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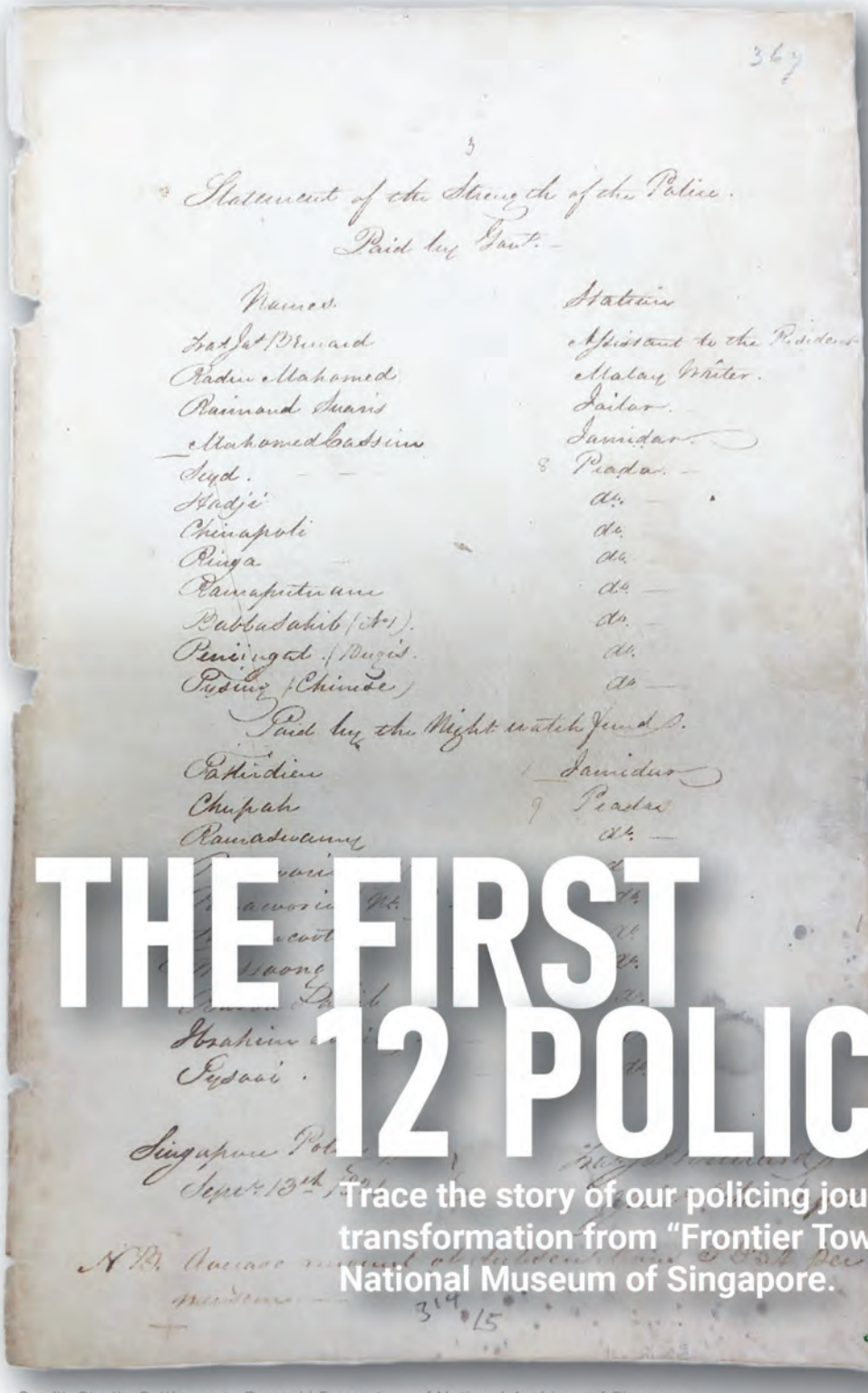

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FOREWORD

This issue concludes our four-part bicentennial commemorative series which focuses on the rich and diverse stories behind Singapore's place history. In this final commemorative edition, we take a look at how the effects of physical geography, human interactions as well as collective memories influenced the place histories of seven of Singapore's towns and precincts.

The arrival of the British in 1819 and their subsequent development of the island had a significant impact on Singapore and its numerous towns and precincts. However, this was not the start of the Singapore story, which extends centuries before the British arrived. In our articles on Seletar and Kembangan, we gain some insights into our pre-colonial history and learn more about early settlers of Singapore such as the Orang Laut, the Acehnese, the Boyanese and the Javanese.

