven objects.

CONNECTING WITH WORLDWIDE FOMS



Millie with the president of WFFM, Carolyn Forster from Australia.

MILLIE PHUAH REPORTS ON THE WORLD FOM CONFERENCE 2023 HELD IN BRUSSELS

The open top double-decker bus trundled down the grand Avenue Louise of Brussels, well known for the magnificent Art Nouveau buildings which line it. On board, representatives of members of the World Federation of Friends of Museums (WFFM), myself included, were thrilled to take in the sights of this storied city this way, on a very warm summer evening.

I had the General Assembly of the WFFM to thank for the honour of representing FOM in Brussels. We have been an associate member since 1985. In fact, FOM jointly organised a regional Friends meeting with Kuala Lumpur way back in 2000, and hosted the General Assembly in Singapore in 2007.

I was very warmly welcomed in Brussels, especially since we were the only participant from Asia.

The meeting opened on the 8th of June. I delivered a presentation about FOM's history, organisation and activities, and took also questions.

Associates were invited to attend the Executive Council meeting in addition to the General Assembly (similar to our AGM). It was a great opportunity to put Singapore on the map and also take part in discussions with global Friends from Brussels, Italy, Germany, France, Norway, Luxembourg, Portugal, Canada and Australia. Several Young Friends from various European countries were also there, a testament to the importance placed on sustaining the Friends legacy.



With reps from Germany, Norway and Portugal.



With Barbel from Luxembourg, in the magnificent Art Nouveau gem, Solvay House.



Attending the WFFM Executive Council Meeting.

The leisure programme was just as enriching.

This year's meeting theme was Art Nouveau, and appropriately so as Brussels is the birthplace of the architectural and design style which took the world by storm between 1893 and 1914. The four-day gathering was peppered with walks and visits to iconic buildings, including the home (and now-museum) of the Belgian founder of the movement, architect Victor Horta, as well as arguably his most admired work, the UNESCO-listed Solvay House (1894), where curves, nature motifs, light and luminosity envelope the visitor. On 10 June - World Art Nouveau Day - we gathered for our final dinner.

A wonderful meeting of global friends, united by our passion for museums, whatever language we speak.

To remember them is to honour them

CHARLOTTE DAWSON ATTENDS A CONFERENCE ON RESEARCHING POWs IN THE FAR EAST

Photos provided by the author.

As a history buff and a docent at the Changi Chapel and Museum (CCM), I've fallen down some deep rabbit holes while learning about Prisoners of War (POWs) and civilian internee experiences.

Last summer, while preparing the CCM docent training programme, I met with Louise Cordingly Reynolds whose father, Rev. Eric Cordingly was an Army chaplain and POW. She invited me to the 2023 Researching Far East POWs History Group (RFHG) Conference.

The conference was held from 10-11 June at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, which has the longest on-going research study on the physical and mental health of Far East POWs (FEPOW). I attended the Conference on my own accord but also made a slideshow on the newly revamped CCM including artefacts from British POWs in Singapore.

The RFHG formed in 2005 when several children of the FEPOW wanted to learn more about their fathers' experiences. Most members are British academics. I felt quite special to be a "fly on the wall" listening to the participants speak about their research. I spoke with several people about their fathers, mothers, and their own childhoods. Some were curious why I was there, so I told them about FOM and described my role as a CCM docent, which most appreciated.

Over the course of two days, 25 speakers gave themed presentations. Each speaker made a 20-minute presentation on their topic of choice, followed by a question and answer session. I felt that these short sessions made the information easy to digest. My slideshow was run on a continuous loop through the break periods between speakers and I answered a handful of questions about CCM.

The sessions reconfirmed what I've learned about Singapore's Changi camps and the Thai-Burma Railway. I discovered more about other regional POW camps and the depth of psychological trauma and physical ailments the POWs lived with long after Liberation. I had the rare



Charlotte with Mrs Louise Cordingly Reynolds (left), daughter of FEPOW Rev. Eric Cordingly.

opportunity to chat with a former child internee. Listening to Mrs Olga Henderson tell us about her captivity in the Changi Gaol and Sime Road camp, and her subsequent repatriation was a special moment I will cherish forever.

In attending this conference, it impressed upon me that we, as FOM docents at CCM, are the custodians of remembering the POWs. We are in the privileged position of meeting family members of FEPOW during their visits to our museum. We ensure that future generations learn about the FEPOW experiences. I am honoured to be a small part of this journey for so many. Lest we forget.



Charlotte with Mrs Olga Morris Henderson (right), former child civilian internee at Changi Gaol and Sime Road Camp.

VOLUNTEERS DANCE THE NIGHT AWAY

PARUL MEHRA REPORTS ON FOM'S ANNUAL VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION EVENT

Photos by Ismail Mohamed and Yit Peng Chong.

On April 25 2023, FOM celebrated 45 glorious years at the annual Volunteer Appreciation event held at Barouv, a beautiful rooftop venue at the Scarlett Hotel. This was the first time the celebration took place in the evening. About 160 FOM volunteers attended the event.

FOM president Millie Phuah said, "It is one of the most important events in the FOM calendar, when we get to show our deepest appreciation to all our amazing volunteers. We thought it would be a nice change to hold our annual Volunteer Appreciation event in the evening, hence it's a VAN instead of a VAM (Volunteer Appreciation Morning). After the Covid-19 restrictions of the last few years, it's great to be able to celebrate with each other in person and let our hair down. So it's a dance party!" She also reminded everyone that FOM's flagship magazine, *PASSAGE*, turns 15 this year, a significant milestone.

The theme for VAN was inspired by Studio 54, the iconic Manhattan nightclub which was famous from the late 1970s to the early 1980s. Volunteers came dressed to impress in shimmering disco inspired outfits and flamboyant accessories.



Oh what a night! This was the first time FOM had a Volunteer Appreciation event in the evening.

Oksana Kokhno, (Council Rep. for Volunteer Appreciation and Membership) along with her organising team greeted guests at the entrance. Welcoming everyone were Council members Robyn Lloyd and Linda Lim, with Jariyah Yusoff assisting. Guests were given gift bags containing a glass with the FOM Studio 45 logo.

Talia Webb was the roller-skating MC for the first half of the evening. The most awaited segment was the ceremony recognising the hard work of volunteers by awarding them with service pins. Karen Ng (FOM vice-president) was MC for this segment.

Special guests from the National Heritage Board joined in – Chang Hwee Nee (Chief Executive), Gerald Wee (Director, Education and Community Outreach) and Karen Goh (Senior



Hilary White is the Salome de Decker awardee for 2023.



25 year pin recipients Lim Chey Cheng and Janet Stride with Millie Phuah and Chang Hwee Nee.



Assistant Director, Education and Community Outreach).

Millie presented the pins, with the help of Hwee Nee, Charlotte Dawson (Council Rep. for Museums) and FOM past president Garima Lalwani. There were 99 pins awarded for service to FOM. This included 40 pins for three years, 19 pins for five years, 22 pins for ten years, 11 pins for 15 years, four pins for 20 years. The three 25 year pin recipients were Lim Chey Cheng, Sabine Silberstein, and Janet Stride. Chey Cheng said, "Explore Singapore! is like my baby. I have nurtured and cherished it over the years. I feel enriched being a part of FOM and I'm constantly learning."

This year's winner of the Salome De Decker award is Hilary White. The award is given to outstanding FOM volunteers. Hilary's noteworthy contributions at various museums, consistent work and infectious spirit gained her recognition among peers. She thanked her mentors and fellow docents for the award. Read an interview with her on the following page.

"Best Dressed" contest finalists Charlotte Dawson, Lynelle Barrett and Jyoti Ramesh did a cat-walk to impress judges

Irina Grishaeva and Gerald Wee. Jyoti came away with the prize. "I attribute my dazzling look to my daughter as I'm wearing her accessories!" she said.

The celebration continued with a scrumptious dinner buffet, drinks and dancing.

Organiser Oksana received a floral bouquet of appreciation for planning the event. She said, "I couldn't have made this event a success without the great support and preliminary planning done by my predecessor Darlene Kasten."

Volunteers enjoyed a great evening of fun and friendship. "45 years and going strong! This evening is all about friendships and the camaraderie that volunteers share."

"Usually docents look frazzled during training but here they seem overjoyed!"

"So much bling and cheer at one place...it's amazing!"

The organising team would like to thank Hilary White and her husband Kevin for the posters and event logo.

This epic night will go down as a very special one in FOM's history.



Elated 20 year pin recipients May, Constance and Catalina.



