

PASSAGE

Friends of the Museums Singapore

January / February 2018



art
history
culture
people



President's Letter

Dear Friends,

Happy New Year!

This year, FOM celebrates its 40th birthday. It is also the 10th anniversary of *PASSAGE* magazine. The new council is gearing up to celebrate these twin anniversaries with exciting programmes and limited-edition merchandise. So do check our website, Facebook and newsletters regularly for updates.

Since its creation 40 years ago, FOM has grown from strength to strength. From providing guiding services to one museum in 1980, its docents now guide in nine museums, art and heritage institutions. And from just 100 members in 1978, its membership reached 1,500 last year.

The society has evolved over the years to meet the changing needs of our members with new programmes such as photography workshops, cooking classes and foodie groups. It has been no mean feat for an entirely volunteer-run society to have continued to serve the museum community in Singapore and its own members with passion and enthusiasm over such a long span of time. FOM could not have done all this without the selfless contributions of time and energy of our volunteers, FOM's heart and soul.

PASSAGE itself has also evolved. The magazine started life as a no-frills newsletter printed on cyclostyled paper with content meant solely for the FOM community. In September 2008, the first full-colour issue of *PASSAGE* was officially launched, replacing the newsletter. Thanks to Andra Leo, the managing editor of *PASSAGE*, and her editorial team, we now have a beautiful magazine with articles that appeal to the wider community. These articles are often complemented with artful illustrations and photographs.

In December last year, you elected the FOM Council for 2018; their photo is below although Sophia Kan, the treasurer, is missing. I would like to thank you for placing your trust in me and my team for another year. We have worked well together during the past 12 months, updating the society to adapt to the changing needs of our members. We look forward to continuing our agenda for the coming year. My gratitude goes to outgoing council member Sue Ellen Kelso who for family reasons, has to step down. Sue Ellen has been an FOM stalwart for the past 11 years and has contributed tremendously to the council as the Council Representative for Member Activities over the last two years. I would like to welcome her successor, Heather Muirhead, to the council.

Chinese New Year is upon us again. This year, it heralds the arrival of the dog, among whose traits are a strong sense of responsibility, friendliness, honesty and loyalty. These are qualities that our volunteers espouse in no small measure and have served to endear FOM to our partners.

On this note, I wish everyone a good year ahead, filled with many meaningful engagements in art and culture.



Clara Chan
FOM President 2018



FOM's Open Morning



The Friends of the Museums Open Morning took place last October at the National Museum of Singapore. Enthusiastic volunteers pulled out all the stops to tempt visitors into exploring the exciting world of FOM. They decorated their booths with items of special meaning, such as textiles from their personal collections and photos of their study tours to various countries including India, China and Indonesia. Whether visitors were travel fanatics, foodies, or looking for docent-training opportunities, there was something for everyone at the event.

Members took time catching up with each other over the delicious food prepared by many of the volunteers. It was an event filled with camaraderie and good, old-fashioned fun. The morning was beautifully wrapped up by artist and educator, Kelly Reedy, who gave an enlightening talk on the healing aspects of Asian ritual art-making practices.

Photos by Gisella Harrold



Leadership Appreciation Dinner, November 2017



The FOM council organises an annual dinner to thank those volunteers who have taken on leadership roles: museum and activities coordinators, co-heads of training, overall co-heads of training and members of *PASSAGE* magazine's editorial team. In recent years, the schedulers have also been included because of their huge contributions to the docent community. This year's event was again organised by Sadiyah Shahal, one of the council representatives.

In 2009, Mako Sato, the council member in charge of Volunteer Appreciation, first mooted the idea of such a dinner and the first Leadership Appreciation Dinner was held at the Hediard Café with 29 attendees. This year, 50 attendees gathered at the Joie Restaurant, which specialises in a meatless cuisine using the freshest vegetables, fruit and herbs. Each dish was exquisitely presented, so it seemed a shame to break up the lovely patterns created by the chef and actually eat the food.

During her speech, FOM's president, Clara Chan, thanked all present for their contributions, then singled out Sue Ellen Kelso for special thanks, praising her wisdom, energy, commitment and her "aura of calmness". After giving FOM 11 years of service, Sue Ellen is leaving Singapore to return home. Clara ended her speech with these words, "Someone once told me that it is better to walk alone than to be with a crowd going in the wrong direction. I am glad that I am not walking this FOM journey on my own because I have all of you walking in the same direction as me."

Photos by Gisella Harrold





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On the Cover: Padded silk vest with embroidered phoenix, butterflies and peony motifs, symbolizing happiness and prosperity in perfect harmony, from the collection of the Memorial Museum of Generalissimo Sun Yat-sen's Mansion. Photo by Lim Yuen Ping.

FOM is a volunteer, non-profit society dedicated to providing volunteer guides and financial support to Singapore's museums and cultural institutions and to delivering programmes to enhance the community's knowledge of Asia's history, culture and art.

FOM is an Associate Member of the World Federation of Friends of the Museums.

FOM member privileges include free admission to NHB museums (excluding special exhibitions); access to FOM programmes including docent training, lectures, study tours, volunteer opportunities; a subscription to the FOM magazine, *PASSAGE*, and discounts at selected retail outlets, theatres and restaurants. Membership in FOM ranges from \$25 (senior) - \$100 (family) depending on category of membership.

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FOM is not responsible for statements expressed in the signed articles and interviews.

Guiding Student Tours at STPI

By Fiona Silva

"Tell me and I'll forget, show me and I'll remember, involve me and I'll understand." – from the Xunzi.

The most memorable sessions during my time as a trainee docent were the lectures on student guiding techniques. Even today, having already guided several student tours over the last two years and now working as Training Co-Coordinator for STPI, I find many elements of these student guiding approaches very applicable to guiding all age groups.

While most museums and institutions in Singapore need to create tours that cater specially for student audiences, student tours make up the bulk of our guiding at STPI. Here they are unique because of the nature of an institution that allows us to take visitors on 'behind the scenes' tours to look beyond the exhibition and the artwork, into the mysteries of the production process.

The STPI workshop tour offers insights into the collaborative art-making process that goes on behind the scenes and the materials involved. It is here that visitors take in the smell of the ink and wet paper-pulp, the sound of the printing presses in action and very often, we bring along samples of the types of paper used, a relief printing plate and other tangible materials to allow the visitor to touch, feel and experience the artwork more intimately – something that they would not be able to do with artworks in the gallery.

In order to offer visitors this type of tour experience, one that engages the different senses, our docents work very closely with the STPI Education and Outreach Team, who put together a toolkit containing print samples and leftover materials from the workshop. Most children are naturally tactile learners and as we grow, different learning styles may dominate the way we receive and digest information. Audio-visual learners might be engaged and captivated just by the lines, colours and forms in the works and by the stories behind the artwork and

Xunzi was the title given to the Chinese Confucian philosopher, Xun Kuang, who lived from 312-230 BCE. Along with Confucius and Mencius, Xunzi was one of the prominent early architects of Confucian philosophy. His works were collected into a set of 32 books also named, Xunzi. Woodblock copies of these books dating back 1,100 years are still in existence.



Kindergarten children in a hands-on workshop



Students get to touch and explore samples of print works along the Education Wall at STPI



A docent-in-training having a hand at using an etching press in the STPI workshop

the artists. Studies have shown that about 15% of learners are predominantly tactile or kinesthetic learners who need physical activity to truly engage in and understand concepts. Even the rest of us retain only 10% of what we see, 30-40% of what we see and hear, and 90% of what we see, hear and do. So the opportunity to actually have a go at printmaking hugely enhances the learning experience and understanding of the artwork.

At STPI, school groups are offered the possibility of participating in a hands-on workshop before or after their guided tour. The workshop is conducted by STPI staff and focuses on a print technique relevant to the current exhibition. The response has been tremendous and over the last two years; student tours at STPI have increased

by almost 84%. In 2017 alone, 217 student tours were conducted and over half of these groups attended hands-on workshops as part of the tour.

I love guiding student groups that have come out of a printmaking session because they are all ignited, inspired and far more perceptive in how they look at the artwork and decipher its meaning and process. In order to truly understand the processes behind the artworks in each new exhibition, we docents are fortunate to have on-going training and workshops with STPI staff. I find that I can break down and explain a print process to my audience more coherently after having tried it out myself. Experiencing the process first-hand deepens my understanding of it and



Dahlia Osman, head of Education and Outreach at STPI showing samples of an aquatint work to STPI docents

I feel better able to take on questions and delve deeper into the subject.

Several teachers and art therapists I have spoken to say they feel that learning experiences that disrupt the classroom monotony are especially vital today. This is because classroom learning in the digital age means that with more computers and tablets being used in

the classroom, the tactile experience of handwriting is being lost. The balance in the classroom then shifts to the benefit of visual learners because typing is a predominantly visual rather than tactile experience since each key feels the same. In order to create a more inclusive learning environment for all kinds of learners, excursions and hands-on workshops such as the student tours to STPI, which offer a more integrated learning approach, are steadily increasing in popularity.

As we embark on our STPI docent-training season this February, we look forward to growing our community as we anticipate an even higher demand for student tours in the coming year. I would like to extend a warm welcome to the new batch of trainee docents and wish you lots of touchy-feely fun at the training. Be prepared to get your hands dirty!



Getting your hands dirty is all part of the learning process at STPI

Fiona Silva is docent at SAM, STPI and Gillman Barracks and enjoys guiding groups of all ages.

Photos courtesy of STPI Creative Workshop and Gallery

The Year of the Dog, 2018

By Lim Chey Cheng

The current Chinese lunar Year of the Rooster ends on 15 February 2018 and a new year, the Year of the Dog, will begin on 16 February and end on 4 February 2019. The dog *gǒu* (狗), [classical Chinese: *quǎn* (犬)] is the 11th of 12 animals in the Chinese zodiac.

In Chinese astrology each zodiac animal has its own fixed element, one of five: Gold (Metal), Wood, Water, Fire and Earth. The fixed or ruling element for the dog is Earth and for the rooster, Metal. In addition, for each year that the animal occurs, it is also associated with one of the five elements, by rotation. It is customary to refer to each calendar year by its year's animal/element combination. Thus 2017 was the Year of the Fire Rooster. The 2018-year element for the dog is Earth, so 2018 is the Year of the Earth Dog.

Each of the five elements occurs within each animal sign once every 12 years. Therefore, each specific animal-element combination, for example the Earth Dog of 2018, repeats once every 60 years. This animal/element combination is one factor among many others used for horoscope predictions. Chinese astrologers predict that 2018 will be a good year in all respects.

The dog symbolizes some of the best traits in human nature – loyalty, faithfulness, honesty, intelligence, responsibility and industriousness. These qualities are further reinforced by the Earth element making people born in the year of the Earth Dog highly valued by friends and colleagues.

Among the famous people born in the Year of the Dog are Mother Teresa, Sophia Loren, Dolly Parton, Andrea Bocelli, Benjamin Franklin, Bill Clinton and Donald Trump, who ironically is not a dog lover and is the only US president who does not have a dog.

Chinese mythology credits the dog with providing humans with grain seeds, enabling the

planting of crops. The Yao, She, Miao and Li minority groups claim a divine dog as their ancestor. Of the various myths the one of *Pán Hù* (盘瓠) a dog that married a king's daughter after killing his enemy, is the most popular. The progeny of this union became the ancestors of these groups. *Pán Hù* is worshipped by some of the groups and the eating of dog meat is banned by them.

Another myth is that of the *tiān gǒu* (天狗 – heavenly dog) a legendary creature that resembled a black dog or meteor and was thought to swallow the sun or moon during an eclipse. People were told to beat dogs and drive them away in order to ward off the *tiān gǒu*. The 'heavenly dog' would then spit out the sun or moon and flee back into the heavens, ending the eclipse. A Chinese god, *Zhāng Xiān* (張仙) is the enemy of the *tiān gǒu*. He is the god of birth and protector of male children and is often depicted surrounded by boys, with bow and arrows aimed at the sky, waiting for the beast to appear.