With the arrival of the British in Singapore, the transformation of the island into a modern city brought about a scale of immigration that was previously unprecedented. This is evident in our article about the Singapore River, where we learn that large numbers of Chinese and Indian lightermen were brought into Singapore to help alleviate the rapidly-growing city's labour shortage.

However, the Singapore story did not end with the departure of the British. Singapore's strive for progress and strong desire to carve a niche in the world's stage guided much of the subsequent development of our towns. Buona Vista transformed from a place with "a good view" into a world-class research hub, while Tiong Bahru continued to renew and reinvent itself – as a cemetery, a modern public housing estate, and even a hip hangout.

Finally, we also play witness to how two towns successfully evolved beyond their former identities in response to social changes around them. In our feature on Bidadari, recreation, education and housing developments in the area have resulted in its evolution from a town associated with its namesake cemetery to an upcoming vibrant residential hub. Similarly, despite British-imposed racial segregation, Little India's strong multicultural character has endured and continues to flourish even till today.

We hope that you have enjoyed this four-part journey into the unique histories of 30 of our nation's towns and precincts, and that it has encouraged you to explore and discover the heritage behind Singapore's different towns and precincts.

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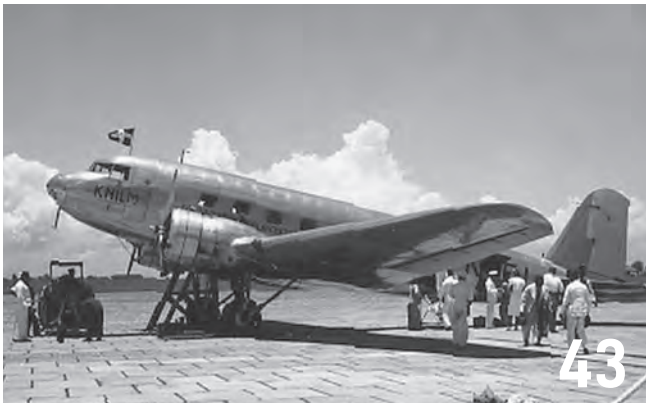

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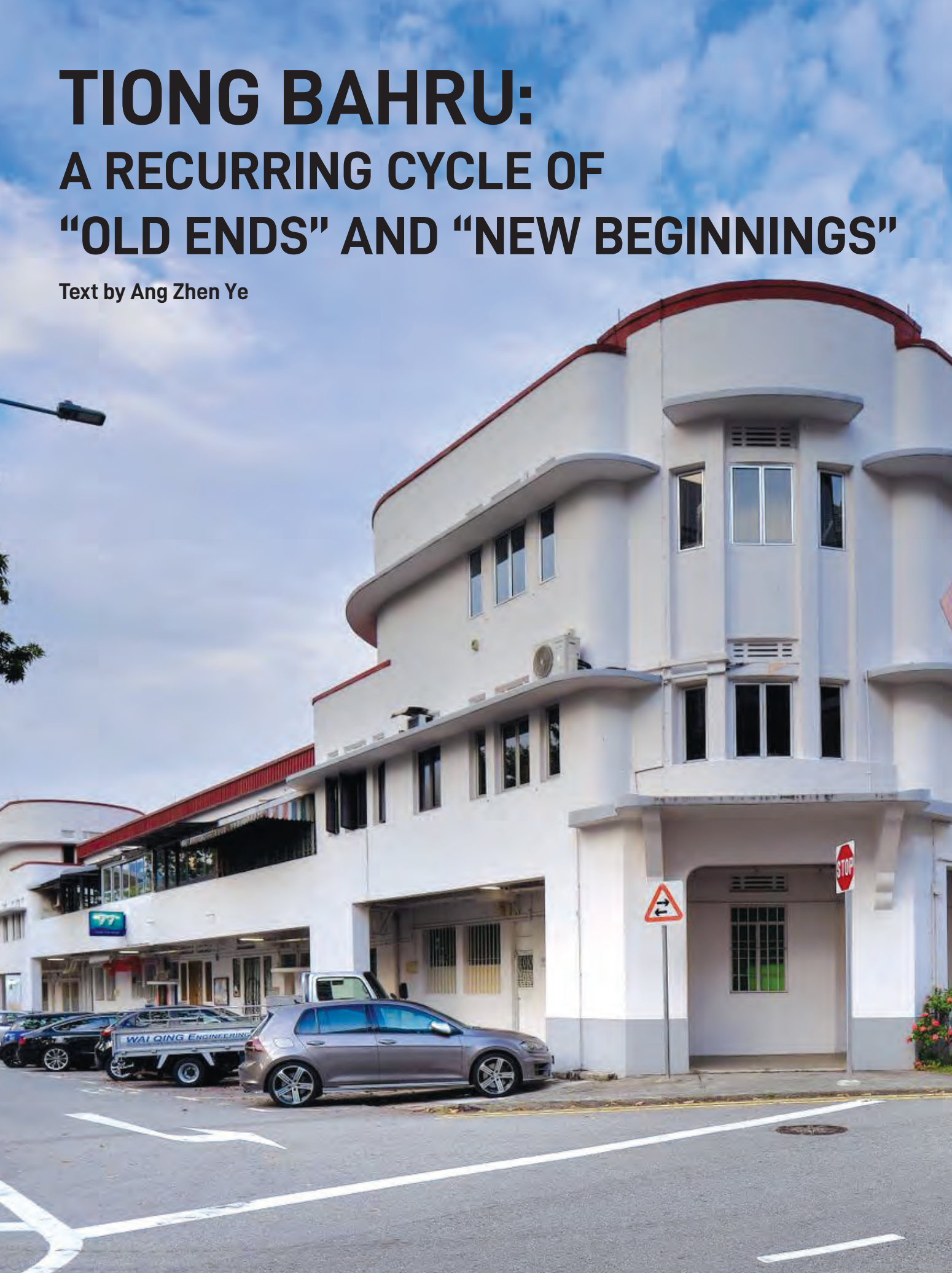
TIONG BAHRU:
A RECURRING CYCLE OF "OLD ENDS" AND "NEW BEGINNINGS"