The top three best dressed party-goers – Lynelle, Jyoti and Charlotte.



FOM friends enjoying the evening.



FOM president Millie Phuah (centre, with silver tie) with NHB guests, Gerald Wee, Chang Hwee Nee and Karen Goh.



Council struts their stuff!



Oksana Kokhno (left), the woman behind the party, receives a bouquet of appreciation from Millie.



Parul Mehra (left) with roller skating MC Talia Webb.



Enjoying the delicious buffet.

HILARY WHITE'S *Incredible* JOURNEY

PARUL MEHRA SITS DOWN WITH THE 2023 SALOME DE DECKER AWARDEE

The Salome de Decker award is presented annually by FOM to a volunteer who has consistently devoted time to the organisation and personifies values such as teamwork and sharing knowledge. Hilary White has been with FOM for 11 years as member, 10 years as a volunteer.

Parul (P): How did you get involved with FOM?

Hilary (H): I first moved to Singapore in 1989 with my husband Kevin. I would hear about FOM from my friends and curiously attended a few Monday Morning Lectures at that time. When I finally became an empty nester years later, I was looking for a way to expand on my love of history and researching, improve my writing abilities and my fear of public speaking. So becoming a part of FOM was perfect.

P: Tell us about your experience as a FOM docent? Which venue do you enjoy the most and why?

H: I started my FOM docent journey in 2012 when I trained to be a guide at the National Museum of Singapore (NMS). Two years later the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) asked FOM to guide Bukit Pasoh tours and I was invited to be one of the team members who created the training programme. That has subsequently become the URA Chinatown Heritage Trails. An opportunity to train at the Malay Heritage Centre (MHC) arose in 2019, which I eagerly joined. In 2021 I became part of a 12-member team that developed the training programme for Changi Chapel and Museum. Later that year, I embarked on docent training at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM). Presently, I guide at NMS, MHC, CCM and ACM. I think every docent has a special connection with their first museum/institute. Over the years I have had amazing experiences and forged wonderful friendships at all the museums I guide at but I definitely have a soft spot for NMS.

P: Who are your FOM mentors?

H: Clara Chan (FOM past president) is amazing. I admire Sylvia Khoo, who has been extremely kind to me over the years. I have tremendous respect for my mentor at ACM, Shivani Kanwal Kulpati.

P: How did you react when you heard that you had won the award?

H: I felt extremely honoured but also did not want to be in the limelight over others who devote their time generously to the FOM community. It was a very special moment for me to be recognised amongst my peers and I am very appreciative of those that nominated me for this prestigious award.



Hilary White with her award at the Volunteer Appreciation Night (VAN) 2023. Photo provided by VAN organisers.

P: Do you have a fond anecdote of your time as a docent?

H: I remember once when I was leading a tour at MHC I was talking about Singapore's first president, Yusof Ishak. So I asked the group I was guiding if anyone had a currency note as I wanted to show them his image. A gentleman handed me a \$10 bill and I proceeded with my explanation then slid the banknote into my pocket as I was distracted with continuing the tour. Later I realised my blunder, but it was too late. I couldn't find that visitor!

P: What drives you to continue to volunteer with FOM?

H: Everything for me is connected to NMS, where I started my FOM journey. I love being a part of that community. I'm very motivated by the learning experiences offered by FOM. When researching in a group you can forge life-long friendships, also by mentoring and evaluating new docents, you always stay on top of the latest research.

P: Do you have advice for new FOM members?

H: Enjoy all the different activities. You don't necessarily have to train as a docent right away. I was a member for a long time before becoming a docent. It's a great place to make new friends, hence "Friends of the Museums" is very apt!

MAKING KAWAN OVER KOPI

GWEN ONG WELCOMES NEW FOM MEMBERS AT THE REVAMPED PERAKANAN MUSEUM



A warm welcome to our new FOM members.



Council Members and Activity Leaders, left to right:
Back row : Leong Lee Chew and Karen Ng
Middle row: Shriya Narula, Linda Lim and Oksana Kokhno
Front row: Robyn Lloyd and Michelle Lim

On 8 June 2023, a group of Peranakan Museum (TPM) docents and Council Reps welcomed over 40 new FOM members with a delightful coffee morning. Fresh from a revamp, the museum, a bastion of Peranakan culture and heritage, was a beautiful setting to make new *kawan* (friends) over *kopi*.

As always there was the fantastic team comprising of Council Reps – Vice-President, Karen Ng, Hon. Treasurer, Linda Lim, Hon. Secretary, Lee Hong Leng, Communications Rep, Michelle Lim, Activities Rep, Robyn Lloyd and Volunteer Appreciation & Membership Rep, Oksana Kokhno – ever attentive and informative with their respective presentations on various FOM events, training and volunteer programmes. A big shout out of thanks to the refreshment team for a devilish spread of delicious Peranakan *kuehs*.

There was sheer excitement from the group when it was time for a brief walk-through of the galleries at TPM. Tours were conducted by TPM docents Angela Kek, Siew Wai Leen and Gwen Ong, who shared stories of Peranakan culture through artefacts and showcased the old and new in surprising ways. The time allocated for the 'taster' tour flew by in a flash with many questions from curious new FOM members, interesting observations and much laughter.

It was so much fun that one participant remarked that she was ready to join the next TPM docent training course. Many lingered on after the tour and slowly continued taking in the beauty of TPM. We hope to see many new faces in future TPM docent training courses.



Selamat Datang to TPM. TPM Docents Angela Kek, Gwen Ong and Siew Wai Leen conducted a brief tour of the museum.

NEW FACES FOR A NEW SEASON

DOCENT TRAINING COORDINATORS **JYOTI RAMESH AND LEONG LEE CHIEW** CONGRATULATE NEW FOM DOCENTS

Photos provided by OHOts.

The 2022/2023 docent training season has been a great post-pandemic season for us. It was exciting going back to an in-person format, where the trainers and trainees could interact over lectures, coffee breaks and field trips.

It is special for a few reasons. Firstly, the first group of trainees for the Changi Chapel and Museum have completed a dedicated training programme. Secondly, after four years, the Peranakan Museum (TPM) has reopened after a revamp and our seasoned docents stepped up to the challenge by undertaking refresher sessions as well as training a new group of docents.

As pandemic restrictions have relaxed, we all cherish the warmth, joy and pleasure in learning, sharing and laughing together once again. We overcame many challenges, from venue bookings to sharing resources by working together across museum communities.

Training reiterates what the FOM community is about – consisting of dedicated people who devote their time and resources wholeheartedly. The Japanese docent team had an additional task of translating all text into Japanese to support their trainees in learning.



Featured below are some quotes from our trainees from the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM), Changi Chapel and Museum (CCM), Indian Heritage Centre (IHC), Japanese Docents (JD), National Museum of Singapore (NMS), the Peranakan Museum (TPM) and the URA-FOM Chinatown Heritage Trails.

At the time of printing, most trainees would have already started guiding in museums. Many of them will step into various leadership roles for the 2023/2024 docent training season. We thank them for keeping the FOM spirit alive. We wish them all the best in their journey ahead as FOM docents!



Graduating trainees from ACM pictured here with their trainers: Joanne Tan, Avia Astryd, Tay Gim Soon, Ryan Tai, Evi Marmarinou, Anne-Kristen Knabe, Marie Deneux, Felicia Shaw, Felicia Bukyeong Ha, Sonam Kundu, Vandana Sharma, Ong Sze-Chin, Leong Liyuin, Katherina Aryle, Kathy Kong, Mireia Solano, Lim Ee Lian and Caroline Oh.
Not in photo: Naomi Ishikawa, Effi Rigopoulou, Maxine Palmer, Lin Liya and Sherry Wu.

“Doing NMS training is like walking down memory lane for me as a local, growing up in the nation building years. It was an enjoyable journey, learning about the transformation of Singapore from a trading port to an economic miracle today.”

– FLORENCE TAN, NMS TRAINEE DOCENT

Graduating trainees from CCM: Talia Webb, Eliza Gleeson, Andrea Baker, Robyn Lloyd, Heike Friedrich, Liz Coward, Henry Wong and Sarah Woo.
Not in photo: Ivy Lee.

Graduating trainees from IHC:
Front row L to R: Victoria Gomez, Ashmina Mehta, Stephanie Lyser and Pooja Bhusari.
Middle row L to R: Lucille Couturier Bourdiniere, Summer Lee, Nidhi Mukharya and Darly Furlong.
Back row L to R: Vidya Khader, Anu Ghosh, Saveria Cristofari and Anita Malhotra.