Despite Chinese myths about dogs (unlike many other animals, in most accounts dogs are not given fanciful or fantastical appearances or attributes), real dogs have existed throughout China since prehistoric times. Along with pigs, dogs were the earliest animals domesticated in China, about 15,000 years ago. The remains of dogs have been found in many ancient archaeological sites.

Although the Chinese honoured the dog with a position in the zodiac and used it as an esteemed sacrificial animal as well as pampered it (the Pekingese) in the imperial courts, they also killed it for food. The Pekingese, (from *Peking*, the old name of Beijing) an ancient breed

of toy dog originating in China over 2,000 years ago, was believed to bring good luck and dispel evil owing to legends that the Buddha helped create it. In ancient times it was a temple dog and companion of Buddhist monks. No doubt we will see many of them enjoying their heyday in 2018. After all, every dog must have its day.



Lim Chey Cheng is a docent at several museums. She enjoys reading about Chinese culture and likes travelling to off-the-beaten-track places that retain their original culture and are undeveloped.

William Willetts (1918-1995): The Rakish Scholar

By Patricia Bjaaland Welch

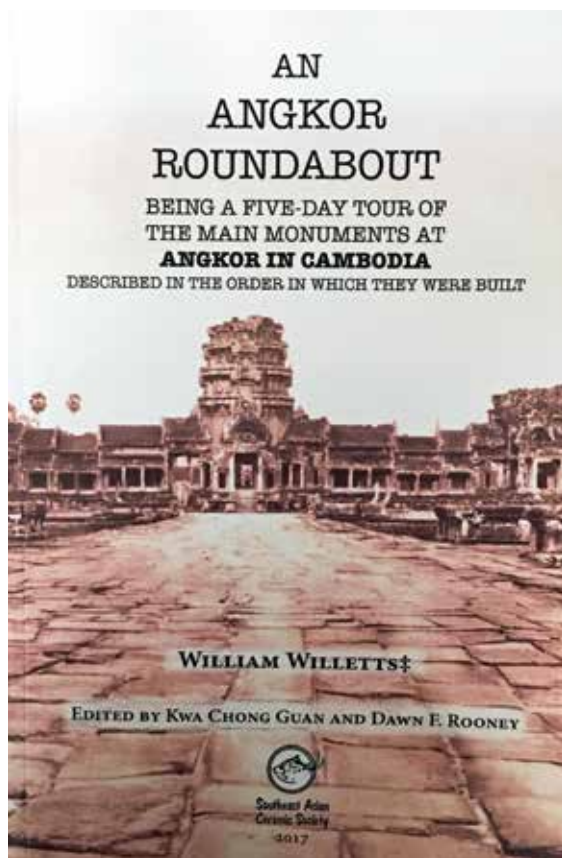
"Reading, thinking and drinking" – so summed up William Willetts' three preferred occupations, which earned him the reputation of living a "somewhat rakish" lifestyle, which included a very casual sense of dress. Students who studied and travelled to various Southeast Asian historical sites with him, almost without fail recall his "shirt tails and baggy white shorts".

But while undoubtedly an individualist, he also left behind "a legacy of scholarship which inspired many in the now established field of South-East Asian art studies."¹ So wrote John Guy, now Curator of South and Southeast Asian Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, when he composed Willetts' obituary (the article which also outed his distinctly non-conventional lifestyle).

Willetts did inspire; among his students (when teaching at the National University of Singapore (NUS) in 1966 and 1967 and serving as curator of the University Art Museum), was Dr Kwa Chong Guan, today an Associate Fellow at the Archaeological Unit of the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Adjunct Associate Professor in NUS' History Department, and a well-known face to FOM docents and members as one of their most popular speakers and guest instructors.

Willetts' and my own path unfortunately crossed only virtually – in Boston in 1971, when I purchased his two volumes on *Chinese Art*², published in 1958. It was this work's royalties that bought him his ticket to Asia, but he stopped off en route "to take a closer look [at India, and] stayed for six years".

Chinese Art was not your typical history of Chinese art. Willetts had his opinions and unique phrasings, and seemed incapable of stopping himself from expressing them. Applied ceramic moulds were described as "butter-pats". Tang pottery was applauded for its "approaching the condition of 'rational' art more nearly than any other Chinese ware". The enthusiasm with which Chinese applied themselves to flower



Willetts' manuscript published by SEACS and available as a pdf at: seaceramic.org.sg under 'Publications'

and bird paintings for a thousand years, he described as comparable "with, say, our European nudes".

He never did make it to China. "It was Singapore's great luck that Mao's Cultural Revolution in China delayed his long-held aim to study there and kept him in Singapore," recalled Pamela Watkins.³ Those years in Singapore helping build a Chinese and Southeast Asian collection were followed by an invitation in 1972 to be the founding curator at the Museum of the Arts of Asia at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. There, he established the Museum Seni Asia, then chaired the Southeast Asian Ceramic Society West Malaysian Chapter while arranging exhibitions and giving lectures throughout the region.

Willetts established the Southeast Asian Ceramic Society (SEACS) in 1969, crediting its founding to the "group of Indonesian pottery dealers, their wicker baskets filled to bursting with the ceramic yield of hundreds of more or less clandestine excavations of graves scattered all over the Indonesian Archipelago".⁴

A large quantity of ceramics from those overflowing baskets ended up in Singapore, "the nearest suitable market outside Indonesia...[and] as local interest grew, so the Southeast Asian Ceramic Society came into being".

Unfortunately, his outspokenness and "temperamental character" got the better of him towards the end of his life and he spent his final years working on a number of unfinished projects. When he passed away in 1995, among his papers was an unpublished manuscript on Angkor Wat. It was passed on to ceramics expert Dawn Rooney, who passed it on to SEACS a few years ago. SEACS has published it (together with an excellent introduction by Dr Kwa on the history of Angkor studies) as a free, downloadable pdf, available on our website (seaceramic.org.sg) – *An Angkor Roundabout: Being a Five-Day Tour of the Main Monuments at Angkor in Cambodia* – just in time for the Asian Civilisations Museum's upcoming Angkor Wat exhibition March 2018.

¹ John Guy, "Obituary: William Willetts", *The Independent*, February 14, 1995.

² William Willetts, *Chinese Art*. New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1958.

³ Pamela Watkins, "The Founding of SEACS", in *Southeast Asian Ceramics: New Light on Old Pottery*, ed. by John N Miksic. Southeast Asian Ceramic Society and NUS Museum, 2010, p. 21.

⁴ William Willetts, *Ceramic Art of Southeast Asia*. Singapore: The Southeast Asian Ceramic Society, 1971, pp. 5-6.

Patricia Bjaaland Welch is currently president of the Southeast Asian Ceramic Society, preparing for this year's William Willetts lecture, an annual event, held in Willetts' memory, which will be given on 7 March by NUS Visiting Professors Barbara and Leonard Andaya.

The Changsha Makara Bowl

By Caroline Carfantan

In today's world, the label "Made in China" is probably the most recognisable one since China is the world's largest exporter. Today, many Chinese export goods travel by ship to their country of destination – exactly as they did 1,200 years ago. But while today's goods are shiploads of electronics, machinery and sneakers, in the ninth century the bulk of the cargo was ceramics.

The archaeological recovery of a shipwreck and its cargo, discovered off Belitung Island in Indonesia in 1998 and now known as the 'Belitung Shipwreck', are a time capsule of this seaborne trade. Out of a total of 60,000 pieces of ceramics, the mass-produced items on this Tang ship included 55,000 pieces of underglazed, decorated Changsha bowls. According to John Miksic, an American professor at Singapore's National University and expert on Southeast Asian archaeology, "the handmade bowls give evidence of 'factory-like production'."¹

They owe their name to the Changsha kilns on the eastern banks of the Xiang River in Hunan province. What makes the wares of the Changsha kilns unique is the fact that they are different from any other ceramics of that period. On the one hand, they incorporate ceramic techniques from northern China, on the other, they display influences from southern Chinese iron-glazed Yue ware.

Changsha potters are believed to have been the first to introduce underglaze painting; the decoration itself being a clear design break from what was produced elsewhere in China during the same period. They are the earliest known exported examples of their kind.

The variety of motifs gives us a glimpse of the eclecticism of the global market they were traded in. One can see in the ACM collection that there was something for everyone: birds, landscapes, flowers, botanical designs, Buddhist motifs, calligraphy, clouds... and bowls with unusual-looking fish (even if every fish bowl is different, they are fish).

The fish on every single one takes up most of the space, with the exception of the four symmetrically arranged brown speckles on the rim. With its long, snout-like nose, big teeth, large open jaws, huge eyes and spiky dorsal fin in the shape of a mountain ridge, it better fits the characteristics of a fearsome sea monster than a fish the likes of Nemo or Dory. All these distinguishing features are those of a *makara*.

A *makara* is a mythical animal first encountered in India. However, in early Indian representations it looked more like a crocodile. In the ACM you can see a beautiful example of a crocodile *makara* on the sandstone Yakshi capital from the second century from northwest India. Over time, it evolved into a composite fish-elephant animal. Along the trade routes, this Hindu-Buddhist motif travelled



Changsha Makara Bowl, China, Hunan province, around 830s, stoneware, ACM collection

from India to China. The first known Chinese textual mention of a *makara* is in a Buddhist sutra dating from the end of the fourth century², while the first *makara* depiction is believed to be that found on a silver dish dated to the late fifth century.

Among a *makara*'s striking details on our Changsha bowl is its tongue. It is extremely long and flicking out – like a chameleon's tongue eager to catch the flaming oval shape in front of it. In the Tang dynasty, the viewer would have identified this shape as the luminous jewel or flaming pearl, known as a *cintamani*. This flaming orb would have been seen as a metaphor for the teachings and virtues of the Buddha. Using Buddhist motifs during the Tang dynasty was an established practice, which is why a variety of auspicious symbols (such as stupas and swastikas) appear as recurring motifs on Changsha bowls.

These charming shallow bowls are not just tea-drinking utensils, but allow us to visualise what "Made in China" exports meant in ninth century China. Every one of the 55,000 "Made in China" bowls tells the story of international trade, the exchange of ideas and of mass-production, long before this term was coined, enlarging the boundaries of our knowledge of the past.

Caroline Carfantan has lived in Singapore for the last three years. She is an FOM docent who enjoys guiding at the ACM and MHC. She discovered a love of ceramics during the recent FOM study tour to the porcelain cities of China.

Photo by Gisella Harrold

¹ Simon Worrall, 'Made in China', *National Geographic*, June 2009, p. 118.

² Takakusa J. and Watanabe K. 1927. *Taishō shinshū Taizōkyō* (The Chinese Tripitaka). Tōkyō, vol. 1, p. 809.

The Museum of East Asian Art (Bath, UK)

By Anne H Perng

When one thinks of Bath (UK), one thinks of honey-coloured Georgian architecture, Roman baths and Jane Austen. How about imperial Chinese porcelain, Ban Chiang pottery or Javanese masks? These artefacts and more can be found in a restored Georgian townhouse, which houses The Museum of East Asian Art (MEAA). Opened in 1993, the MEAA is the only museum in the UK solely dedicated to the arts and cultures of East and Southeast Asia with over 2,000 artefacts from China, Japan, Korea and Southeast Asia.

This museum felt like home to me as I recognised so many pieces similar to those at the Asian Civilisations Museum. (A Changsha bowl! A scholar's studio! Tang *sancai* tomb figures!) Many of the artefacts were placed thematically, such as "Blessings" in the symbolism section, "Mirrors" and "Burial Objects" in Chinese material culture or "Wise Administration" and "Integrity" in Literati life. Other displays showcase the museum founder's interests, such as the Nestorian crosses.

The museum is the culmination of a lifetime's worth of collecting Chinese antiquities by MEAA founder Brian McElney, who was born in Hong Kong and worked as a



Glass snuff bottle, clear, with dark blue overlay



Yaozhou zhadou (slops jar) with brown pattern echoing its shape. Late Tang dynasty, ninth century

century gilt bronze Tibetan Buddha that he bought for £26 in 1955. He already possessed a keen eye, as this particular Buddha had an unusual unopened base that held its original contents. Once the collecting bug bit, he amassed an enviable collection of Chinese blue and white porcelain and other objects. Trips to investigate possible places to house the collection in the

prominent lawyer there until he retired and returned to the UK in 1992. His aptly named memoir, *Collecting China: The Memoirs of a Hong Kong Art Addict*, recounts the joys of collecting and how his private collection was to end up in Bath, with vivid accounts of the antique dealers in the heydays of the Hollywood Road district. His first Asian art purchase was a 17th



Famille noire cup, with inventory mark of Duke of Saxony (Augustus the Strong), ante-1730

UK yielded nothing, as institutions such as the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford or the Fitzwilliam in Cambridge required further donation demands. Oxbridge's loss was Bath's gain.