Text by Ang Zhen Ye



01 Row of flats at Tiong Bahru, 2019
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

"A hipster town" – that is how most Singaporeans would describe Tiong Bahru today.[1] Traditionally known as a heartland community with a rich culture and heritage, hipsterfication has marked a new beginning in Tiong Bahru's history. Following the establishment of the first batch of modern cafes in the area in 2010, many other indie (independent) cafes and specialty stores started to take root in Tiong Bahru; injecting a new vibe and vitality into the old estate.[2] Yet, this hipster identity means more than a simple addition to – or even distinction from – the old Tiong Bahru. Rather, part of what it means to be a hipster location lies in its unique juxtaposition between the old and the new – a symbiotic amalgamation where a new flavour and identity is born through the old elements of the estate. Taken in this sense, the hipsterfication of Tiong Bahru is not an entirely new beginning of an old town – rather it represents a continuity from the past where "new beginnings" emerge out of "old ends". In many ways, the history and identity of Tiong Bahru is an explicit embodiment of this process. In tracing the historical developments of this town, this article hopes to capture the cyclical transformation from "old ends" to "new beginnings".

02 Map showing Tiong Bahru and Tiong Lama cemeteries (as highlighted in green and pink), 1883
Image courtesy of NUS Geography Department

03 Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) Tiong Bahru flats under construction, 1940
M Masson Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

04 Pre-war SIT flats designed in the Streamline Moderne style, 1952
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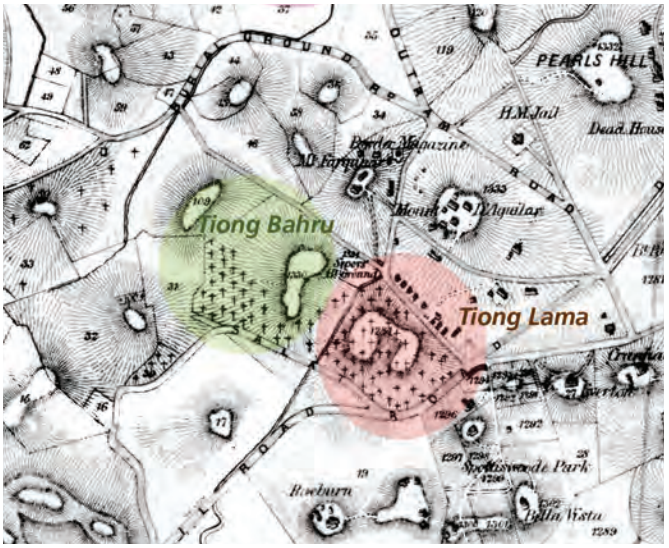

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Out of an "Old End", a "New End" Emerges

It is not clear when the use of the name "Tiong Bahru" was first standardised. Early reports suggested that the place was also known as "Tiang Bahru". With its first appearance in *The Straits Times* on 13 June 1863, the newspaper reported that Tan Kung, a grass cutter living in Tiang Bahru, was stabbed multiple times when he tried to stop three men from stealing his plantains.[3] Even in the early 1900s, reports on the area still retained the use of "Tiang Bahru".[4] The etymological roots of "Tiong Bahru", however, indicates that the present name was conceived in relation to an older location. "Tiong Bahru" is a combination of two words: "Tiong" (冢) – meaning grave in the Hokkien dialect – and "Bahru" – a Malay word for "new".[5] Local usage of "Tiong Bahru" was thus a reference to a new cemetery (an "end" for the dead) and a distinction from its older counterpart.