Graduating Japanese Docent trainees: Odaira Rumiko, Ode Mayumi, Oyanagi Megumi, Kurokawa Yumi, Savory Momoko, Tsujinouchi Fumiko, Nizawa Sachiyo, Nishimura Ayano, Hirose Tomoko, Fushimi Ikumi, Matsubara Sayumi, and Mizuno Hitomi. **Not in photo:** Fukuyama Chiaki and Tajimi Miho.

“From the programme I obtained knowledge about the local diaspora, and history of Indians in Singapore. Also my perspective towards the multicultural and multi-ethnic communities of Singapore evolved. It has been an enlightening and incredibly rewarding experience.”

– POOJA BHUSARI, IHC TRAINEE DOCENT



New TPM docent trainees (Peonies): Clara Chan, Flavia Junqueira, Shirley Kan, Kalyani Kausikan, Rita Lee, Tan Aik Ling, Alexandra Domart, Darlene Kasten, Garima Lalwani, Shriya Narula, Isabel Ana Telford, Wong Chee Sing, Jenny Yoon, Chong Yit Peng, Nilofar Iyer, Linda Kawaratani, Joanna Low, Gregory Peck and Talia Webb.



Docents from the TPM refresher course (Lotus group): Angela Kek, Angela Ng, Caroline Liew, Caroline Oh, Constance Ong, Debbie Wong, Eugene Tan, Florence Phuah, Florence Tan, Gwen Ong, Janice Oh, Janis Woon, Joan Khaw, Katherine Seow, Khong Swee Lin, Leong Lee Chiew, Leow Chin Lee, Lim Chey Cheng, Long Fung, Mabel Lee, Madeleine Tham, Marie Lee Seung Jin, Michelle Foo, Patrick Lee, Pauline Choe, Peggy Lee, Rosalind Tan, Rosita Karaya, Sam Yun-Shan, Sarah Cheong, Shia Ai Lee, Siew Wai Leen, Sonal Mawandia, Sophie Touchais Godet, Susan Chong, Susan Fong, Sylvia Khoo, Sylwia Peh, Tang Siew Ngho, William Ngho and Yvonne Goh.
Not in photo: Lo Yiling, Dennis Oei, Leow Chin Lee, Tay Bee Wah and Mae Chong.



Graduating trainees from URA-FOM Chinatown Heritage Trails: Giovanna Milesi, Sapna Walia, Garima Lalwani, Hossnya Nada, Mathilde Fouin, Leslie Ng, Sonia Evangelista, Katja Baxter, Svetlana Fedotova, Gill Cruikshank, Maud Wind, Sara Ho, Donna Krejci, Tais Carloto, Gregory Peck and Shradha Nayan.

“I joined the URA training course in order to learn more about the history of our gracious host country. But it delivered so much more. An exciting learning journey filled with euphoria and exhaustion, encountering beautifully restored buildings, hearing fascinating stories and meeting extraordinary people along the way.”

– GILL CRUIKSHANK, URA TRAINEE DOCENT



Graduating trainees from NMS:
Top row (standing), L-R: Caroline Beaumont, Ramya Narayanan, Zhu Jialei, Mylene Soriano, Vidhya Nair
Middle row (seated), L-R: Cindy Neo, Sofeene Ang, Alice Chevalier, Priscilla Tan, Melissa Nesbitt, Caleigh Hu
Bottom row (seated), L-R: Azra Moiz, Randolph Yew and Jeff Kwan (Jeff Kwan will not be graduating from the course.)
Not in photo: Brigita Laukeviciute, Florence Tan, Michaela Wulff and Candice Yeo.

A PREVIEW OF DOCENT TRAINING FOR 2023-2024

LEONG LEE CHIEW AND JYOTI RAMESH REPORT ON FOM'S ANNUAL PUBLIC OUTREACH EVENT

Photos by Priscilla Tan and Mohamed Ismail.

What is PIM? Public Information Meeting (PIM) is an annual FOM event organised by the Overall Heads of Training (OHOs) to introduce FOM's docent training programmes to the public. This is where Co-Heads of Training of the various museums, Heritage Institutions (HIs) and Heritage Trails (HTs) share what their teams have to offer to potential trainees. It's like a friendly tug-of-war among the teams to attract more sign-ups.

Out of the 12 venues that FOM guides at, we have a plethora of training opportunities to choose from in the next 12 months.



ACM docents at their table.



KGHT docents at their table.



IHC docents at their table.



STPI docents at their table.



URA docents at their table.



CCM docents conducting a presentation inside auditorium.



Docents from NMS training conducting a presentation inside auditorium.

- A total of seven training programmes, with four of them at ACM, NMS, STPI, and KGHT will start in September 2023.
- Three other training programmes at CCM, IHC and URA-FOM Chinatown HTs will start in January 2024.
- The last training programme for KGHT was held in February 2021 and the last training for STPI was in September 2019. So we are thrilled to announce that these two programmes will begin again.

Planning for PIM started six months before the event. This was the first in-person PIM since 2019 post all the COVID-19 restrictions for large gatherings, so our excitement levels were peaking. We would like to thank the National Museum of Singapore for the use of the venue.

This year, docents at work took the centre stage for our PIM poster. It was designed by FOM volunteer Evonne Koh. The communications team (Michelle, Evonne, Priscilla) came up with a brilliant campaign to feature our trainee docents on FOM's social media accounts in the run-up to PIM to generate some buzz. New docents who have just completed their training are the best ambassadors to share their experiences and motivate others to join.

PIM 2023 saw a strong attendance of over 120 participants, with many registrations and sign-ups on the day. The Co-Heads and their teams enthralled the audience with presentations about the Civic District where NMS is located, to ACM and STPI located by the Singapore River, to the colourful districts of Kampong Gelam, Little India and Chinatown leading all the way to Changi.

Apart from the valuable contributions of the training teams, we would also like to thank the following:

- Registration team (Dobrina, Latha, Smita and Katherine)
- F&B team (Ian, Donna, Akiko and Fuilin)
- Membership table (Rupa, Vanessa, Arlene, Neerja, Prabha and Smitha)
- Photographers (Ismail and Priscilla)
- Taster tours in the Singapore History Gallery (NMS docents Sofeen, Caroline and Srivalli)

We would also like to extend our deepest gratitude to council members. The whole atmosphere was like a carnival with good cheer all around. This event wouldn't have been possible without the help of the FOM community who helped us tirelessly behind the scenes, the kampong spirit was alive and kicking!



Visitors to PIM 2023.



Audience inside auditorium.



The registration team.



The F&B team.



The Membership team.



NMS docent conducting a taster tour for the visitors.

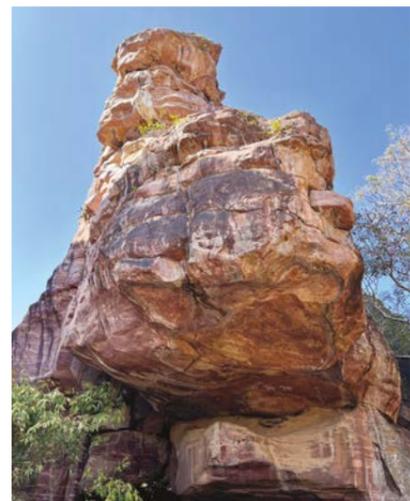
Discovering Three Heritage Gems

ABHA DAYAL KAUL LEADS STUDY TOUR TO INDIA

Photos by the author and Gisella Harrold.

In February 2023, 23 intrepid FOM members journeyed with me to UNESCO World Heritage sites in Madhya Pradesh state, the “three gems”.

From Bhopal, we visited India’s foremost prehistoric site, Bhimbetka, our first gem. Forest dwellings of earliest humans, this natural art gallery houses striking drawings and paintings in Stone Age rock-shelters. We gazed at hunters on elephants chasing wild bull in white; rhinos, deer, boars, and tigers in red; and a yellow flower vase holding white lotuses with green leaves. Primeval petroglyphs created in mineral pigments across different ages lie well-preserved within hidden nooks. Scholars say that certain cupules or enigmatic, cup-like hollows seen in Bhimbetka’s rocks are the world’s oldest known prehistoric art.