At the time of my visit, there was a special exhibition of museum highlights displaying objects that were the chosen favourites of visitors, museum trustees, staff and volunteers. I imagined a young visitor to the museum falling in love with a snuff bottle just because, according to the museum label, "I like blue." Founder Brian McElney also chose an item – a spittoon from the late Tang dynasty (ninth century) "This very rare example of a ceramic piece from the Yaozhou kiln of Shaanxi Province is my all-time favourite. The decoration echoing the shape of the piece is very modern in its concept and the piece has been universally admired by those whose opinion and aesthetics I



Changsha bowl – every ACM docent will recognise this

respect." My own favourite from this visit? A cup from the Kangxi period (1662-1722) in the Qing dynasty because it contained the inventory mark of Augustus II the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland (1670-1733). It was his love of porcelain that led to the European discovery of the secrets of porcelain production. When he died in financial ruin, his porcelain collection held 35,798 pieces. Here was one of those pieces!

It was fun to discover a little bit of Asia in Jane

Austen's Bath. You too, might recognise an old friend or two among its display cases. It was well worth a visit.

MEAA's current exhibition is *Dressed to Impress: Netsuke and Japanese Men's Fashion* until 22 April 2018, at 12 Bennett Street, Bath, BA1 2QJ <http://meaa.org.uk>

Anne H Perng has only recently learned to appreciate Chinese ceramics and porcelain after guiding at the Asian Civilisations Museum for just over a decade.

All photos courtesy of the author



Exterior of the MEAA

Chinese Street Opera in Singapore

By Siobhán Cool

During Chinese New Year and the Hungry Ghost Festival, the traditional performing art of Chinese opera (*wayang*) is evident all over Singapore. Striped tents spring up along the streets and in open fields in heartland areas and the evenings resonate with the poignant sounds of traditional instruments and the singers' melodies.

Chinese immigrants originally brought the genre to Singapore. Owing to the multitude of Chinese dialect groups, there are numerous opera styles. Despite this, they are similar, with variations in content and execution; each dialect group has its own history or legends to tell and some acting and singing styles are more refined than others. Beijing opera (aka Peking opera) developed during the Qing dynasty and has more than 100 years of history here, where it used to be the most popular form of entertainment amongst all Chinese dialect groups. Cantonese opera and Hainanese opera are also performed here. Perhaps the two most popular styles today are Hokkien and Teochew opera. Hokkien opera is a regional genre, originating in Taiwan and flourishing in Fujian, before migrating to Southeast Asia where local Malay and Singaporean communities shaped it. Hokkien opera's popularity in Singapore may be partly because its troupe production costs are lower. A Cantonese or Beijing troupe has to travel farther – from Hong Kong or mainland China. Hokkien opera has been adapted for film and television while also maintaining its Singapore theatre roots. The oldest style might be Teochew opera (from Chaozhou), with a history of more than 500 years. Its origins can be traced to the mid-Ming dynasty (mid-1500s).

The operas are based on Chinese classics and myths and whilst the productions are performed for entertainment, they also contain moral messages with storylines that tend to highlight the virtues of loyalty, love and patriotism.



Backstage, before the opera, Tok Yi Bu

At times, the operas are performed at temples, to observe certain religious rites or the birthdays of particular deities. The operas' stage designs, vibrant costumes and colourful make-up are heavily rich in symbolism and the performances are unashamed displays of ethnic songs, dances, acrobatics, martial arts and acting.

Although Singapore has a professional community of Chinese opera artists, during the popular festival seasons of Chinese New Year and Hungry Ghosts, one will readily encounter performances by one of the many amateur troupes that help preserve the rich operatic heritage here. Amateur singers train throughout the year, usually attending weekly classes and more when performances are due. Their lush costumes and sets are often hired, but costs are kept to a minimum where possible. The performances are free and anyone is welcome to take a seat under the tent and enjoy them.

Although the golden era for Chinese opera in Singapore was in the 1950s and 1960s, organisations such as the Chinese Opera Institute and Chinese Theatre Circle, strive to keep the art form alive with training workshops and educational programmes as well as annual seasons. Annually, the Esplanade and People's Associations stage professional and amateur opera productions respectively during the Hua Yi Festival. With preservation and education in mind, the Singapore Chinese Opera Museum, now located at 100 Jalan Sultan, opened in 2010.

Although the majority of its audience and fan base is older-generation Singaporeans, it is hoped that efforts continue so Chinese opera, with its beguiling sounds, visual beauty and classical stories will be more heavily patronised and appreciated by younger generations in Singapore.



Chinese Opera, Tok Yi Bu

Siobhán Cool is a corporate lawyer who has lived in Singapore for 14 years, never tiring of the colours and sounds of Asia.

The Rain Tree

By Shivani Kanwal Kulpati

In 2016, a special honour was bestowed on Connaught Drive, the tree-lined avenue separating the Padang from Esplanade Park. It was christened the "Avenue of Heritage Trees". This is indeed a great achievement, as 22 of the trees along this avenue were recognised as 'Heritage Trees'. This is the largest number of trees in a single avenue to have been endorsed under the NParks' Heritage Tree Scheme, which advocates the conservation of mature trees in Singapore. The heritage trees along Connaught Drive are estimated to have been planted in the mid-1880s. At more than 130 years old, this makes them living heritage landmarks that have witnessed many important events in Singapore's history, including the Declaration of Independence in 1963 as well as the first National Day Parade in 1966.

The trees, known as *Samanea Saman* or *Albizia saman* are popularly called Rain Trees. They are flowering trees belonging to the *Fabacea* species of the pea family. The branches of this tree are dark and sinuous whereas the leaves are small and the flowers delicate. When the small clusters of its pink and white flowers bloom, they give the canopy a soft whitish pink hue. The seed pod is dark, almost black, with a sweetish fruit pulp. The thick branches lend themselves to being perfect hosts for epiphytes such as orchids and ferns to grow on.



Heritage tree label

The reason they are commonly known as rain trees is that when the sky is overcast, the leaves fold up in anticipation of rain. They also fold up around five o'clock every evening, giving them their Malay name, *Pukul Lima*, meaning five o'clock. This name came about since sunset was closer to five in the evening, before the standard time was changed in Singapore.

Like the vast majority of people in Singapore, the rain trees are also immigrants, with the first ones having been planted in 1876. They are natives of Central America and were introduced all over the tropics in the 1900s, especially in the coffee and nutmeg plantations.

It is difficult not to notice these majestic trees around Singapore. They have a way of drawing attention to themselves and being noticed for their thick trunks and



Heritage rain trees along Connaught Drive bordering the Padang

branches that spread out wide, forming an umbrella-like canopy. They can grow up to 30 metres in height and the canopy could be 20-30 metres across. Being big trees that provide shade from the harsh tropical sun, makes them suitable to line expressways, avenues and roads around the island.

It is a pleasant experience walking under the shade of these majestic trees, so why not go try and look for them around the island? One can start at Connaught Drive, barely a stone's throw away from the Asian Civilisations Museum, or walk along the East Coast Park. You may want to start by admiring the very impressive ones outside the Istana.



Ferns and orchids growing on the branches of a heritage rain tree

Shivani Kanwal Kulpati is a docent at the ACM and has always been fascinated by the rain tree.

All photos courtesy of the author

The Sar Kong Fire Dragon Dance

By Ingeborg Hartgerink-Grandia

There is always something special about a dragon dance during the Lunar New Year celebrations in Singapore, but a most special dragon dance, the fire dragon dance, is only performed once every three years. The Sar Kong Mun Shan Fook Tuck Chee temple, located at 124 Sims Drive, is one of the oldest Daoist temples in Singapore and is on the verge of destruction as it is built on what is land destined for more HDB buildings. This temple is the only one in Singapore that has a dragon-dance troupe, dragon-building master and dragon-dance master to perform this age-old, traditional straw fire dragon dance. In 2012, I was lucky enough to see some of the preparations and the dance itself.

The origins of the dance and the temple

In Chinese tradition, the dragon is one of the most auspicious animals, symbolizing ultimate power, strength and good luck and believed to have control over water and the weather. Dragon dances have long been performed in China to chase away plagues and other evils and to ask for good harvests, safety and prosperity in the New Year for the people who attend the dance. The Fire Dragon Dance has its origins in Guangdong and outside China, is nowadays only performed in Hong Kong and Singapore.

The Sar Kong Mun San Fook Tuck Chee temple in Singapore was founded by labourers from Guangdong – Cantonese and Hakka coolies, who came to Singapore to work in the brick kilns. Sar Kong (which translates as Sand Ridge or Sand Dune) was the name of the village in the



The fire dragon being paraded through the streets

Kallang basin, where the Kallang and Geylang rivers meet. In this area, there was plenty of clay that was good material to bake bricks from, much-needed in a prospering Singapore, where some building was always going on.

While most temples in Singapore were financed by wealthy benefactors, this temple was mainly financed by the labourers themselves. It was first founded around 1860 and moved to its present location in 1900 with an extension built in 1905. Although it's a simple construction, the structure is built according to traditional Cantonese-style temple architecture, another rarity in Singapore.

After expanding, one of the things the temple provided was a school and sports club so that devotees had a place to spend their free time meaningfully instead of using opium, as was the habit for many coolies. The room where the school used to be, now houses the lion-dance troupe and it is this award-winning Sar Kong Mun San Fook Tuck Chee Dance Troupe that also performs the fire dragon dance every three years, or whenever possible.



A devotee comes to pay her respects to the dragon



The completed dragon waiting for the incense sticks to be inserted



Incense sticks being inserted

Originally instructed and taught by a dragon-building master from the Xinwei county in Guangdong, the current dragon-building master is Master Fong Keng Yuen, who has been designing and building these straw dragons for over 30 years.

The straw fire dragon

A fire dragon for a dragon dance has the same basic structure as the cloth dragons that can be seen more often in dragon dances. A dragon-dance dragon consists of a head, a tail and a body with an uneven number of segments, usually nine, and can be over 70 metres long. Every segment has a reinforced part where a pole handled by a dancer can support the body. The fire dragons in Singapore have hundreds of incense sticks inserted into those reinforced parts.

The first time a fire dragon dance was performed in Singapore, locally available banana leaves were used to form the body, but it was discovered that the *padi* straw traditionally used in Guangdong was better because the structure of the plaited straw made it easier to insert and hold the incense sticks. The straw has to be imported from Guangdong and such a straw dragon can cost up to S\$30,000, a sum that has to be financed by the temple devotees. Since the dragons used for the religious rituals will be burned after the dance, it is a costly tradition, one of the reasons why the fire dragon dance is no longer a yearly tradition.

The dance of the fire dragon

Building the dragon takes at least three months, shaping the head, tail and the body from rattan and the imported plaited *padi* straw. Meanwhile, the dance troupe will practise their moves with a regular cloth dragon under the supervision of the dance master, Mr Ho Loon Leong.



Accompanied by crowds, the dragon is on parade



A closer look at the incense sticks near the dragon's clawed feet

Performing the moves requires a lot of discipline and martial-art training in order to hold the dragon and make synchronised moves. The straw dragon weighs about the same as a cloth dragon when unadorned by the incense sticks, but the weight doubles when all the incense sticks have been inserted. The weight, the lit incense sticks, the heat and the smoke mean that the dancers can't make all the moves they would for a regular dragon-dance. Also, the strength needed to manoeuvre the dragon gliding on its clouds of smoke is so great that the dancers have to be changed every five minutes. Each segment will have at least three alternating dancers who weave in and out under the dragon's body and take turns holding the pole.