This older cemetery was called "Teong Lama" – literally meaning "Old Cemetery" – and was located at the present site of the Singapore General Hospital.[6] Established in 1828, the Hokkien cemetery and its Heng San Teng temple, a temple serving the cemetery and dedicated to Tua Pek Kong, became well-known by the 1840s. Writing in 1875, the Municipal Engineer WT Carrington reported that by 1859, the 29 acres at the old burial ground had been filled. Accordingly, a new burial ground called "Teong Baru" was "evidently made as an extension of Teong Lama" with "plenty of ground to spare for burials for the next ten years".[7]

The standardisation of "Tiong Bahru" as a name likely came after 1913, where the name first appeared as the location of a Chinese village on a map.[8] By 1924, the area increased in settlement and function – the Chinese village expanded into a community known as Kampong Tiong Bahru and much of the old and new cemetery were exhumed for the development of the General Hospital, Maternity Hospital, Lunatic Asylum and Medical College.[9] As with most expansions of early settlements, problems of sanitation and health followed. Moreover, Kampong Tiong Bahru's conditions and proximity to the General Hospital and Lunatic Asylum was a major cause of concern for the Municipal Authorities. To deal with this "Slum Problem", the colonial authorities proposed a Tiong Bahru Improvement Scheme in 1925 where the government would first purchase the area, clear the squatters and develop proper drainage systems, before selling the land to private developers.[10] This improvement scheme was approved in 1926.[11] As the Municipal Commissioners put it:

> Around Tiong Bahru Road, near the General Hospital, there is an area partly swampy, partly disused graveyard and hills, which is crowded with squatters' huts with hardly any permanent dwellings. This area is mosquito breeding, and the squatters' huts are generally most insanitary and undesirable near a hospital. It has been long recognised that the area would have to be cleaned up.[12]

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The task for this improvement scheme was left to the Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) which was established in 1927 under the auspices of the Municipal Commission. This transformation led by the SIT signified a new beginning for Tiong Bahru's living residents and the departure from an "old end" (Teong Lama) of cemeteries for the dead – marking the start of the modern town as we know it today.

A "New End" with Many "New Beginnings"

It took the SIT three years to acquire and develop the property in Tiong Bahru. By 1931, both the cemeteries in the area were exhumed, hills levelled, and roads, drains and culverts built according to the improvement plan. For five years after completion, however, the SIT failed to sell these sites to private developers as the economy was still recovering from the Great Depression.[13] Incidentally, it was through this period that the SIT began to recognise a need for public housing to mitigate against the problem of squatters and unsanitary conditions. As Lionel Langdon Williams, Manager of SIT, put it: "Bad food is dangerous to the health of the public. So is an insanitary house." For Williams, Tiong Bahru was an ideal test case for the development of a public housing estate. With this vision in mind, the SIT embarked on developing Tiong Bahru Estate into a housing estate to resettle residents cleared from the Chinatown squatters.[14]

While Tiong Bahru was not the SIT's first housing project, it was the first large scale public housing development of its kind – the precursor to Singapore's modern public housing estates.[15] From 1936 to 1941, the SIT built a total of 784 flats housed in two- and three-storey blocks, 54 tenements and 33 shops in Tiong Bahru.[16] More importantly, these were the uniquely designed pre-war flats that defined Tiong Bahru's architectural identity – and some, such as the aeroplane flats of Blocks 81 and 82 along Tiong Poh Road, are now conserved by the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Singapore (URA).[17] Designed by Alfred G. Church, the flats were fashioned in the Streamline Moderne style, a minimalistic architectural style hallmarked by simple and functional lines. This style was a late development of the Art Deco movement inspired by technology and the speed of modern travel in the industrial age, as the former President of the Singapore Heritage Society Dr Kevin Tan explained:

> Back then, if you were able to drive a car, take a plane or a cruise, you were on the cutting edge. As such, buildings here were designed to look like automobiles, trains, ocean liners and airplanes.[18]

However, while the new flats were a novelty, the high prices of the flats meant that the estate was not fully occupied. One of the first residents of the new estate was Linda Koh, who remembered that when she was around four years old, the neighbourhood had very little residents. Many flats were empty and she only had one or two neighbouring families to interact with.[19] Another resident, then 11-year-old Tan Mok Lee, recalled that the flats came with a toilet and rubbish chute, were well-painted, and even had "flowers all planted very nicely", but many were vacant as not many people could afford to stay.[20]