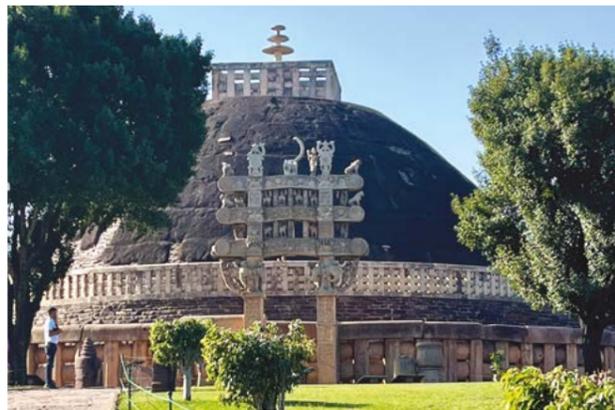


Bhimbetka rock shelter with prehistoric paintings.

The next heritage gem we studied is India’s ancient stupa-monastery complex that presides intact, though restored, over a hill at Sanchi. Our group was thrilled to experience this extraordinary Buddhist monastic site, referred to in ancient records and cited as a high point in art history thereafter.

Sanchi is renowned for its iconic domed stupa and four exceptionally carved gateways narrating *Jataka* or past-life tales and the Buddha’s life stories. Interestingly, the Buddha is not depicted in human form, only represented symbolically – by his footprints, departing horse, or an empty seat under the Bodhi tree. Originally built of brick over the Buddha’s relics by Emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE, Sanchi’s main stupa was encased in stone and enlarged by later patrons, the Shungas and Guptas. This ‘Great Stupa’, the construction of which was supervised by Ashoka’s wife, Devi, a local merchant’s daughter, is the oldest stone structure in India. FOM members adored Sanchi’s magnificent gateways, excellent carvings, and sense of spiritual serenity.

We then headed to our last gem, the sacred town of Khajuraho, famous for its outstanding 10th-11th century Hindu and Jain temples built by the Chandella Dynasty, descendants of the Moon God, Chandra. Once 85 temples



Sanchi Great Stupa and carved gateway.

stood here; just 25 have miraculously survived. Almost all are fashioned of fine-grained sandstone in shades of beige, gold, honey and rose, creating a magical impression with their awesome architecture, ornate carvings, and profusion of lifelike sculptures.

The most significant temples are situated in a fenced garden compound. From the oldest Lakshmana Temple dedicated to Vishnu, with its dazzling sculptures, including renowned erotic imagery; to the grandest Kandariya Mahadev, to Shiva, with finest statues and soaring *shikhara* spires; then to Chitragupta, the only temple dedicated to Sun God Surya; and the Vishvanath, also to Shiva – they boast matchless design, breathtakingly beautiful sculptures and stunning images. Gods and goddesses, mythical animals, amorous couples, and celestial beauties or *surasundaris* heave in harmony on every stone surface, exuding energy and warmth.

An evening performance at Khajuraho’s much-acclaimed annual International Dance Festival rounded up our tour. Seated on lawns facing an outdoor stage against the backdrop of enchantingly lit temples, we were enthralled by a stirring programme of classical Indian dance under a starry sky.



FOM group at Khajuraho temples.

WHAT’S IN A BOOK?

VINNI RELWANI EXPLORES BLACK, WHITE AND WHAT LIES BETWEEN THE PAGES

Books are more than just black print on white pages. To me, they are the foundations upon which we readers build thoughts, ideas and perspectives. When our minds wander, our builds are sprawling. When we share thoughts, the layers become towering blocks.

Books can encapsulate duality – truth and illusion. There sits on my shelf a book wearing a white coat of dust. A soft cloth to wipe, and the same dust once white on a black book-jacket now turns to black dust on the white cloth. These different dimensions of books are some of the experiences that members of the FOM Asian Book Group share when reading and discussing books.

The Guest Cat by Takashi Hiraide, a Japanese poet in his 60s, is a story set in the late 1980s about an elderly couple and a cat who comes to visit. I found it minimalist and true to the title from beginning to end. The cat’s wanderings to and from their home pervade the couple’s lives like a stealthy breeze, provoking more questions in the reader’s mind as one turns the pages. How does this guest change their lives?

A Tale for the Time Being by Ruth Ozeki, a Japanese-American writer who is also a Zen Buddhist priest, was written after the 2011 Japanese earthquake and tsunami. Her book tackles wide-ranging topics from her faith to Silicon Valley. Her characters are presented in such a way that the reader quickly forms opinions about them, yet as the book progresses and we are shown different facets of these characters, our opinions of them are shaken and flipped.

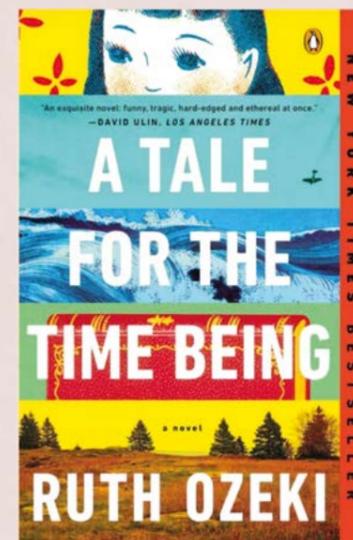
There is mastery in both styles of writing – one holds steady in his lane, the other takes the reader on a rollercoaster ride, introducing new perspectives, turning upside down our thoughts and opinions of just a moment ago.

Another style was used by Kate Grenville, an Australian writer, in her book about her great-great-grandfather, the convict Solomon Wiseman. It is a purposeful presentation of his story from one side. In *The Secret River*,

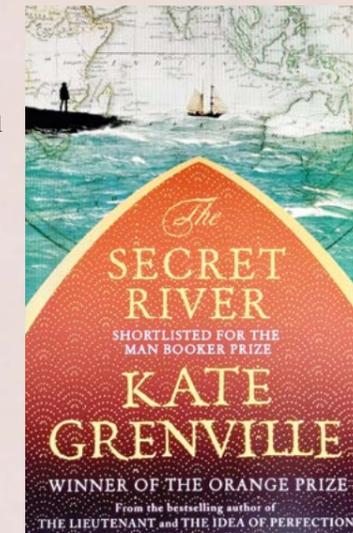
we are back in the 19th century. Wiseman, an Englishman, and his family, arrive in Australia, then inhabited only by Aborigines. The author tells the story of their encounters from the new settlers’ viewpoint. Even as the book is written from only one perspective, it gives power to the other – untold – story, that of the Aborigines.

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid, a Pakistani author, the narrator tells his life story to an American stranger in a Lahore café. Hamid uses the same one-sided style to present a monologue, unusual, clever, and though delivered from one character’s perspective, gives to the reader also a startling myriad of impressions calling out to be noticed. This book had us sitting on the edges of our seats with its nuanced shades of the in-between and had us in its grip right to the end as we dissected the ending.

So, whilst print is in black and white, the words give rise to limitless colours in our imagination through the combination of each author’s purposeful direction and the reader’s active participation. Our reading experiences have been greatly enhanced by exploring these books in a group setting. Here’s to more gatherings!



A Tale for the Time Being by Ruth Ozeki



The Secret River by Kate Grenville



A FOM Asian Book Group meeting.

Living Colours: Textiles of West Timor

SHEELA DEMEL EXPLORES WEST TIMOR WITH
FELLOW TEXTILE ENTHUSIASTS

Photos by Sheela Demel and Rosalie Kwok.

In April 2023 ten FOM members were brimming with excitement as they boarded a Lion Air flight bound for Kupang for a ten-day study trip. This remote place is located in West Timor in the Indonesian province of East Nusa Tenggara. The study tour was organised by Rosalie Kwok under the auspices of FOM's Textile Enthusiasts Group (TEG). To prepare for the trip, research and presentations were done by our group members. In addition to textiles, we delved into a plethora of other topics related to this destination.



Chief Mateos Anin from Fatumasi is a Christian descended from the Halaika. Halaika is an ancient faith practised by the mountain folks in Central Timor. They worship their ancestors and spirits found in nature. He is dressed in Mollo textiles.



Chief Baltazar Da costa Deutel of Alas kingdom in Timor Leste, residing since 2001 in West Timor because of civil war in Timor Leste. Here, he is in Naime village, part of Amanuban Kingdom with 47 other families.



Ladies at None Village gather for thanksgiving festivities.



Chief Mateos Anin's wife.



Lunch being served as part of harvest festival at None Village.



A mother and son at None Village wearing hand-woven tais, selendang and headscarf.



Prince Yohanes Sanak at Sonaf (Palace) Maslete in the Bikome kingdom of North Central Timor Regency.



Fruit vendor at Oehala waterfalls.



Midwife Mama Helena Tuaho, inside the ume kbbu where she helps expectant mothers and delivers their babies.

As I sat cramped in my seat and stared out the airplane window, I was awestruck by the vastness of the Indonesian archipelago. Our itinerary included visiting twenty villages. Most of these have been described sketchily in travel blogs and are off the tourist trail. We were looking forward to an enriching journey filled with cultural experiences and had expectations of what the trip would entail.