Before the dance can take place, there are several religious rituals to go through. These end by bringing the dragon to life by the dotting of the eyes, done by the guest of honour just before the incense sticks are attached. Then, after all the sticks of lit incense have been carefully placed on the head, tail and re-enforced parts of the body, one lead dancer will carry the fiery pearl (a ball on a pole also completely filled with lit incense sticks) and start the moves, so that the fiery dragon will be seen trying to catch the precious pearl ball during the dance. The combination of the sounds, incense smoke and the heat make it an unforgettable experience when witnessing the dragon floating in snake-like moves with huge clouds of smoke and sparks coming off the incense sticks.

The dance usually takes place on the festival days of the temple's main deity, the deity of Soil and Earth, Tu Di Gong or Tua Pek Kong, on the second day of the second lunar month or the 15th day of the eighth month (mid-autumn). In the Year of the Dragon 2012, the dance troupe performed a fire dragon dance during the Chingay Parade. That dragon is exhibited in the temple's Heritage Room, opened in 2015. In 2016 the temple celebrated its 150th anniversary with a three-day programme, including a fire dragon dance and a book, *A Kampong and its Temple*, with the history of the area, temple and when the dance was launched. The temple and the dance troupe have Facebook sites with a calendar of events, so if you want to experience this rare tradition yourself, do keep an eye on their site, www.facebook.com/pg/sarkongmunsanfooktuckchee/

Ingeborg Hartgerink-Grandia lived in Singapore twice over an 11-year period, until 2012. She used to be a docent and was FOM president in 2012. She still misses the sights, sounds and smells of Singapore.

All photos by the author

Kiln Gods of China

By Patricia Bjaaland Welch



Kiln god in the Wind and Fire God Temple (Dehua, China). Although once declared a superstition to be shunned, the old kiln god altars of the past are beginning to reappear, even in such modern ceramic centres as Jingdezhen, to ensure the success of the firing

A young potter throws himself into a kiln to ensure the firing's success. A kiln worker by the name of Lin Bing dreams of a beautiful young maiden with smoke coming out of her mouth and designs a kiln that memorialises the shape of her breasts and rounded belly. All of these and many more stories surround the myth of the Chinese kiln god, or perhaps we should say gods, because there may have been more than one individual worshipped as a kiln god or a related muse.

The Chinese scholar He Li identifies a Yaozhou kiln site in Huangbo village in Tongchuan as the site of the oldest temple dedicated to a kiln god: "The Yaozhou kiln temple would have a great celebration in honour of the Kiln God each year. All the potters and local people would make offerings and burn incense, have performances and set up vendors' stands, celebrating continuously for three days and nights."¹ A stele erected on the site in 1084 tells of a "craftsman from elsewhere named Lin" who taught the villagers ceramic



Kiln god statue at Jingdezhen's ancient kiln site

techniques and "was commemorated in the temple". But the story is unclear as to whether Lin was remembered in the kiln god's temple or whether Lin became the kiln god. But Rose Kerr cites an even earlier story from the 4th century when "Ning Feng-Tzu 甯封子, Controller of Pottery (Thao-cheng 陶正) under the legendary Yellow Emperor, burnt himself to death in a kiln leaving his bones intact, which were buried with reverence in the Ning mountains (甯山)"².

Many modern kiln gods in China are known by the name Feng Huo Xian (风火仙), which means the God of Wind and Fire. Our recent FOM Study Tour to three of southeast China's major kiln sites saw several temples dedicated to Feng Huo Xian, primarily in Jingdezhen but also in Dehua, but they left us with more questions than answers.

It is logical that the kiln god would be named not after the lump of clay one normally associates with ceramics, but with those elements that transform that clay lump into ceramics – namely fire and the kiln's atmospheric conditions. The latter is defined by the amount of oxygen present during the firing process (when present, it's known as an *oxidation* atmosphere, when absent it's known as a *reduction* atmosphere). It is the firing temperature (the fire) and the atmosphere that determine whether the piece will emerge as porcelain or not, and in the case of which metallic oxides are used, the resultant colours. As Maris Gillette notes, it's the "make-it-or-break it stage in porcelain production".

Fung Huo Xian wasn't always a god, but was once a potter known as Tong Po [Bo] in the story recorded by the Jesuit priest, Père d'Entrecolles in 1721, during the reign of the Kangxi Emperor.³

"It is told that once an emperor wanted [the potters] to make him porcelain like a given model; they told him many times that it was impossible.... One of the workers, in a moment of despair, threw himself in a lighted furnace and was instantly consumed. The porcelain that was fired in this lot was perfectly beautiful ... Since that time this poor fellow has been a hero, and became as a result the idol who rules over the works of porcelain. I do not know that his elevation has brought other Chinese to take the same route in hope of a similar honour."

This story is confirmed in earlier Chinese texts including a collection relating to ceramic production compiled by Tang Ying (1682-1756), the Manchu Superintendent of the Jingdezhen Imperial Porcelain Factory during the reign of the Emperor Qianlong. He was a ceramic artist himself, but more importantly, is recognised as the genius behind Jingdezhen's success. He too recorded the story of how the sacrifice of a youth thereafter ensured perfect firings and ends with the words "The vessel's sleek gloss is the blood and fat of the departed; its cohesion is the flesh and bones of the departed; and its brilliant whiteness and gem-like lustre of kingfisher blue is the divine sincerity and valiant heart of the departed one."⁴

One contemporary western potter researching the story of Feng Huo Xian felt however that, "[He] likely perished in a fiery accident that occurred while he was standing on top of a kiln in order to carry out the risky task of stoking it with sticks of wood, which had to be dropped into the firing chamber through special holes in the kiln's roof."⁵ But she concluded one couldn't jump into a kiln if one wanted to. It was much more likely that the kiln ceiling collapsed while being stoked.

However, it's not obvious even knowing this story, which figure within a kiln god's temple is actually Feng Huo Xian as there is often a large grouping of statues depicting various Daoist gods and other immortals in attendance. It is also likely that the kiln god once would have been incorporated into a temple dedicated to the earth god and other folk deities. If there is any established iconography to help visitors identify Feng Huo Xian, it is probably a burning torch or a bowl issuing forth flames representing the figure as a stoker of the kiln's flames.



The kiln god in this small shrine in Jingdezhen is dressed in a Daoist robe and holds a small, mysterious bottle or vase



The propitious inscription in Dehua's kiln god temple reads R to L: Feng tiao yu shun; Guo tai min an or "Favourable weather [for growing crops]; the country is prosperous and the people live in peace".

Many of the stories and knowledge relating to kiln gods and rites were lost as they were condemned as one of the 'Four Olds' during the Cultural Revolution, when many folk temples were destroyed and the stories they recorded repressed. But times have clearly changed because all of the sites we visited had bowls of sand supporting burnt-out incense sticks and worn fortune-telling tools on nearby tables. One temple even had a resident caretaker couple. Some of the major kiln sites now even have full-size sculptures identified as the 'Kiln God'.



Teapots emerging from a sagger after firing

Taiwan has a different kiln god story. Their version, as told by the new Yingge Ceramics Museum in New Taipei City, tells the tale that once upon a time, a long time ago, there lived three brothers in Fuzhou, China. "Each of the brothers had a skill that was special for making ceramics. Lo Ming brought with him the skill of coiling and Lo Wen was the master of throwing forms. The other brother, whose name is forgotten, was not brought to Taiwan. At present, only Lo Ming is represented by a traditional wooden statue and it is unknown who made it, or when."⁶ But sadly, when the temple's chief caretaker was asked if there were any specific iconographic guidelines to be followed in terms of dress or character for the kiln god, he wasn't sure.

Patricia Bjaaland Welch led an FOM study tour to Jingdezhen, Dehua and Changsha in October. She plans to repeat the trip for more FOM members in 2019.

Photos by Andra Leo

¹ He Li, "Ceramics of the Song, Liao, Western Xia, and Jin Dynasties", *Chinese Ceramics*. Yale University Press, 2010, p. 273.

² *Sou Shen Chi*, Ch. 1, p. 2 as quoted in Kerr, R. & N. Wood, *Ceramic Technology*, Vol. 5, Part 12 of *Needham, Science & Civilisation in China*. Cambridge U. Press, 2004, p. 206.

³ Interested readers can find a translation of the letters online at http://www.gotheborg.com/letters/letters_first.shtml

⁴ Sayer, Geoffrey R., trans. *Ching-te-chen, T'ao Lu: or The Potteries of China*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1951, pp. 83-4.

⁵ Geiger-Ho, M., "Guardians of Fire and Clay: The Legacy of China's Kiln Gods", *The Studio Potter* 28, no. 3 (2000), pp. 49-54.

⁶ *The Free Library*. S.v. Guardians of a shifting industry: worshipping the Kiln God, Lo Ming in "Yingge: Dr Martie Geiger-Ho explores the current worship rituals of Taiwan's pottery gods." Retrieved November 15, 2017 from <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Guardians+of+a+shifting+industry+%3a+worshipping+the+Kiln+God%2c+Lo+Ming...+a0396614711>.

Visual Expressions of a Mother's Love

By Lim Yuen Ping and Pang Ong Choo

Have you ever heard of a fortune deity by the name of Liu Hai and the wealth-beckoning three-legged golden toad that stayed by his side? Would you like to be greeted by them? The special exhibition, running until 4 March at Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall, is definitely the place to catch a glimpse of this lucky charm.



Liu Hai teasing a three-legged toad, motif from an open-crown hat

The special exhibition entitled *Stitches of Love – Hidden Blessings in Children's Clothing and Accessories*, is well curated with 90 colourful embroidery items comprising mainly children's clothing and accessories made in the late Qing dynasty and early 20th century. The motifs of birds, animals, flowers and mythical folklore characters embroidered on hats, headbands, *dudou**, bibs, earmuffs, booties and vests were believed to be the laborious needlework of mothers. Each symbol is a visual expression of a mother's love, well wishes and blessings for her child. These hidden blessings include longevity, good health, happiness, prosperity, harmony and fortune. *Liu Hai teasing the three-legged toad* is a popular motif among these embroidery works because it symbolizes the abundance of fortune and wealth.

* *Dudou* 肚兜: an under garment covering the chest and abdomen

** Round Chinese metal coins with a square hole in the center were in circulation since the Warring States period (350BCE)

There are quite a few versions of the origin story of this lucky charm. One of them is that Liu Hai, who practised the teaching of Tao, was the prime minister of Yan, an ancient Chinese state during the Zhou dynasty and Warring States period (1046-256 BCE). Later in life, he attained immortality and stayed in heaven. As an immortal deity, he was entrusted with the task of making rounds on earth to subdue demons and monsters. It was during one such round that he came across a mischievous golden toad that loved to gobble up treasures and valuables, most notably coins. Liu tried to capture the toad by luring it with a willow branch strung with coins++. Unfortunately, amidst the tussle, the toad lost a leg and ended up three-legged.

After the golden toad made a promise to practise the teaching of Tao, Liu Hai kept it at his side during his rounds on earth. The toad was allowed to continue gulping down coins in the day, but had to spit them all out in the night to help the poor. Not long after that, the pair was referred to as "The Fortune Deity with a Wealth Beckoning Three-legged Golden Toad." When an embroidered motif of *Liu Hai teasing a three-legged toad* appeared on a child's accessories, it showed a mother's wish that this good luck charm would bring fortune and wealth to her child.

Conversely, when a four-legged toad motif is embroidered on a *Wudumao* (五毒帽), it plays a different role. In China, the summer solstice signals the time of year when pests such as snakes, scorpions, lizards, spiders, toads and centipedes become aggressive. To protect children from being bitten by these pests, parents would make sure their child put



Wudumao, a hat embroidered with the motifs of five pests

on a *Wudumao* or a hat embroidered with motifs of five of these pests. It was believed that the five pests would form a formidable shield against all menacing pests and negative forces known as *Sha qi*. As a precautionary measure, parents

would also make their child wear an amulet called the longevity lock *baijiasuo* around their necks.