When war broke out in Europe in 1939, public members called for the government to build more air raid shelters. Responding to these calls, the

government incorporated a 1,500 square-metre air raid shelter into the largest block of Tiong Bahru flats at Moh Guan Terrace – making it the first ever public housing building to be built with the shelters as part of its design.[21] With a holding capacity of 1,600 people, the shelter was expected to be the refuge for the residents during the Second World War. Yet, according to residents Tan Mok Lee and Linda Koh, the shelter played a minimal role in the war. As Tan recalled, the Japanese bombs were rather weak against the concrete housing blocks: "…they got a bomb, but won't go through. Won't go through … If the bomb strike the house, it's alright."[22] Similarly, Koh recounted that only one bomb fell near her home at Moh Guan Terrace – and it merely created a "洞" ("dong", which is Mandarin for "hole"). Fortunately, considering how these flats were generally unoccupied, the bomb did not result in any deaths or injury. Koh, however, spent 30 minutes in the shelter once during a pre-war air raid evacuation. She described the shelter as "dark" and "poorly ventilated", despite the low turnout of about 100 occupants.

After World War II, Tiong Bahru estate emerged from the rubbles and experienced a new – albeit salacious – development, as seen through the demographic of its residents. Dubbed as the "Hollywood of Singapore", Linda Koh recounts that many of these flats were known as "Er Nai Chun" (二奶村, which means "Mistress Village" in Mandarin) or "Mei Ren Wo" (美人窝, which means "Den of Beauties" in Mandarin).[23] Not only did many wealthy Chinese businessmen house their mistresses there, many *pipa lui* (pipa girls) also lodged in these flats with their *ma jies* (caretakers). According to Koh, these pipa girls were hired by entertainment companies to work in dance cabarets such as the "World" amusement parks. Interestingly, Koh notes that these pipa girls were very "modern" – they took care of their nails, wore fitting qipaos and stylish one-piece sleepwear – and would often leave in the evening for their cabaret work at the Great World.[24] Indeed, together with the coming of this "new age", a new breed of Tiong Bahru residents had also been born.

The post-war period also saw many other meaningful "new beginnings" in Tiong Bahru. In 1948, a prominent member of the Tiong Bahru community, Lau Yew Hock, proposed the establishment of a community centre.[25] Tasked to "further the moral, cultural, physical and advancement of the residents", the community centre was commissioned and officially opened in 1951 – the first of its kind in Singapore.[26] Community centre activities included regular film screenings, weekend dances and indoor games – serving the interest of the residents till the

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05 Civilians inside what was believed to be the air raid shelter at Blk 8 Guan Chuan Street, 1941
Image courtesy of International War Museum

06 Cars belonging to tenants of SIT flats in Tiong Bahru, 1959
© Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reprinted with permission.

present day.[27] Tiong Bahru's community centre was subsequently emulated in other housing estates across Singapore. Two other new landmarks that defined Tiong Bahru was the Seng Poh Road Market and the singing birds corner. First completed in 1950 by hawkers themselves, the zinc-roofed Seng Poh Road Market offered a large variety of foodstuff and daily necessities, thus becoming Tiong Bahru's "chief selling point which draws customers from as far as River Valley, Bukit Timah and Katong who were attracted to the market's reputation for variety and freshness".[28] As journalist Lee Kok Wah described in 1985:

> The market reminds me of Hong Kong – hot, dirty and crammed with perspiring housewives firing away in rapid Cantonese to gesticulating stallholders. You can find anything and everything here, from umbrellas, towels and cute embroidered pyjamas for little girls, georgette blouses for women, to joss-sticks, fresh meat, fish, eggs, mountains of fresh fruit, watermelons in string bags, to dried and canned goods, and the freshest and most colourful selection of cut flowers I've ever seen in any Singapore market.[29]

Near the market lay Tiong Bahru's internationally renowned singing birds corner. After the war, a group of local men would hang their bird cages on a tree next to a coffee shop at Block 53. The corner became so popular that a Dutch journalist and avid bird lover came and wrote articles that appeared in several newspapers in the Netherlands.[30] According to Lee, the early riser catches the birds:

> By 7.30 a.m., unfold one of the formica-topped tables, pull up a stool under the shade of trees, and order strong black coffee which comes in an old-fashioned thick-rimmed cup. While you listen to the warblers in elaborate cages surrounded by their proud, beaming owners…[31]

Concluding Thoughts – The Cycles of "Old Ends" and "New Beginnings"