HOLISTIC INTERACTIONS LED BY A PRINCE

Our guide was Prince Pae Nope of the Amanuban kingdom who spoke passionately about his homeland and its people. He spoke about the influences of Dutch-Portuguese colonialism and the co-existence of western religion along with ancient practices.

The prince, dressed in traditional clothing, took us to remote villages. He explained that his formal attire was necessary to meet with village heads and warrior chiefs. He wore *tais* (sarong), *selendang* (scarf), belt and headscarf.

Smiling faces greeted us everywhere and we were graciously invited into homes. We enjoyed local snacks of steamed tapioca and bananas, relished sumptuous buffets, and tasted *arak* (palm wine). We also witnessed a man shimmy up a lontar palm to collect its nectar and had a conversation with a traditional midwife in her *ume kbbu* (round house).

SIMPLE WAYS OF VILLAGERS

Boti Village was an unusual experience for us. It is remotely situated in the highlands and hence escaped being colonised. Villagers retain animist beliefs till today. Our journey was rocky and steep. Driving in this terrain was tough so we alighted the bus and walked the rest of the way. The uphill climb was arduous in the drizzle and darkness. We carefully and slowly navigated the path with torchlights.

There is no electricity in Boti; a generator is the only power source. We visited the king's home and met village elders. There were no embellishments in their dress and dinner was a simple affair.

We also visited None Village. It embodied a traditional and communal essence, standing as a juxtaposition to the contemporary world. Memories of this special place are forever etched into our hearts. We were greeted with rhythmic drumming by a bevy of villagers in traditional costume. Their clothing bore motifs unique to their heritage.

We were cajoled into joining them as the ladies raised their *selendangs* in unison with jubilation. Our visit was timed with their harvest festival, so the ceremony included a lunch feast. A sacrificial pig was barbecued along with other staple food. We were invited to dine in an exclusive part of None. Here, we were also introduced to betel nut chewing, prevalent in West Timor. It was all mesmerising.

It is one thing to visit a country as a tourist but quite another to enjoy the privilege of being immersed into its culture. With its innumerable exotic islands, indigenous inhabitants and diverse ethnicities, our adventurous trip to West Timor left a lasting impression on all of us.



Our study group with guide, Prince Pae Nope of Amanuban kingdom in his home in Soe, West Timor.

A Modern Sanctuary for Temple Lovers

EXPLORE SINGAPORE! COMMITTEE MEMBER **SUSAN McDOUGALL** DISCOVERS FO GUANG SHAN BUDDHIST CENTRE

Photos Kerstin Kiesselbach unless otherwise stated.

The Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Centre located in Punggol in Northeast Singapore is a temple with an unconventional design. A newspaper report about the opening of this centre in June 2008 stated, “Its modern design and zen decor shall raise eyebrows of the traditionally inclined.”

Everything about this structure from its concept to construction is different from other traditional Buddhist temples. The red and gold pillars typically seen in Chinese temples in Singapore are missing. Green-tiled roofs with colourful *qianci* (cut and paste ceramic friezes) decorations are also absent. Instead, visitors are greeted with calming pastel colours and a peaceful ambience.

CHERUBS AND ENLIGHTENMENT

Our tour began in the main hall which is accessed via a flight of steps from the street level. This act of ascension is important to note, as it is believed that this symbolises the path to enlightenment. Once inside this serene hall, visitors are struck by the minimalistic decor. The lapis lazuli feature wall along with high ceiling design, pristine white marble flooring and walls adorned with Buddha images exude an uplifting feeling. In other locations, cherubic stone figures welcomed us from corners and open areas. This was yet another feature adding to the charm of this unusual space.

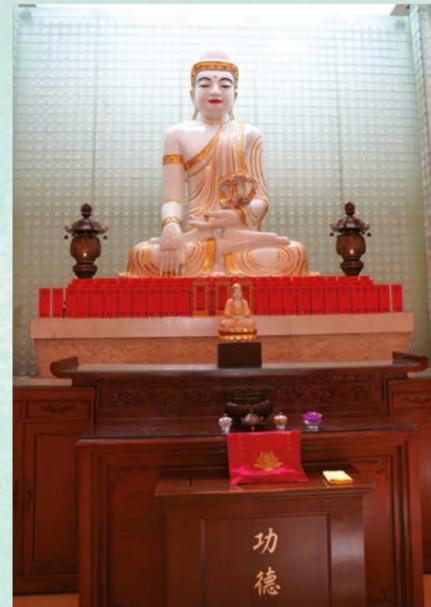


Diamond Sutra characters engraved on the lapis lazuli wall in the main hall. Photo by Lim Chey Cheng.



Cherubic figures add to the welcoming atmosphere of the temple.

The main feature in this hall is a four-metre high *Shakyamuni* Buddha statue weighing over 12 tonnes carved out of a single piece of Myanmar jade. Due to its height and weight, the statue had to be placed in the hall before the roof and walls were added. On the wall behind the statue are 6,648 square tiles made of lapis lazuli, of which 5,183 are inscribed with handwritten Chinese characters of the Diamond Sutra, spanning from right to left and top to bottom. On the other three walls are 10,000 images symbolising Buddha’s infiniteness and 33 White Guan Yin statues representative of the Bodhisattva’s many forms.



A 12 tonne jade statue of Shakyamuni Buddha.

THE SPIRITUAL ASPECT OF THIS PRACTICE

A large table with ancestral tablets is placed on one side. Our volunteer guide from the centre, Herman Chia, explained that these were set up specially for devotees to honour their deceased relatives during the Qing Ming Festival. Regular chanting sessions in Mandarin are held in the hall every Sunday morning. *Pinyin* versions of the sutras are available for those who aren’t familiar with Mandarin script.

Interestingly, this centre is one of over 300 such centres around the world with roots in Taiwan. These centres propagate a form of Buddhism called Humanistic Buddhism founded by Venerable Master Hsing Yun. The focus of this practice is to cultivate Buddhism through daily activities rather than ritualistic aspects of the religion. Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s objectives are to propagate *Dharma* (Buddha’s teachings) through culture, education and purification of people’s minds through spirituality. His vision was to build a harmonious society. To realise these objectives the venerables (monks) and laity (temple volunteers) conduct interactions with the

public, engaging in community outreach and charity. This is achieved through *Dharma* classes for all age groups and donation projects for the underprivileged.

TRADITIONAL BELIEF SYSTEMS

There is also a special room for visitors to learn the art of calligraphy and to practice meditation. Our group was guided to do the same. The centre’s fourth level houses a columbarium and memorial hall for ancestral tablets. Entire walls are lined with well-lit transparent boxes containing urns. Outside the columbarium level, is a granite wall carving depicting Pureland, the celestial realm of a buddha or bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism where many Buddhists aspire to be reborn in.

The open roof area houses a bell and a drum. Traditionally, the bell would have been rung 108 times at



Explore Singapore! tour participants trying calligraphy during their visit to the temple.



The memorial hall with ancestral tablets and a statue of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva (Dizhang).



A granite wall carving of Pureland, the celestial realm in Mahayana Buddhism where many Buddhists aspire to be reborn in.



10,000 Buddha images and 33 Guan Yin statues adorn the walls of the main hall.

sunrise and the drum beaten same number of times at sunset, to inform the public that it was time to start the daily routine or to retire. However, these are now ceremonial and sounded only once annually.

Our visit concluded with lunch at the Water Drop Teahouse which is run by volunteers. The vegetarian menu here is extensive and healthy. The scrumptious lunch and parting gift of a book titled *Buddha-Dharma Pure and Simple* presented to each one of us, made this visit very memorable indeed.

Shang Antique

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



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FOM ACTIVITY GROUPS

Please check the FOM website for more information and current events for these activities.

ASIAN BOOK GROUPS

FOM Book Groups meet monthly focusing on books with Asian subjects, fiction/non-fiction. The aim is to familiarise members with this region through reading. Also exchange views within a small group setting.

Non-native English speakers are welcome to join. Our members come from diverse backgrounds. Though the topics are Asian, all viewpoints are global and our discussions are very lively.

Coordinator: Durriya Dohadwala
fombookgroups@gmail.com

CURIO

Uncover the rare and intriguing delights of Singapore with FOM members.

Curio offers a range of events such as an evening at the theatre to sampling local cuisines with our Foodie Groups.

We also have workshops for photography, drawing & culinary skills.