Traditionally, when a Chinese baby turns 100 days old, friends and relatives chip in to get a necklace with a silver lock for the baby. Thus the lock is known as "100 families lock" or *baijiasuo* (百家锁). The lock hanging around the baby's neck



Embroidered longevity lock around the neckline of a dudou

will work as an amulet to ward off all evil forces. Some Chinese parents strongly believe the soul of a child before the age of 12 is still in a formative and unstable state, one that could easily be shattered or taken away by evil spirits. The *baijiasuo* was said to possess the power to keep the soul locked within the child's body, protecting it from encountering evil spirits or suffering from mishaps. Therefore the lock is also known as a longevity lock or *changmingsuo* (长命锁). A longevity lock embroidered around the neckline of a *dudou* would have served the same purpose. Such longevity locks are usually decorated with auspicious Chinese characters or mythical creatures such as the *Qilin*. But mothers who were fervent about the Chinese rebus for longevity, bet on cats and butterflies.



Dudou with cat and butterfly motifs

A Chinese rebus refers to a word or phrase that could be represented by symbols or the pictures of objects that were similar or sounded alike when pronounced. Cat in Chinese is pronounced as *mao* (猫) and butterfly as *di-e* (蝶). The two words together, *mao-die*, are a rebus of (猫蝶), a respectful way of addressing Chinese people in their 80s and 90s. Naturally, pairing a

cat and a butterfly in the same embroidery piece is a blessing for a long life.

Butterflies, which symbolize happiness, are often delightfully depicted among beautiful and colourful flowers and fruit. The peony in Chinese is called *Fu-gui- Hua* (富贵花), which means a flower of wealth and nobility. A scene of blossoming peonies, phoenixes and butterflies together simply means great happiness and prosperity in perfect harmony. Peaches are often included as a symbol of eternal happiness and good health. According to a legend, the heavenly queen mother (*Xiwangmu*) has a peach garden that produces immortal peaches. Once every 6,000 years, the peaches are harvested and *Xiwangmu* invites all the deities in heaven to an immortal peach feast. After the feast, the deities retain their immortality and remain happily in heaven.



Phoenix, butterflies and peony motifs, symbolizing happiness and prosperity in perfect harmony

Apart from the peony and peaches, the chrysanthemum is also a hot favourite motif chosen by mothers to elicit blessings of dignity and longevity for their children. Typically, the chrysanthemum can withstand the harsh weather conditions of late autumn. This cultural symbol is associated with a famous Eastern Jin Dynasty poet, Tao Yuan-ming (陶渊明) (365 - 427 CE), who had deep affection for the chrysanthemum. He wrote many poems and prose about this flower.



Chrysanthemum motif on a red jacket

In a wider context, motifs featuring the characters of *Journey to the West* (西游记), one of the four classics of Chinese literature, may reflect the mood and buzz of the early Republican years, perhaps is an indication of some mothers' interests being translated into visuals. We therefore see motifs of the characters in that novel, combined with the motifs of the peony and phoenix, stitched onto accessories.

In today's societies, you often hear mothers saying, "I love you", while kissing and hugging their children in public. It was a form of expression that traditional Chinese mothers probably wanted to experience, but restrained themselves from doing. Instead, they resorted to the long and laborious process of embroidering symbols onto their children's clothing or accessories to convey their love, wishes and blessings. In so doing, these mothers transformed their love into a visual form. The *Stitches of Love* exhibition reminds us that a mother's love, be it visible or hidden, is universal and timeless. While these embroidered works highlight an aspect of Chinese culture, they also reveal society's expectations and aspirations during the late Qing and early 20th century.



Dudou featuring characters from Journey to the West

Lim Yuen Ping and Pang Ong Choo became FOM docents at SYSNMH in 2015 and 2016 respectively. They are currently guiding the special exhibition *Stitches of Love*.

All images courtesy of the collection of the Memorial Museum of Generalissimo Sun Yat-sen's Mansion

The Hakkas and Their Tulou Communal Homes

By Anne H Perng



A view of Chuxi Village, Yongding County, Fujian

They were once purported to be nuclear missile silos, when satellite imagery found many circular shapes dotted in the mountainous landscape of Fujian province in China's southeastern coastal region. The analysts were wrong – they were instead *tulou* 土楼, the communal homes of the Hakka people, one of China's major cultural-linguistic groups whose origins remain unclear. Numbering approximately 80 million worldwide today (although not all are Hakka speakers), the Hakkas are believed to have come from an area around the Yellow River in north-central China (primarily Henan). They gradually moved south in a series of migrations some time before the fourth century, owing to war, famine, flooding, droughts, invasions by other ethnic groups, etc. By the 14th century, they had settled in southeastern China in Fujian, Guangdong and Jiangxi provinces. Migrating from those provinces, the Hakkas settled mainly in Taiwan and also in parts of Southeast Asia, including Singapore, but the diaspora has spread globally to every region of the world.

The term *Hakka* comes from the Cantonese pronunciation of the word *ke jia* 客家 which translates into 'guest family' or 'guest people'. It started as a term of abuse used by locals in the south to describe the newcomers who moved into their communities, implying that the "guests" (*ke* 客) would eventually go home. Their language and customs had distinguished them from the local Chinese in the areas

where they settled. Eventually the term Hakka was accepted and used by the very people themselves, even though it was originally a hostile attribution given to them by others and not one that they had given themselves.

The Hakkas have been stereotyped as being frugal, hardworking, egalitarian and stubborn. Hakka women, however, were seen to have a higher degree of freedom than non-Hakkas since their tradition encouraged them to avoid foot-binding, to keep a large amount from their dowries and to work outside the home for cash, often doing heavy physical



Inside a Hakka tulou



An altar to Guan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy



Peering into the ancestral hall

work such as plowing. Female education was also encouraged, while daughter-selling and concubinage were discouraged. In Hakka ancestral halls, only one tablet was displayed and that was of the founding ancestor, so that all ancestors, be they rich or poor, male or female, were included.

Hakkas who settled in the mountainous regions of Fujian and Guangdong provinces built homes called *tulou*, or 'earth dwellings'. The *tulou* is a type of rammed earth dwelling and can be round, square or mansion-style in shape. The walls are made from cooked glutinous rice and brown sugar that are added to immature soil, fine sand and limestone, then kneaded, pounded, pressed, and finally rammed into place, with a frame of bamboo and wood chips holding up the walls. The wall of a *tulou* is usually one metre thick at the base and thinning as it rises to the roof, thus saving on materials and ensuring its survival in stormy weather and earthquakes. The earliest extant earthen building was constructed during the Tang dynasty in the eighth century, but most were built from the late 17th century and well into the 20th century. According to the latest research, the Hakkas were not the first to build these *tulou* structures, but are likely to have been influenced by earlier inhabitants.

Because they were the latecomers, the Hakkas settled in the less desirable tracts of land in these mountainous regions and constructed communal, fortress-like buildings to prevent attacks from bandits, enemies or wild animals. They typically had only one main door and no windows at ground level, to make them easily defensible. Because of stockpiles of grain, an internal source of water and often also a sophisticated sewerage system, the Hakka *tulou* could withstand a prolonged siege.



A neat stack of firewood

Each floor of the *tulou* has a different purpose: the first floor is where the livestock and other animals are kept; the second floor is reserved for food storage and the third and fourth floors are the living quarters. Central courtyards let in light and air and contain the communal ancestral shrine, wells, lavatories, granaries, vegetable gardens and animal pens.

The diameter of a small *tulou* is about 50 metres and can accommodate 30-40 families. The round *tulou* has two or three storeys built in a single ring. Medium-sized dwellings

have three or four storeys with a larger inner space and double rings. Bigger *tulou* have diameters up to 80 metres and can hold some 700 to 800 people. These larger ones are built in three concentric rings.

There can be up to 250 uniform-sized rooms in a *tulou*. A typical room size is about 10 to 13 square metres and each family has three or four rooms in a vertical segment. Typically, these buildings have at least two staircases with four for public use. In the past, each *tulou* was run like a village where they could be cut off from the rest of the world and often housed members of the same clan. Each *tulou* was named and its name chosen in the usual Chinese manner from clan histories or to commemorate one's ancestors. These names would further reflect good wishes or blessings to be bestowed on those residing within its walls.

In July 2008, the Fujian *Tulou*, which comprises 46 properties in Yongding, Nanjing and Hua'an counties, in a unanimous vote, were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List at its 32nd World Heritage Convention, held in Quebec. According to UNESCO's documentation, "the Fujian *Tulou* are the most representative and best-preserved examples of the *tulou* of the mountainous regions of southeastern China... The elaborate compartmentalised interiors, some with highly decorated surfaces, met both their communities' physical and spiritual needs and reflect in an extraordinary way the development of a sophisticated society in a remote and potentially hostile environment. The relationship of the massive buildings to their landscape embodies both Feng Shui principles and ideas of landscape beauty and harmony."

While the *tulou* were originally created for large, bustling Hakka clan communities, today's *tulou* reflect China's current demographics. When tourists visit these remote *tulou* sites, they encounter sparse communities consisting of the very old and the very young. The younger generation tend to look for work in urban centres and leave the countryside behind in search of better economic opportunities. These *tulou* do come alive again during the hustle and bustle of festivals such as Chinese New Year when everyone in China returns to his/her ancestral home to honour their ancestors. Having UNESCO World Heritage status will ensure that others will see for themselves the Hakka people's cultural legacy in architectural form.

Anne H Perng, a Taiwanese-American, is a proud member of the Hakka diaspora and was delighted to see the Fujian *tulou* for a second time recently. She currently guides at the Asian Civilisations Museum and the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall.

Photos by the author

Amoy and Singapore – Two Cities Linked by History

By Liz Gielewski

At the back of the Trade Gallery in the ACM are two much-overlooked trade paintings showing Amoy, or Xiamen. If we look at them both we can see many similarities. For example, the number and types of ships are almost identical. Paintings such as these were popular in the mid-19th century and would have been painted as souvenirs for Western merchants to take home as mementos of their time in China. The style of the paintings shows us that the unknown Chinese artist knew about Western landscape styles.

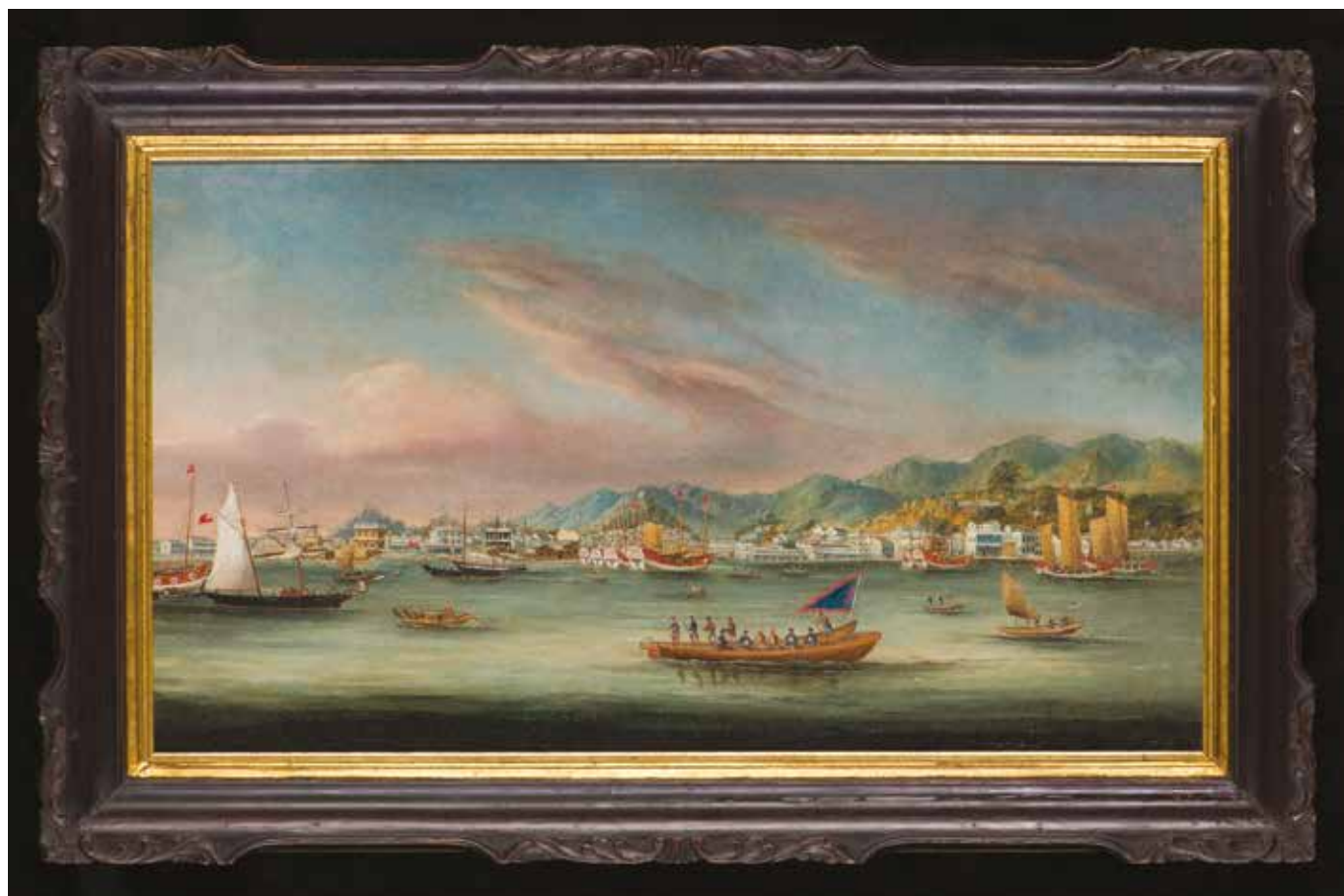
In the early 18th century, a Frenchman called Pierre du Halde wrote that, “This is a famous Sea-Port, call’d Emouy from the Name of the Island which forms it, for it is properly a Place for Ships to ride at Anchor, and one of the best Harbours in the World: ... it can contain many thousands of Vessels, and the Sea there is so deep, that the largest Ships may come up close to the Shore, and ride there in perfect safety”