From the aforementioned post-war developments up until 2003, little change was made to Tiong Bahru, which had by then become a well-known "heartland" of Singapore.[32] Recognising the town's rich heritage,

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07 Guests at the opening of Tiong Bahru Community Centre, 1951
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08 The newly refurbished Tiong Bahru Market, 2019
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

09

09 Block of flats at Seng Poh Road with new shops and cafes, 2019
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

the URA decided in 2003 to conserve the old SIT flats of the Tiong Bahru Estate.[33] Incidentally, the singing birds corner was demolished the very same year due to redevelopment in the area and the market was closed for renovations a year later.[34] Although the two landmarks were reopened in 2008 and 2006 respectively, the "old flavours" were no longer quite the same and the number of patrons decreased. As Mildred Choo, a resident who lived in Tiong Bahru for six decades, remarked about the loss of the estate's old charm: "I've been here a long time and I feel like I can't keep up with the times."[35] Part of Choo's comment reflected the rapid transformation of Tiong Bahru into a hipster town: Since the entry of the first batch of cafes in 2010, many hipster cafes and stores flocked to the once "old estate" – bringing about an influx of younger people into the neighbourhood. Yet, more than just simply replacing and putting an "end" to the "old" elements, these new shops drew upon the "old" that hitherto defined Tiong Bahru to create a meaningful "new". For example, the cafe Forty Hands was attracted by Tiong Bahru's "rich and charming heritage"; the bistro Open Door Policy consciously "retained some of the designs of the previous place, such as preserving the green metal door, as well as using recycled vintage furniture… giving a very traditional feel to the place"; The Dispensary cafe also "maintained the old charm and ambience" of the old Chinese medical hall which it replaced.[36]

To conclude, the history of Tiong Bahru is about the cycles of "old ends", and "new beginnings". In the mid-1800s, a "New Grave" (Tiong Bahru) emerged out of an "Old Grave" (Tiong Lama). Both cemeteries were then exhumed and redeveloped – transforming the "end" place for the dead to many "new beginnings" for the living. Nonetheless, with the passage of time, these "new beginnings" gradually became a declining "old". And yet, once again, with the hipsterfication of Tiong Bahru, a "new beginning" of Tiong Bahru was born. Such cycles of rejuvenation will continue to shape and enrich the cultures, histories and identities that uniquely define Tiong Bahru.