Follow us on Instagram #fomcurio

Coordinator: Gisella Harrold
fomcurio@gmail.com

ASIAN STUDY GROUP

This group has 10-16 members who meet weekly to gain knowledge on specific themes. Weekly, we have two 40 minute presentations. This is by a member, who chooses his/her own topic of interest within the theme.

If English isn't your first language that wouldn't be of any consequence. As we appreciate viewpoints of all members from all over the world.

Coordinators: Kim Arnold & Priti Sangavi
fomstudygroup@gmail.com

STUDY TOURS

FOM's study tours are educational. They offer a range of travel experiences to expand members' understanding of Asian culture.

Each itinerary is meticulously planned by an FOM member who leads the tour. Each participant is expected to do preparatory reading on any topic related to the country they are visiting. This is required to make a presentation at the pre-trip meeting or during the trip.

Coordinator: Abha Kaul
abhadkaul@gmail.com

FOM MEMBERS CARE

FOM Members Care organises events for members to gather in the spirit of fun, friendship and philanthropy. The projects maybe ranging from preserving Singapore's heritage, helping the community, or improving our planet's health.

Coordinators: Nilofar Iyer & Effie Rigopoulou
fommemberscare@gmail.com

ASIAN FILM STUDY GROUP

The Asian Film Study Group is on an extended break until a new coordinator is found. If you would like to volunteer, please email: activities@fom.sg

TEXTILE ENTHUSIASTS GROUP

Do you enjoy learning about textiles? This group (TEG) was created to foster interest in Asian textiles. We invite speakers, conduct visits to interesting locations related to textiles and offer tactile experiences. You don't need to be an expert to enjoy TEG activities. We share our enthusiasm for textiles with like-minded individuals. Newcomers are welcome, so if you're new to Singapore or FOM, do join us.

Coordinators: Dobrina Boneva & Jyotsna Mishra
fomtegsingapore@gmail.com

FRIDAY WITH FRIENDS!

Join us on the last Friday of each month for a series of free talks giving insights into diverse topics. Friday with Friends, organised by the Asian Civilizations Museum, is open to the public. Lectures start at 7pm sharp. See FOM's weekly newsletter or website for schedule of lectures.

Coordinators: Mathangi Venkatesh & Priya Seshadri
fufcoordinator@gmail.com

MONDAY MORNING LECTURES (MML)

All lectures are scheduled on Monday mornings at 11am. See page 71 for the upcoming schedule.

Coordinators: Yenping Yeo & Vidhya Nair
mmlcoordinators@gmail.com

EXPLORE SINGAPORE!

We offer detailed guided tours which are different from the usual tourist trails. Curated especially for members, Explore Singapore! events are held on Thursdays. See FOM's weekly newsletter or website for details.

Coordinator: Chey Cheng Lim
limcheycheng@gmail.com

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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.



Explore Singapore!

SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER 2023

MODERNISM IN SINGAPORE : THE BAUHAUS

Thursday 14 September 2023
9:30 am – 11:30 am
Fee: \$35

Modern Asia hasn't developed in isolation but has been influenced over the years by western ideologies through sustained interactions. These shared ideas and experiences unite us globally. History is manifested in the myriad forms of the architecture around us. Modern architecture in Asia also depicts how Asians have evolved. The impact of Bauhaus on architecture and housing in Singapore is noteworthy but relatively unknown outside academic circles. We invite you, to embark on a walking tour led by a renowned professor to shed more light on this topic. This will deepen your comprehension of Bauhaus' ground-breaking ideas and its influence in Singapore's context.



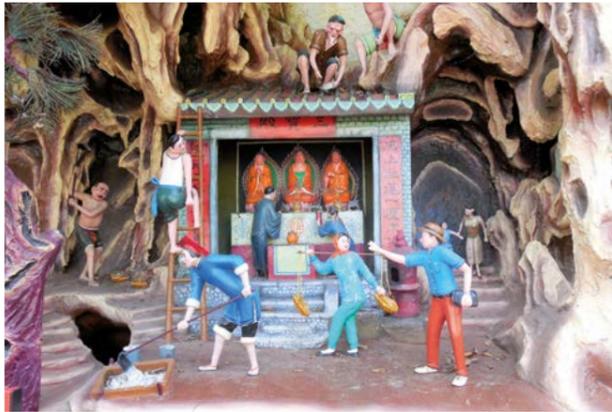
HAW PAR VILLA TOUR

Thursday 28 September 2023
9:00 am – 11:00 am
Fee: \$35

Did you know that Singapore had a theme park in the 1930s? Haw Par Villa was Singapore's first theme park constructed in 1937 by Aw Boon Haw, the Tiger Balm King. He designed a park to showcase Chinese history and Confucian ideology. Literal and graphic, the park's original collection of colourful statues and giant tableaux immortalise Chinese moral values and heritage.

From around 1950-1970, it was one of the top attractions for locals and tourists. The rapid development of other attractions led to its gradual decline. However, recently it has been revived and designated as a historic site by the National Heritage Board. Let Explore Singapore! take you to discover the meanings of a few of the 1,000 sculptures and dioramas set within a surreal landscape in this 8.5 hectare area. Also you will get a chance to listen in to the intriguing stories about the illustrious Aw brothers.

(Note: This tour does not include the Courts of Hell)



THE JOY OF GAMELAN

Thursday 12 October 2023
10:00 am – 12:30 pm
Fee: \$45

In Indonesia it's common to find live music played by seated musicians in hotel lobbies and entertainment areas, this melodious music is by an instrument called the gamelan. If you have been fascinated by this and wish to learn more, here is an opportunity. In this workshop you will learn about the gamelan's history, traditions, related cultural activities like *wayang kulit* (Indonesian shadow puppetry) and dance. You will be introduced to the various gamelan orchestras such as Javanese, Balinese and Sundanese and be taught to play it as well. Hearing gamelan music after this workshop will never be the same experience for you!



DEEPAVALI WALK: LITTLE INDIA

Thursday 26 October 2023
10:00 am – 1:00 pm (including lunch)
Fee: \$45

Take a walk through Little India precinct and see how Singapore's Indian community prepares for Deepavali. This special festival of lights and sacred rituals is one of the biggest celebrations for the Indian Hindu community. FOM docent Abha Kaul will give her insights regarding the meaning of Deepavali, explaining the customs and traditions associated with this festival. Enjoy a delicious lunch meal to conclude the tour (included in the fee).



GEYLANG SERAI MARKET TOUR

Thursday 9 November 2023
9:30 am – 12:30 pm
Fee: \$45

Do you know what a *belimbing* is and where to get it? How about a *buah keluak* the nut which some foodies call black gold? If you would like to find out, join us on this tour. Experience the sights, sounds and smells of the morning wet market at Geylang Serai. Chat with stall vendors and learn about local ingredients that you can't find elsewhere. The walk will end with a special lunch meal to sample unique dishes.



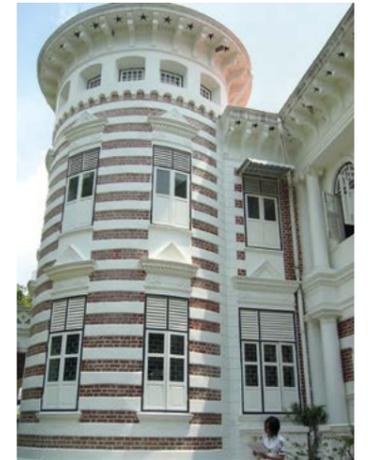
THE GOLDEN BELL MANSION

Thursday 23 November 2023
10:00 am – 12:00 noon (1:00 pm with optional lunch at own cost)
Fee: \$35

The Golden Bell Mansion is a classic example of a Singapore landmark building. Located on a hilltop in a scenic setting, it was constructed in 1910 by the great grandson of Singaporean philanthropist Tan Tock Seng.

Currently the Golden Bell Mansion is used as the Danish Seaman's Church. The church premises are used for multiple activities besides religious services. The Danish community conducts English language lessons for children, coffee sessions for community interactions and more. Join us at this picturesque setting where Mr. Roney Tan, a descendant of Tan Tock Seng, will share the fascinating history of this house. Then we will interact with Reverend Carl Bjarkam, the Port Chaplain telling us about the current role and activities of the Danish Seaman's Church. This will be followed by a tour of the building.

You can conclude this tour with an optional lunch, consisting of classic Danish dishes cooked by the church.