If we look at the oblong painting in more detail, we can see the waterfront at Amoy from the island of Gulangyu. Amoy itself is also an island. The harbour is full of Chinese junks and the two ships on the left are flying British East India Company flags. Another boat in the foreground is transporting what are probably Chinese merchants and there are French, Dutch and British flags flying outside the trading houses.

After their defeat in the First Opium War, in 1842 the Chinese were forced to sign the Treaty of Nanjing. One of the concessions listed in this treaty was that the Chinese would open up five ports where the British could both trade and live. Until the First Opium War, Canton or Guangzhou had been the only trading port open to Westerners. These five ports were called Treaty Ports and Amoy was one of them.

Much of China’s tea and porcelain was shipped to Europe via Amoy and the swift arrival of foreign traders transformed the island of Gulangyu into an international settlement. In 1845, the first shipment of Chinese labourers set sail from Amoy for the Isle of Bourbon, a French island east of Madagascar, and this marked the beginning of a Western-sponsored coolie trade.

However, before Amoy became a Treaty Port it was an important port for both intra-China trade as well as trade with the Nanyang (Southeast Asia) especially places like Bantam in Java, Siam (Thailand) and Luzon (Philippines). In 1650, Amoy’s success as an entrepôt led to it being called a “treasure island” and during Qing rule, coastal shipping from Amoy to other coastal regions grew. Rice and sugar from Taiwan were important commodities. Sugar would arrive in Amoy for transshipment to the northern provinces. Ships from Taiwan would also bring goods such as sweet potatoes, indigo, beans and venison.



The waterfront at Amoy, from the island of Gulangyu



Amoy's busy harbour, filled with junks and many other ships

Trade with the Nanyang would bring commodities such as sappan wood, pepper, lead, tin, ivory and sea cucumbers.

So how is Amoy connected to Singapore? Well in quite a few ways. Amoy was the ancestral home of Tan Kah Kee who was known as the Pineapple King and the Henry Ford of Singapore. Tan Kah Kee came to Singapore in 1890 to work in his father's rice shop. Although he lived frugally, he was a generous benefactor to local Chinese schools both in Singapore and his native village near Amoy. In 1921 he founded the Amoy University which he financed almost single-handedly for 16 years until it was taken over by the Nationalist Chinese Government.

Another famous Singaporean, Lim Boon Keng, went over to Amoy to be the first president of Amoy University (today's Xiamen University) in China in June 1921. There is even a record of the first junk from Amoy arriving in Singapore at the beginning of the monsoon season in 1821. Amoy Street in Chinatown was developed in the 1830s as part of Raffles' plan for Chinatown. At that time there were many Hokkien migrants living there and Amoy Street's location near the shoreline meant that it was full of businesses that catered for sailors and the sea trade. The street was also associated with opium-smoking dens.

And then there were the Great Riots of 1854 in Singapore, considered to be among the most severe outbreaks of violent conflict within the Chinese community in 19th century Singapore. At the time, unemployment was high because of a decline in gambier production. This, together with a rice shortage, was causing hardship in the Teochew migrant community. At the same time, a large number of Chinese immigrants had fled from Amoy to Singapore in 1853. Many of them were from the Xiao Dao Hui (Short Dagger Sect) and had taken part in a failed rebellion against the Qing imperial government. So when the local Hokkien community refused to support a subscription fund designed to help the escaped rebels – many of whom were Teochew, tensions between the two communities increased even further.

On 5 May 1854, an argument between a Teochew customer and a Hokkien shopkeeper about the price of rice broke out.

Onlookers took sides and before long, the two communities were fighting in the streets. This quickly escalated into full-blown riots with shops being smashed and looted. There were reports of terrible atrocities such as the impaling and mutilation of men. The riots lasted for at least 10 days and up to 400 Chinese were killed. The political refugees from Amoy were blamed by many for the outbreak of violence as they were said to be more used to violent conflict than the Chinese immigrants who had settled in Singapore.

As soon as the riots began, Police Superintendent Thomas Dunman asked Governor Butterworth for reinforcements, but Butterworth was reluctant to intervene as he felt it was an internal disturbance within the Chinese community. However, he eventually decided that he would go to the troubled areas and take a look for himself. It was only when he was attacked by a mob that he allowed sailors from the British man-of-war ships docked in the harbour to come to Dunman's rescue. The Temenggong of Johor was also asked for help and he sent 200 Malay soldiers. But none of these measures helped. Finally, Dunman ordered some of his troops to be transported by steamer to the corners of the island and then to march inland towards the town areas. This strategy took many of the rioters by surprise and 10 days later, the police were once again in control.

Although 500 people were arrested, only about half of them could be identified in order to stand trial. Six men were sentenced to death and two were eventually executed, but records of the incident also show that 30 junks containing the unwelcome immigrants sailed away for China. I wonder what sort of homecoming they received?

Liz Gielewski is a docent at both NMS and ACM and enjoys finding links between artefacts exhibited in both museums.

Photos courtesy of the Asian Civilisations Museum, National Heritage Board

My Grandfather, the Prince of Tin

By Carolyn Pottinger

Around 1883, aged 20, my maternal grandfather, Charles George Ogilvie, left his home in north-eastern Scotland to make his way to British Malaya. By then he had already worked on a sugar plantation in the West Indies, having found passage by banana boat with two friends from Aberdeen Grammar School when they were only 17 years old. Clearly driven to explore the opportunities that the British Empire then offered a young man, it is impossible to imagine the hopes and aspirations that Charles experienced during his sea crossing to Malaya, but if he set out with the intention of making his fortune, he was to prove remarkably successful. This is a glimpse of his extraordinary story.

The Kinta district of Perak (north of Kuala Lumpur) had known tin-mining for centuries, but the industry had suffered during the Perak War of 1875-76. It was also the case that some of the areas richest in tin were inaccessible except by river. Ho Tak Ming, in his excellent book *Ipoh: When Tin was King*, tells us that the short distance between Taiping, the administrative capital of Perak, and Kinta, today an hour on the motorway, then took a journey of around two weeks to complete, involving a trek to Port Weld, a steamship to Penang, another to Durian Sebatang and a boat ride up the Perak and Kinta Rivers.

However, industrial advances in more developed parts of the world brought fresh impetus to the search for newer and more productive sources, and the rich alluvial deposits of Kinta proved an effective lure. As the



The Ipoh Cup, Kinta Races, 1894



Charles with a baby orangutan

1880's got underway, miners began arriving in their droves and Ipoh, until then a small *kampong* consisting of riverine *atap* huts, began the start of an extraordinary transformation as it grew to become the beating heart of the Kinta tin industry. Before too long the world's most productive tin mines were to be found there.

Charles first took up employment as an Inspector of Mines, but he was a natural speculator, an entrepreneur at heart, and soon he had no financial need to continue his government work. Not long after his arrival, Charles invested in a mining concession outside Ipoh. He had hit upon what was later to be described as the "deepest and richest mine in the Peninsula" (*Kinta Monthly Report 1889*). The success it brought him earned him the sobriquet "the Tin Prince" and in a poem titled *The Kinta Alphabet* and published in the Taiping paper, the *Perak Pioneer*, in 1895, one line read: "O is for Ogilvie, the *Sorakai** Millionaire".

If chance had played any part in his choice of concession, it appears to be through good management that he made it successful. European miners, greatly outnumbered by Chinese, often failed to make their mines productive. While it was easier for Europeans to acquire the land, keeping down the labour costs (Chinese coolies) proved more challenging. It was noted that those Europeans who learned to combine European with Chinese systems of actually working the mines – and Charles' name was specifically mentioned in this context – were far more successful than those employing European methods alone. His admiration for Chinese mining methods was described in a letter to which he was signatory (1901), complimenting not the 'Prince', but the 'King of Tin', the *Towkay* Foo Choo Choon, on the running of his mine.

He may have found success, but life cannot always have been easy. The rapid growth of Ipoh gave rise to problems with transport, sanitation and violence. Sickness in tropical climes was always a threat, and there is a report in *The*

Straits Times (1902) of Charles experiencing a bad fever, but it is followed by another referring to him looking much better for his "change at sea". Going to sea to recover from illness was certainly practised at the time Raffles was living in Southeast Asia, perhaps this too was a sea trip purely for medicinal purposes.

On the more positive side, there is much evidence of Charles' social and sporting life. In 1898 he was elected president of the recently formed Ipoh Club. He played cricket and for years this was enjoyed on a rough piece of land beside the police barracks where, it is recorded, their bar consisted of a bottle of whisky and a goblet of water kept under the staircase of the barracks. In 1897, although a major recession in the tin industry was underway, Charles organised a committee comprising seven Europeans, four Malays and four Chinese to raise money to buy land for a recreational area in Ipoh. The move was intended to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, but must also have been welcomed by the sportsmen. He went on to captain the cricket team.

In 1903 the Ipoh Golf Club and the Ipoh Gymkhana Club both came into being. Charles was a director of the former, and an active participant in the latter, as a race horse owner, a presenter of prizes, and when he fell off his pony, Flea, and broke his collarbone while riding the course.

The tin recession was a stimulus for diversification and the first direction that some of the miners, including Charles, turned was towards coffee. A collapse in international coffee prices, combined with the invasion of a pesky caterpillar, brought these ventures to an end as fast as they had begun, and this was when investors turned to rubber. The rubber tree (indigenous to Brazil) had only arrived in the area in 1877 when a number of seedlings were successfully grown in the Botanic Gardens in Singapore. The Malayan climate



Brenda Traill Skae Ogilvie, my grandmother



Charles dressed for his wedding to my grandmother

and soil were ideal for the trees. At the same time as coffee proved a poor investment, burgeoning international demand was pushing rubber prices up, and Charles, among others, decided to invest. He named one of his plantations Strathisla, for his home in Scotland. Ironically if you do a google search today for Strathisla, all you will find in Malaysia now is a Tamil language school by that name.

Charles married his first wife, Jean Littlejohn George, in Ipoh in 1890, and they had one son. When Charles' brother Thomas died, Charles had schooled and then provided work for four of Thomas's

sons in his Malayan businesses. The stories of this next generation are both fascinating and in some cases tragic. Their son, Chaelis, died in a car crash in 1936; two nephews received Orders of the British Empire for services to the tin industry and to game conservancy; at least one was enrolled in the Malay State Volunteer Rifles during WWI; they were prisoners of the Japanese during WWII and one had the extreme misfortune of being among the first Europeans murdered by terrorists in the Malayan Emergency of 1948. Jean died in 1910, and Charles married my grandmother in 1911. She came out to visit once, when it was recorded that she was fascinated by the beautiful country and the delightful Malay people. This seems to have been the end of his time in Malaya, though the business interests continued.