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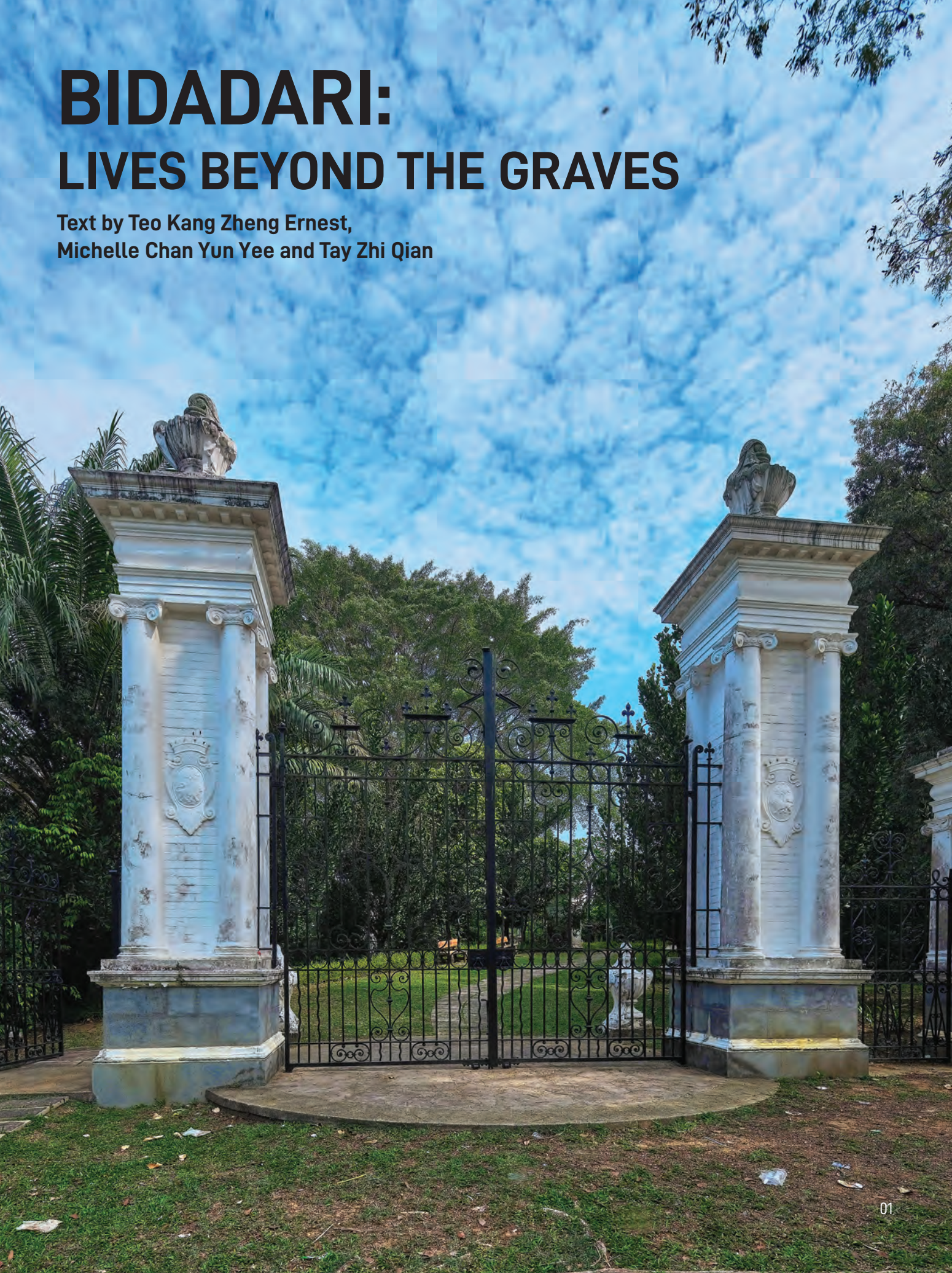
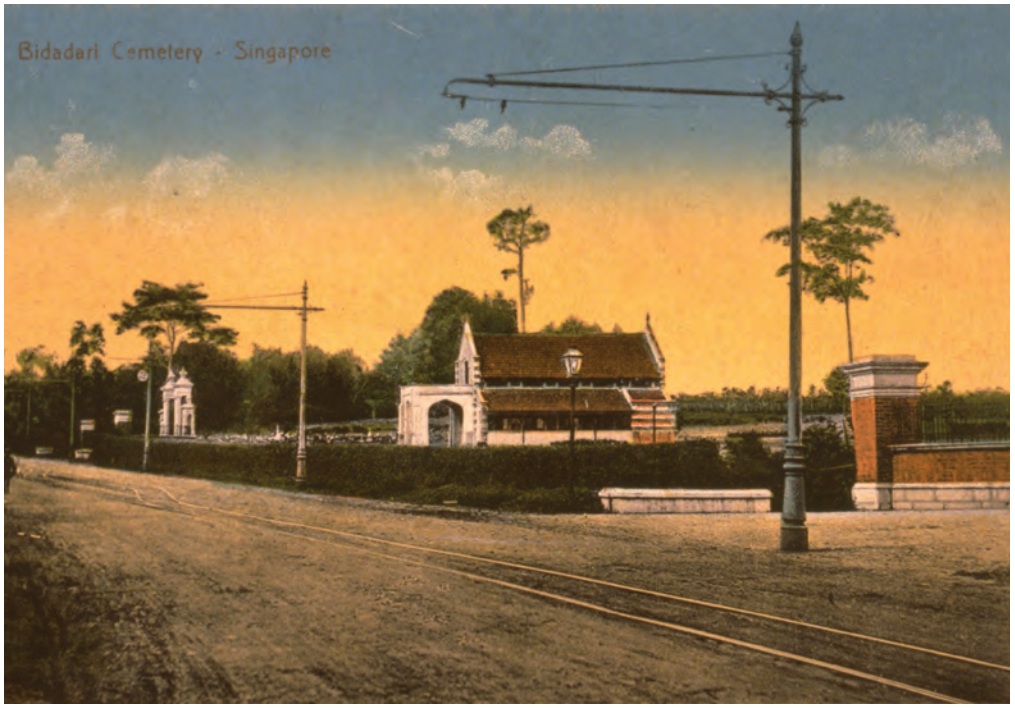
BIDADARI:
LIVES BEYOND THE GRAVES

**Text by Teo Kang Zheng Ernest,
Michelle Chan Yun Yee and Tay Zhi Qian**



01 Former gates to the Bidadari cemetery are now installed in the Bidadari Memorial Garden, 2019
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

02 Post card depicting Bidadari Cemetery. c. 1905-1910
Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



02

Cemetery. Graves. Death. These are terms often associated with the area called Bidadari. A *Straits Times* article published in 2013 noted that some Singaporeans remain unsettled with regards to Bidadari's cemetery past. The article claims that some even suggested changing Bidadari's name to dissociate the place from death for the purposes of development, considering that "there are a significant number of superstitious Singaporeans".[1] Despite this common association, the term "Bidadari" itself is a word with Sanskrit origins that means fairy, angel or nymph, and does not inherently make reference to death.[2] While the area is closely tied to notions of death, with the cemetery having served as a defining landmark, Bidadari's history too has many stories of life and living. This article explores the story of Bidadari beyond its well-known cemeteries, and into the generations of communities that have lived in the area.