NATURE AND NOSTALGIA IN LABRADOR PARK : CROSSROADS OF MARITIME, MIGRATION AND MANUFACTURE

Thursday 7 December 2023
8:30 am – 11:00 am
Fee: \$35

Let our guide take you on a walk filled with nature and nostalgia. The rocky hills and creek of Labrador Park are an interesting junction of many significant events in Singapore's history. It's a unique venue which has sites that mark the journey of this island. The story of how Singapore once dotted with coastal mangrove swamps has transitioned over the years into a cosmopolitan port city. For over a century this area was protected by defence fortifications. It's a fascinating tale that is set around the last nature reserve on the southern shoreline.



For queries, please contact Lim Chey Cheng: fomexploresingapore@gmail.com

MUSEUM DIRECTORY

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

MUSEUMS WITH FOM GUIDED TOURS

ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

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



Opening hours:
Daily: 10am - 7pm
Fridays: 10am - 9pm

FOM guided tours:
<https://www.nhb.gov.sg/acm/whats-on/overview>

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.

This museum houses Asian antiquities and decorative art. As the only museum in Asia with a pan Asian scope, ACM is devoted to exploring the rich artistic heritage of Asia through its outstanding collection of masterpieces and through ground breaking special exhibitions. ACM focuses on the many historical connections between cultures and civilizations in Asia and the world.

GILLMAN BARRACKS

9 Lock Rd, Singapore 108937
Tel: 6694 4077
<https://www.fom.sg/museums.aspx?MID=4>
<https://www.eventbrite.sg/o/fom-gillman-barracks-outreach-5691212557>

Opening hours:
Refer to website for different operational hours for art galleries

FOM guided tours:
Started on 25th February 2023
Saturdays: 4pm - 5:30pm

The walking tours cover the history of Gillman Barracks from its inception to the present day, as well as a visit to the art galleries for a sampling of their latest exhibitions. Registration is required on the Eventbrite website up to one week before the scheduled date. Join us for a fun-filled weekend of curated heritage, art, culture, and indulge in the wide array of F&B options onsite at sundown.

CHANGI CHAPEL AND MUSEUM

1000 Upper Changi Road North, Singapore 507707
Tel: 6214 2451 / 6242 6033
www.nhb.gov.sg/changichapelmuseum



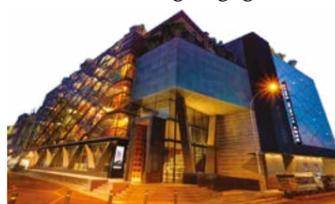
Opening hours:
Tuesday to Sunday: 9:30am - 5:30pm
Closed on Mondays except Public Holidays

Guided tours:
Fridays at 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
Tel: 6291 1601
www.indianheritage.org.sg



Opening hours:
Tuesday to Sunday: 10am - 6pm
Closed on Mondays
Closed on public holidays that fall on a Monday unless otherwise stated.

Guided tours:
Tuesday to Friday at 11am
Saturday, Sunday & Public Holidays at 2pm

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 center opened in May 2015 and is our only purpose-built museum.

MALAY HERITAGE CENTRE

(Closed until 2025)
85 Sultan Gate, Singapore 198501
Tel: 6391 0450
www.malayheritage.org.sg



The Malay Heritage Centre (MHC) is currently closed for a revamp. 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, programs and activities, the center hopes to honor 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: 10am - 7pm

FOM guided tours:
Check museum website for updated tours.

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.

THE PERANAKAN MUSEUM

39 Armenian Street, Singapore 179941
Tel: 6332 7591
www.peranakanmuseum.sg
Opening hours:
Daily: 10am - 7pm
Fridays: 10am - 9pm

Guided tours:
Check museum and FOM website for updates.

Peranakan Museum presents the cross-



STPI CREATIVE WORKSHOP AND GALLERY

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



Opening hours:
Monday to Friday: 10am - 7pm
Saturdays: 9am - 6pm
Sundays: 10am - 5pm
Closed on Public Holidays

FOM guided tours:
Check updates on website.

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.

SUN YAT SEN NANYANG MEMORIAL HALL

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



Opening hours:
Tuesday to Sunday: 10am - 5pm
Closed on Mondays

Guided tours:
Tuesday to Friday at 2pm
Saturday and Sunday at 3pm

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.

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

39 Keppel Road, #01-02, Singapore 089065
Tel: 6697 9730
singaporeartmuseum.sg

Opening hours:
Daily: 10am - 7pm

Guided tours:
Check updates on: <https://www.bit.ly/SAM-MuseumInAction>

This new space opened in January 2022 presents multiple art presentations by Southeast Asian artists and interactive programmes for the public. There are two climate-controlled galleries that host large scale exhibitions, workshops and talks sparking collaborations between artists and audiences.

OTHER MUSEUMS

NATIONAL GALLERY SINGAPORE

1 St Andrew's Road #01-01, Singapore 178957
Tel: 6271 7000

Opening hours:
Daily: 10am - 7pm

FOM guided tours:
Check museum website for updated tours:
<https://www.nationalgallery.sg/>

National Gallery Singapore is a leading visual arts institution which oversees the world's largest public collection of Singapore and Southeast Asian modern art. The Gallery is housed in two national monuments - City Hall and former Supreme Court - that have been beautifully restored and transformed. The Gallery aims to be a progressive museum that creates dialogues between the art of Singapore, Southeast Asia and the world to foster and inspire a creative and inclusive society.



NUS MUSEUM

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

Opening hours:
Tuesday to Saturday: 10am - 6pm
Closed on Sunday and Public Holidays.
Mondays: Visits by appointment for schools/faculties only.

Located at the University Cultural Centre, NUS Museum comprises nine galleries and additional ancillary spaces which host a wide range of exhibitions, module collaborations and supporting programmes that contribute to the cultural and interdisciplinary conversation within NUS and beyond.

NUS BABA HOUSE

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

Guided tours:
Monday to Friday at 10am
Online registration required

Heritage tours:
Tuesday to Friday at 10am
Explore hour (self-guided visit)
Saturdays: Selected entry time slots between 1pm - 4:30pm

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.



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

Shining White Like Moonlight

KENSON KWOK REMINISCES ABOUT HIS JOURNEY THROUGH CHINESE CERAMICS IN THE COMPANY OF DEHUA BLANC DE CHINE

All objects featured are in the collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM). All images courtesy of the ACM.

An abiding image of my childhood home in the 1950s (a modernist bungalow with an impractical concrete roof off Dunearn Road in Singapore) is of two massive book-cum-display cases in the living room. They had been specially designed for the house. There was a cupboard for storage below and shelves above, rising to a height of about 2.75 metres. They were spray painted white on the outside with the interiors being a deep red - all the better for showing off a number of Chinese antiques or curios. We had inherited them from both sides of the family, particularly from my maternal grandfather, a successful tin miner, who had built a large house in Kuala Lumpur sometime before 1920, which had to be appropriately decorated.



Amongst these curios were several pieces of Chinese porcelain. Perhaps these were the inspiration for what turned out to be my lifelong interest – an obsession even – with the ceramic medium. With my first pay packet from a holiday job in the early 1970s I bought a small piece of Chinese ceramic from Moongate, a reputable antique shop at that time. Over the years, other purchases followed.

Because of a preference for early Chinese ceramics, I paid little attention to the white wares from Dehua, Fujian province (known in the west as *blanc de Chine*, high fired whitewares made in Dehua and its vicinity since the mid-late Ming dynasty). It was only in the 1990s, after I joined the National Heritage Board, that the significance of *blanc de Chine* began to dawn on me.

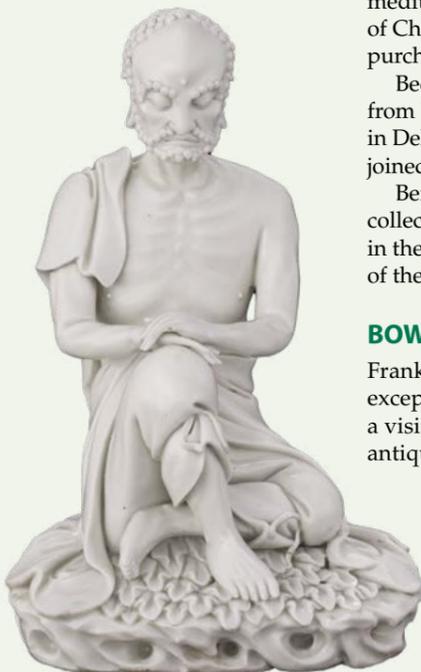
Being a long-time member of the Southeast Asian Ceramic Society allowed me access to the collections of Southeast Asian and Chinese export ceramics that had been formed in Singapore in the 1960s and 1970s, including those of Dr Earl Lu and his brother-in-law Don Sinclair (part of the Lu collection that later came to ACM).