When Charles planted coffee he also grew coconuts. As my paternal grandfather was a planter in Jamaica, where he grew both bananas and coconuts, I have to wonder if the spark that lit the relationship between my parents when they first met after WWII was the discovery that both of their fathers were coconut farmers. My family's interests in Jamaica continued into the 1970s, and I share one of life's more unusual experiences with Charles Ogilvie – as a young child, I too travelled to the West Indies on a banana boat. I have been living in Singapore for five years now, but my personal connections with tin, coffee, coconuts, bananas and rubber have faded with the dying embers of Empire.

**Sorakai is the name of a gourd, which presumably grew in the area of Charles' tin mine*



The Royal Ipoh Club, 2017, from across the Padang

Carolyn Pottinger's interest in her grandfather's history was inspired by her move to Singapore, where she guides with FOM at the ACM as well as at the former Ford Factory. She also runs the lecture series, *Fridays with Friends*.

All photos courtesy of the author

Explore Singapore!

To join an ES! event, please go to the FOM website to register on line or register at the ES! table at any Monday Morning Lecture.

The Joy and Fun of Gamelan – a Workshop

Thursday 18 January
10:00 am – 12:30 pm
Fee: \$25

In the Performing Arts Gallery on the third floor of the Asian Civilisations Museum is an impressive set of authentic Javanese gamelan orchestral instruments. Have you ever wondered how these instruments are played and what they sound like? Here is a unique opportunity for you to find out. In this workshop, you will get to play on them – yes – the actual museum artefacts.

In the process, you will learn about the gamelan's history, traditions and related cultural activities such as *wayang kulit* (Indonesian shadow puppetry) as well as Javanese dance. You will also find out that the Javanese gamelan is different from the Balinese one. Our instructors will open your eyes and ears to the delights of gamelan music and teach you to play at least two traditional gamelan songs. After this workshop, the sound of gamelan music will never be the same for you.



Visit to Parliament House

Thursday 25 January
10:30 am – 12:00 noon
Fee: \$25

Singapore's Parliament House sits impressively next to the river with its formal gardens adding a touch of green to its exterior. Unlike the late Victorian style of its predecessor, the old Parliament House (now the Arts House), the present one was designed "to represent a contemporary architectural expression of stateliness and authority" whilst still using accentuated columns reflective of the colonnade design of classical architecture to blend in with its historical surroundings. The prism-shaped top was similarly a modernist take on the traditional dome.

What is it like inside? And how does the parliament of Singapore function? Join us on a private guided tour of the building to see its different areas – it was designed not only as a venue for parliamentary debates, but also a research centre and meeting place for the members of parliament (MPs), as well as a place of interest for students and the general public. You will also learn about Singapore's unique parliamentary system, the different categories of MPs and the roles of officers in the system.



Chinese New Year Walk in Chinatown

Thursday 1 February
10:00 am – 12:00 noon
Fee: \$30

Chinese New Year is the most widely celebrated festival in Singapore and is the most important one for Chinese people all over the world. Although you will see prominent and plentiful signs (dominated by the colour red) advertising the approaching festival throughout Singapore, Chinatown

is still the traditional centre for festival shopping. During this period, immersion in Singapore's multi-racial culture is not complete without an experience of Chinatown when the area turns into a lively and colourful hub, with shops and extra stalls abundantly stocked with special goods.

This exciting walking tour of the area will enlighten you about the numerous customs associated with Chinese New Year. You will also learn about the importance and symbolic meanings of the decorations, special foods and culinary delicacies, and have an opportunity to taste some of them.



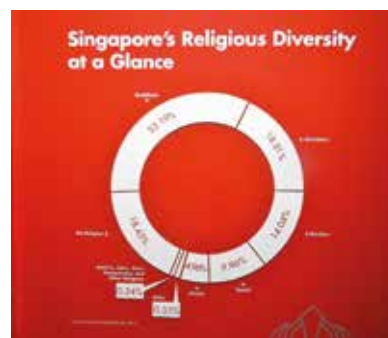
Harmony in Diversity, Gallery and Walking Tour

Thursday 22 February
10:00 am – 12:00 noon
Fee: \$25

Did you know that 10 major religions are represented in Singapore today?

The four galleries of exhibits and artefacts in the Harmony in Diversity Gallery explain these religions and aim to promote an appreciation of Singapore's rich religious diversity. Come with Explore Singapore! to listen to our special guide who will talk about the threads of commonality that are woven throughout these different religions, but also about historical inter-religious conflicts not only around the world, but also in Singapore's own past.

We will then be taken on a walking tour along the streets of Chinatown to discover religious buildings and the sites of various conflicts in the early days of Singapore's history. You will come away with an appreciation of the unique tapestry of faiths that exist in harmony within this small island.



URA/FOM Walks



URA/FOM Heritage Walks

These walking tours are conducted for the URA by FOM docents around the four precincts of Chinatown. They are two hours long and start from the URA building in Maxwell Road. Registration is required and can be found on the eventbrite site www.eventbrite.sg/o/urban-redevelopment-authority-7497466443. Please note that registration is open only one week before the tour.

Tours in January and February are as follows:

Friday 19 January: Kreta Ayer
 Saturday 20 January: Telok Ayer
 Friday 26 January: Bukit Pasoh
 Saturday 27 January: Tanjong Pagar

Friday 9 February: Bukit Pasoh
 Saturday 10 February: Telok Ayer
 Friday 23 February: Telok Ayer
 Saturday 24 February: Kreta Ayer





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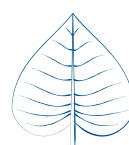
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Island Notes

Chinese New Year

By Daryl Furlong



Chinese New Year or Spring Festival is the most important holiday in the Chinese calendar, commemorating deities and ancestors. Relatives exchange gifts and organise huge 'reunion dinners' on the eve of Chinese New Year, to honour the closeness of family ties. Chinatown, the heart of Chinese identity in Singapore, will be decked with traditional lanterns, lending a festive air to the occasion. The Chingay parade, held at this time, is a colourful display of floats, dancing dragons and stilt walkers. Additionally, lion dances are performed at most establishments to mimic movements of a lion and usher in good tidings of the New Year.



Daryl Furlong is an avid history and mythology buff. She enjoys living in the Katong district and exploring Peranakan culture.

Dragon dance photo by Andra Leo



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History of Western Art III:

Art on Cutting Edge - Art from 1970s to the Present (13 Mar – 24 Apr)

Southeast Asian Modern and Contemporary Art: An Introduction (5 – 26 Jun)

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Textile Enthusiasts Group



Photo courtesy of the Heritage Conservation Centre

Programme: Special Tour of the Heritage Conservation Centre - Part II

Date: Friday 26 January

Time: TBA

Location: 32 Jurong Port Road, Singapore 619104

RSVP: Email Naoko at mnaojp@hotmail.co.jp

We have a private tour scheduled at the Heritage Conservation Centre (HCC), where many of the museum artefacts are kept and conserved. HCC staff will be taking us around the crating room, photo studio, artefacts store and four conservation labs to see how textiles are handled and conserved.

Programme: Bound by Tradition: A brief history of the kimono and exploration of how the obi's rise to prominence has influenced how women dress.

Date: Friday 23 February

Time: Arrive at 10:00 am for 10:30 start

Speaker: Fiona Cole

Location: TBA

RSVP: Email Lynelle at lynellebarrett@gmail.com



Photo by Andra Leo

Join Fiona Cole, collector of Japanese textiles, as she explores how the kimono evolved from its roots as a Chinese-style robe. Learn the story of the once-simple and practical sash that evolved to become a brocade band as wide as four metres and an integral design element for any modern-day kimono ensemble.

Columns Features News Reviews Events Venues Services

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Photo © Felix Hug (Eyes on Asia)

Japanese Docents

The Japanese docents (JDs) started their training programme on 27 October 2017. 22 trainees joined this time and are currently doing their mentor tours. Here's a message from one of the trainees. Please join us in welcoming them to the FOM community.

My name is Rie Komoto. When I visited the museums in Singapore, I was interested to learn that Singapore is a major trading hub connecting Asia with Europe. Japanese porcelain is an interesting example. In Japan, Arita is very famous for making fine Imari porcelain, but I personally didn't know (or never thought about) its connection with the world until I visited the ACM. When exploring the Trade Gallery it was eye-opening for me to discover the historical background to how Imari became famous worldwide. That was when I was able to "connect the dots" as it were. This was one reason I joined the JDs. The other was that I am curious about this country. Singapore is a multi-cultural, modern, high-tech and urban city-state, but it has a long history as to how it became what it is today. How wonderful it will be to learn about this country and to share what we learn with visitors. It will help us all deepen our understanding



of Singapore and then I believe everyone will like this country even more.

I was surprised to find the massive amount of knowledge we need to cover, but we are all having fun learning new things and helping each other, with warm support from senior JDs. We are looking forward to welcoming our own guests in the near future.

Rie Komoto, Japanese docent trainee



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Study Group

Want to learn more about Asia in a friendly, relaxed way? Join our group. A study group consists of 10 to 16 members who meet weekly to improve their knowledge of a specific theme. Each week, we have two 40-minute presentations; each one researched and given by a member of the study group. Members choose their own topic within the theme.

The FOM Study Group provides a wonderful opportunity to meet and enjoy the diverse nationalities of FOM members. We usually have the meetings in our homes, taking turns to host. On occasion, we also enjoy a pot-luck lunch after the presentations.

Do not worry if your first language is not English; we are patient and appreciate the viewpoints of members from all over the world. We can also support you if you are new to making presentations and need some help with PowerPoint or Google slides.



Asian Empires: Tycoons, Dynasties, & Monarchies: Starting Wednesday 17 January

Asia Study Group is turning its focus on empires, whether historical or modern, political or commercial. Empire can be defined as 'an extensive sphere of activity controlled by one person or group.' As we explore this theme, we hope to learn about ancient empires that profoundly influenced this region (for example, the Ming dynasty, the Chola dynasty) as well as modern empires that are leaving their mark on Asia today (the Chaebols of South Korea, political families of India, Li Ka-Shing's business empire) etc.

Join us as we learn, laugh and indulge in great food.
A few possible topics (please feel free to develop your own):

Temple kingdoms: Exploring Southeast Asia through temple complexes

Royal families of Asia

Imperialism in Asia: Western empires confront Asian empires

The Sassoon family of Singapore: Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf and much more

The Mughal empire

Please see the FOM website for more information and a link to a much longer list of suggested topics.



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Monday Morning Lectures

All Monday Morning Lectures will be held at the Asian Civilisations Museum, 1 Empress Place. Please check the website for specific information regarding the starting time. Do come earlier to get a seat, meet and make new friends and find out about FOM's various activities. Please do note the change in venue and timing from the previous series.



15 January • The Mongols in Persia Speaker: Marina Thayil

The conquest and rule of the Mongols in West Asia lasted for barely a hundred years and yet, they were a tremendous cultural influence on the art and architecture of the

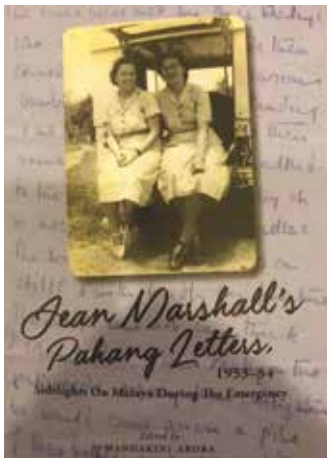
region especially with the conversion of the new rulers to Islam. This lecture looks at the decorative arts of the period and in particular, magnificent illuminated and illustrated manuscripts such as the *Jami al-Tavarikh* and the *Great Mongol Shahnama*.