BOWLED OVER BY A WHITE MOON

Frank and Pamela Hickley – also founder members of the Society - started in the same vein, except their collecting soon took on a radically different direction. Pam recalled that during a visit to Macau, they were captivated by a large *blanc de Chine* platter in the window of an antique shop. “It shone at us like the moon” she said years later. That piece was the start of

(top)
Pamela Hickley at home in 1998 with her “moon” plate. From Kerr & Ayers (2002)

(left)
Bodhidharma in fasting meditation, early 17th century. Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley.



A rhinoceros horn cup (left) and a Dehua ceramic equivalent (right), both made in Fujian, 17th-18th century, Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley.

a 30-year collecting journey, with pieces mostly acquired from dealers in London and in Europe. They became friends with P.J. Donnelly, a major collector of *blanc de Chine* who inscribed a copy of his pioneering work on the subject to the Hickleys (the Donnelly collection was later bequeathed to the British Museum).

The Hickley collection includes not only superbly sculpted figures, but also understated items for the scholar's table, shapes specifically made for western markets – some endearingly quirky, rare enamel decorated examples, and supporting objects such as the libation cups made of rhinoceros horn that were the inspiration for the porcelain equivalents made in Dehua.

VISITING DEHUA KILNS

Of several trips I made to Dehua in the 1990s, the most memorable was a visit with Pam. She had never been to the production site of the pieces in their collection and was thrilled. She was uncomplaining in the face of the rather spartan conditions in rural China at that time (she had lived and worked in China 50 years before, when conditions were likely no better). But she did draw the line at ordering from the lunch menu what a waiter proudly told us were protected species of wildlife.

We were shown around by pioneering Dehua archaeologist and scholar Xu Benzhang, who took us to see ancient kiln sites, traditional porcelain stone processing “waterwheels” and a range of kilns, from home-based electric kilns, and traditional dragon kilns, to oil-fired kilns for large scale factory production (one factory was, and is still run by Singapore company Luzerne).



A pair of enamelled sleeve vases, 17th century. Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley.

The purpose of that trip was to document ceramic production in Dehua in preparation for an exhibition of the Hickley collection at the National Museum of Singapore in 1994. It was some years after that Pam, seeing how good their pieces had looked when displayed in museum vitrines with exhibit lighting, decided to gift the collection to the ACM. She also generously provided funds for the ACM to acquire shapes and types that were not represented in the collection, including the “cold-painted” figures decorated in Europe for European markets - despite these not quite being her taste. The ACM has since judiciously added more pieces, including most recently, fine examples of contemporary Dehua production.

BLANC DE CHINE AT THE ACM

The collection *in toto* is now one of the strengths of the museum's holdings. While the current display at the ACM has been somewhat reduced, I am pleased to see it remains a significant component of the southern China focus of the China galleries. And the ACM's is still one of the biggest displays of Dehua in any museum outside China; only Dresden shows more pieces from their collection.

Thanks to the ACM and my journey with Dehua, I look on those pieces of *blanc de Chine* that used to be in the display cases in my childhood home, not only with fondness as family heirlooms, but also with an appreciation of their ceramic and sculptural quality, their global reach and their significance for a museum in Singapore.

Those who wish to learn more about the history and production of Dehua whitewares can do no better than start with the catalogue published by ACM to commemorate the gift of the Hickley Collection – *Blanc de Chine: Porcelain from Dehua*, R Kerr & J. Ayers (2002). It should be noted that archaeologists in Fujian have begun to investigate Ming period kiln sites in the Dehua region; but many questions remain unanswered, especially regarding production in the 19th and 20th centuries. It is a fascinating subject!



Paper (Medium, Edition No. 17), made by Su Xianzhong in 2020.

KENSON KWOK is the founding director of the ACM and the Peranakan Museum.

Friends of the Museum Singapore
MONDAY MORNING LECTURES (MML)
 September 2023

Lectures will be held in-person on the 1st, 3rd and 5th Mondays of the month, and on Zoom on the 2nd and 4th Mondays of the month. In-person lectures are open to public. Zoom Lectures are open to FOM members only. Visit the Community Events page on the FOM website to sign up. The lectures will begin promptly at 11am.

04 SEPTEMBER
NEGOTIATING AND SUBVERTING POLITICS OF MATERIALS THROUGH MY ART PRACTICE
In-person Lecture. Speaker: Kanchana Gupta



This is the first MML of FOM's 2023/2024 season. It will be held in conjunction with the Opening Morning which begins at 10am.

Kanchana Gupta shares her latest research and works in this talk. She investigates the intricate relationship between gender identity and lace, the politics surrounding its construction, labour, patterns, materiality and how it sexualises the female form. The fundamental construction of lace has remained unchanged since its inception in the 16th century. However its gender symbolism has shifted, as a material associated with both female labour and form. Its history of being exclusively crafted by women makes it a compelling material to the artist.

11 SEPTEMBER
WATAN - ONE PUNJAB, ONE HOMELAND
Zoom Lecture. Speakers: Graciela Magnoni and Mandakini Arora



Watan, a pictorial-poetic book by French-Uruguayan photojournalist Graciela Magnoni, explores and bridges the vibrant cultures of both eastern (Indian) and western (Pakistani) Punjab, which were ripped apart by the Partition of India in 1947. Combining photographs taken in Punjab's villages over five years with the words of renowned Punjabi poets, Graciela tells a story of love and longing for a *watan* (homeland) on both sides of the border, and the deep bond between people and their land.

Join Graciela as she speaks to historian Mandakini Arora about her labour of love. *Watan* originated with Graciela's visits to *Ponta Sahib* gurdwara (place of worship) to immerse in the ashes of her Sikh parents-in-law, far from their West Punjab homeland. It was a complete journey when she returned to the photography sites of her book to distribute copies of it to the books' subjects.

18 SEPTEMBER
PANDANGLAH, LIHATLAH: A CONVERSATION ON THE KEBAYA
In-person Lecture. Speaker: Oniatta Effendi



In this talk, cultural entrepreneur Oniatta Effendi will explore the significance and beauty of the kebaya, a traditional blouse worn in Indonesia and other parts of Southeast Asia. Through this presentation Oniatta will offer insights into the garment's cultural and historical importance. Drawing from her personal experiences, she will share stories of a women in her life and other notable women in the region, who have worn the this garment and how its played a role in shaping their identities. Also in this talk, the speaker shall be challenging common misconceptions such as the notion, that it's solely a symbol of femininity or that it's an outdated relic. By examining the kebaya through a cultural lens, she will invite the audience to reflect upon what it means regarding the concept of shared identity. Through this conversation, attendees will gain a deeper understanding of the kebaya as a cultural artefact.

25 SEPTEMBER
REVIEWING ANCIENT KEDAH AS A PORT-INDUSTRY: DATA, CONTEXT AND CHRONOLOGY
Zoom Lecture. Speaker: Nasha Rodziadi Khaw

Ancient Kedah can be defined as a confederation of various riverine and coastal settlements located on the north-western coast of the Malay Peninsula. While being strategically positioned at the entrance of the Straits of Melaka, its centre located in the Bujang Valley possessed all the natural advantages for the development of urbanised economic and population foci. The rise of the 2nd century trans-Asiatic maritime trade had led to the emergence of ancient Kedah as a centre for exchange. In the successive centuries, different riverine settlements along the coastline began establishing networks of production centres, leading to the gradual formation of ancient Kedah as an integrated polity.

This lecture attempts to review the archaeological data and chronology of ancient Kedah in the context of maritime Southeast Asian history, especially in light of the recent findings in the Sungai Batu archaeological complex.



 Friends of the Museums Singapore

CELEBRATING
45
 YEARS
 1978-2023
art. history. culture. friendships

Open Morning

Monday 4 September 2023 10 am - 12 noon

Asian Civilisations Museum 10 am FOM Open Morning
 Ngee Ann Auditorium & Foyer, Basement 11 am Monday Morning Lecture

featuring
 FOM Members' Activities, Volunteer Opportunities,
 & Museum Docent Training

**Join us to find out more of what FOM has to offer
 & celebrate FOM's 45th Anniversary &
 Passage Magazine's 15th Anniversary!**

Free Entry - Open to the public

Be part of the FOM community of Friends, Docents, and Volunteers who share your passion for the Arts, History & Culture

Lecture seating is subject to availability of seats on first-come, first-served basis, & venue restrictions

For queries, please contact: Vidhya Nair and Yenping Yeo: mmlcoordinators@gmail.com