22 January • 2018 is the Chinese Year of the Dog: Precious Pet or Dinner Dish? Speaker: Patricia Welch

It wasn't always a dog's life in ancient China. Come learn of the multiple roles and meanings of dogs

throughout Chinese history and art from early history to yesterday on the Shanghai Bund.



29 January • Finding History: Jean Marshall's Pahang Letters, 1953-54 Speaker: Mandakini Arora

Using a collection of letters, Mandakini Arora explores what history is; the value of microhistories, the intersection of individual and larger histories and the significance of these particular letters as historical fragments. Written from the Federation of Malaya by Jean Marshall

(then Jean Gray) to her parents in England, the letters were returned to their sender over 60 years after they were written.

When she wrote them, Jean was 27 years old and living away from England for the first time. She was posted for a year to Pahang in the Federation of Malaya, during the Malayan Emergency, as a field officer with the British Red Cross. Her weekly letters home share details of her daily life and work in Pahang, but leave out any incidents that might have alarmed her parents. What was a personal communication at an eventful time in Malaya's history, forms a primary source for the study of history at a 60-odd year remove.



5 February • The Visual Art of Old Burmese Silver – Buddhist and Ramayana Narratives Speaker: David Owens

Speaker: David Owens

Old Burmese silver is a unique and culturally important art form. The alluring work produced in the mid-19th to early 20th centuries is often embellished with exceptionally fine quality visual art featuring narratives from Buddhism and the *Ramayana*. This artwork typically adorns traditional silver offering bowls, treasure boxes and betel boxes. The popular narratives include the early life of Prince Siddhartha Gautama, Buddhist *Jatakas* from the Pali Canon and pivotal episodes from the *Ramayana* epic. The purpose of this visual art was to teach the central tenets of Buddhism and the philosophical elements of the allegorical *Ramayana* story. This presentation introduces a less well-known genre of southeast Asian visual art. The superb technical quality and artistry of old Burmese silver may be a surprise discovery.



12 February • Lancing Girls of a Happy World Speaker: Adeline Foo

Speaker: Adeline Foo

Join Adeline Foo in uncovering the fascinating lives of "lancing" girls or "dancing" cabaret girls in Singapore. Explore Singapore's

social history before WWII and find out how two dancing girls set up a school for the impoverished children of Geylang in 1946. This was a time of boxing matches and striptease performances when the big three 'Worlds' attracted crowds of up to 50,000 people. Recreating "a sense of place and time" of an era that brought the underbelly of society into the forefront of entertainment, this talk offers a candid sharing of the author's research and writing.

19 February • NO LECTURE (Chinese New Year)



26 February • Picasso's Women Speaker: Emily Johnston

Speaker: Emily Johnston

Since Picasso's work is so deeply biographical, perhaps the most revealing and fascinating way to study the extraordinary range of his *oeuvre*, is through his portrayal of women – as Goddesses, as hysterical beasts, as mothers and as objects of desire, amongst other things. Picasso's women were muses and integral to his work. This lecture will chart the link between Picasso's art and his *amours* from youth to old age.

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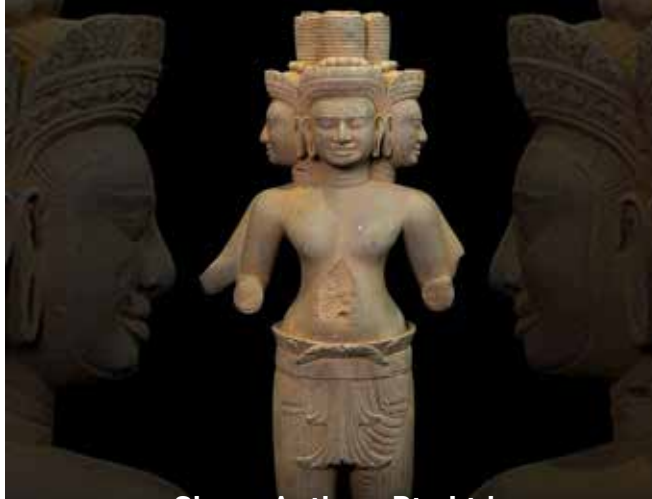


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Museum Information and Exhibitions

Asian Civilisations Museum

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

Opening hours:

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

FOM guided tours:

Mon to Fri 11:00 am and 2:00 pm, Fri 7:00 pm (English)
Tues to Fri 10:30 am and every second Saturday 1:30 pm (Japanese)

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. The new and refreshed permanent galleries are arranged along broad themes that highlight cross-cultural connections, rather than being segmented by geography or culture.

The ACM connects the cultures of Asia across two broad themes: trade and the exchange of ideas, and faith and belief. Beginning with the ninth century Tang shipwreck, the galleries explore Southeast Asia as a trading hub. Chinese porcelain, Southeast Asian ceramics, Indian textiles and furniture are showcased along with the Asian luxuries that were in demand in the global market. Asia was also a source as well as a crossroads of faith and belief and the ACM galleries display works of art showing the development of ancient Indian faiths and the spread of Hinduism and Buddhism across Asia. Christianity and Islam in Asia reveal the Asian origin and evolution of these global faiths.

Gillman Barracks

9 Lock Road, Singapore 108937
www.gillmanbarracks.com

A cluster of 11 contemporary art galleries and the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA), Gillman Barracks features an ever-changing selection of contemporary art exhibitions.

Opening hours: Tues to Sun – Refer to individual gallery pages online for opening hours
Closed Mondays & Public Holidays

FOM guided tours:

Sat 4:00 pm: Art & History Tour

Sat 5:00 pm: History and Heritage Tour

To register please visit www.fom-gillman-barracks.eventbrite.com

DISINI

(through September 2018)

A brand new site-specific festival of programmes, outdoor sculptures and murals by home-grown, regional and international artists at Gillman Barracks, celebrates the precinct's rich heritage as a former military barracks and its current role as Asia's leading contemporary arts cluster. Highlights include captivating outdoor artworks located across various spaces, a multi-functional artist-designed pavilion where a series of exciting and stimulating programmes will take place, and curatorial-led showcases to capture your attention.

Indian Heritage Centre

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

Open Tuesday to Sunday & public holidays. Closed on Mondays.

Tues to Thurs 10:00 am to 7:00 pm, Fri & Sat 10:00 am to 8:00 pm

Sundays & public holidays 10:00 am to 4:00 pm

FOM guided tours: Tues-Fri

11:00 am for the main galleries

2:00 pm for the special exhibition



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

Symbols and Scripts: The Language of Craft (through June 2018)

The exhibition showcases craft traditions from the Indian subcontinent in the context of Singapore's Indian communities. Traditionally, craftsmen have used signs, symbols, patterns and scripts in the decoration of handmade objects in the Indian subcontinent for thousands of years. This exhibition presents iconic examples of craft traditions representing the material culture of Indian communities through craft forms across diverse media. It also examines the role of these crafts as trade objects and underscores the trading networks between South and Southeast Asia.

Malay Heritage Centre

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

Opening hours:

Tues to Sun 10:00 am – 6:00 pm (last admission 5:30 pm), closed on Mondays

FOM guided tours: Tues to Fri 11:00 am;

Sat: 2:00 pm (Subject to availability. Please call ahead to confirm the availability of a docent).

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

Sirri na Pesse: Navigating Bugis Identities in Singapore (through 24 June 2018)

Sirri na Pesse, which loosely translates as 'Honour and Pride' in the Bugis language, features the history and development of the Malay-Bugis community in Singapore, many of whom can trace their roots through seminal historical developments in the Malay world during the 18th to 20th centuries. *Sirri na Pesse* is the fourth instalment in the *Se-Nusantara* (Of the Same Archipelago) series of exhibitions that rediscover the rich multi-ethnic heritage and culture of the Malay community in Singapore.

National Museum of Singapore

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

Opening hours:

Daily 10:00 am – 7:00 pm

FOM guided tours:

Mon to Fri 11:00 am and 2:00 pm (English)

Mon to Fri 10:30 am and every first Saturday 1:30 pm (Japanese)

The Singapore History Gallery

In celebration of 50 years of independence, this gallery has been refreshed with updated stories and content on Singapore's history, capturing the nation's defining moments, challenges and achievements from its earliest beginnings 700 years ago to the independent, modern city-state it is today.



Museum Information and Exhibitions

Desire and Danger

Discover the fine line between desire and danger at this stimulating new exhibition at the Goh Seng Choo Gallery. Featuring creatures that arouse appetites and instill fear, and exotic plants sought for their ability to induce pleasure or pain, this selection of drawings from the William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings explores the complex and sometimes uneasy relationship between man and nature.

NUS Museum, NUS Centre for the Arts

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



Free admission

Opening hours:

Tues to Sat 10:00 am – 6:00 pm, Closed on Sundays and Public Holidays,

Monday: Visits by appointment for schools/faculties only.

Ng Eng Teng: 1+1=1

Through the motifs of spacing and difference, this exhibition features works by the artist Ng Eng Teng produced between 1958 and 2001. The title of the exhibition takes as its point of reference a series of sculptures developed by the artist during the 1990s. While the series 1+1=1 has not been seen as characteristic of Ng Eng Teng's practice, here it is proposed as an alternative point of entry into the artist's body of works.

NUS Baba House

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

Now 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 tour, guests will be introduced to the history and architectural features of the house, and experience a visit to a Straits Chinese family home in a 1920s setting, furnished with heirlooms from its previous owners and other donors.

Visits by appointment only. Free-of-charge tours five times a week.
Email babahouse@nus.edu.sg to reserve spaces.

The Peranakan Museum

39 Armenian Street, Singapore 179941
Tel: 6332 7591
www.peranakanmuseum.sg



Opening hours:

Daily 10:00 am - 7:00 pm

Fri 10:00 am - 9:00 pm

FOM guided tours:

Mon to Fri 11:00 am and 2:00 pm (English), Tues to Fri 10:30 am (Japanese), every second Wednesday of the month 10:45 am (French).

This intimate museum possesses one of the finest and most comprehensive collections of Peranakan objects. Galleries on three floors illustrate the cultural traditions and the distinctive visual arts of the Peranakans.

Singapore Art Museum

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



Opening hours:

Daily 10:00 am – 7:00 pm, Fri 10:00 am – 9:00 pm

FOM guided tours:

Mon to Fri 11:00 am and 2:00 pm, Fri 7:00 pm (English), Tues to Fri 10:30 am (Japanese)

The Singapore Art Museum focuses on international contemporary art practices, specialising in Singapore and Southeast Asia. Housed in a restored 19th century mission school, it opened its doors in 1996 as the first art museum in Singapore. Also known as SAM, the museum is now a contemporary art museum.

SAM has built one of the world's most important public collections of Southeast Asian contemporary artworks, with a growing component in international contemporary art. SAM draws from its collection and collaborates with international contemporary art museums to co-curate and present contemporary art exhibitions

Cinerama: Art and the Moving Image in Southeast Asia (through March 2018)

Cinerama brings together 10 artists and collectives from across Southeast Asia who work through the medium of the moving image. Spanning hand-drawn animation to immersive video installations, the works explore the history of the genre, its current-day expressions, and potential for the future.

STPI

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



Opening hours:

Mon to Fri: 10:00 am – 7:00 pm, Sat:

9:00 am – 6:00 pm

Closed Sundays & Public Holidays

FOM guided tours: Tues and Thurs, 11:30 am, Sat 2:00 pm

Please refer to STPI's website at www.stpi.com.sg for STPI's public programmes.

Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall

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



Opening hours:

Tues to Sun 10:00 am - 5:00 pm, Closed

on Mondays

FOM guided tours: Tues to Fri 2:00 pm (English)

FOM Special exhibition guided tours: 10:30am on Fridays in English

Stitches of Love – Hidden Blessings in Children's Clothing and Accessories (through March 2018)

A collaboration between Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall and the Memorial Museum of Generalissimo Sun Yat-sen's Mansion in Guangzhou, this special exhibition showcases children's clothing and accessories from the late Qing to the early Republican period. It reviews the wide range of images rich in symbolic meanings that were employed to bestow good fortune, longevity, male progeny, health, wealth and career success. The collection on display includes clothing, hats, ear muffs, bibs and shoes that feature a variety of motifs derived from the natural world, history, literature and folklore.

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