Enter the Graves: The Bidadari Cemetery

Bidadari Cemetery, the source of Bidadari's close association with death, was undoubtedly a prominent feature of the area. Before the area was known as "Bidadari", it was part of the "Kalang" area in Congalton and Thomson's map of 1846.[3] The area that would come to be known as Bidadari was located at the lower half of a triangular plot of land, bounded by Upper Serangoon Road, MacPherson Road and Paya Lebar Road.[4] This large area was relatively undeveloped and uninhabited, partly due to the swampy terrain around Mount Vernon hill. It was, however, suitable for the creation of what would eventually be Singapore's largest Christian Cemetery in 1902.[5]

The development of Bidadari as a burial site was driven in part by sanitary concerns at the existing Christian burial site at Bukit Timah Road, whose low-lying topography made it susceptible to flooding and a public health hazard. Furthermore, complaints were also being received about "an intolerable smell [coming] from the newly-opened graves". As such, colonial authorities recommended "acquiring land out of town for the new Christian cemetery".[6]

Additionally, urban development needs made building the cemetery at Bidadari a favourable prospect. By the 1880s, colonial authorities realised there was a scarcity of suitable land for building. Much of the land at the fringes of the city centre, such as at Bidadari, were swampy, making it unsuitable for building.[7] In contrast, the level land at Bukit Timah was viewed favourably for building developments. Motivated by these considerations, the burial grounds at Bukit Timah were demolished while a new one was

established in Bidadari. In so doing, prime land at Bukit Timah could instead be used for future urban development. It was this culmination of factors that motivated the colonial authorities to build a Christian Cemetery in this large, swampy and undeveloped land that we know today as Bidadari.

In 1902, the Singapore Municipal Commission mooted the plan to establish a cemetery in Bidadari.[8] Construction for the Bidadari Christian Cemetery and Chapel then began in 1906 and the cemetery was completed in 1907. Subsequently, the Municipal Commission allocated burial grounds for the other racial and religious groups around the Bidadari Christian Cemetery. In 1904, the Muslim community requested for a burial ground to the Municipal Commisioner at Bidadari. This was followed in 1905 with an acquisition "from the Datu Mentri of Johore… a piece of land forming part of the Bidadari Estate at the price of $1,056.66 per acre".[9] The Mohamedan Cemetery was consecrated in September 1924, and in 1932, a $40,000 mosque was constructed in the vicinity.[10] Soon after, in 1925, Hindu and Sinhalaese burial grounds at Bidadari were also opened.[11] By 1972, the Bidadari Cemetery, which occupied 65.5 hectares of land at the foot of Mount Vernon hill, was the resting place for about 147,000 people.[12]

03

03 Christian burial grounds at Bidadari Cemetery, 1996
Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

04 View of Alkaff Gardens, 1930s
Soh Chuan Lam Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

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As with many other cemeteries, there were a number of horror stories that circulated about Bidadari. For instance, Awang bin Osman, a resident of Bidadari, recalls seeing a number of pontianaks (spirits who ate humans in Malay folklore) in Bidadari. The pontianaks he saw were female, had human features and long hair, "wore a sari … like the Benggali" and had "[legs that did] not touch the floor". He describes how he encountered three to four pontianaks while walking home one day with his companions. They then decided to approach the pontianaks as a group while reciting verses from the Quran, before running away as fast as they could upon escaping the pontianaks' territory.[13] The presence of such tales, coupled with its extensive use as a burial ground, is likely how Bidadari became synonymous with its cemetery function.

Households and Residences

While the Bidadari Cemetery was an important landmark of the area and a significant part of its history, it was not the only defining feature of Bidadari.

In fact, the very etymology of Bidadari and the beginning of its story all point to signs of life and living in the area since the mid-17th century, rather than death. Contrary to popular belief, the naming of the area "Bidadari" was actually acquired from a house of the same name rather than the cemetery. Owned by Henry Minchin Simons, the Bidadari house was built sometime between 1855 and 1861 (it is unknown when the house was first named).[14] The Bidadari house was then sold to the owner of the neighbouring plot of land, Sultan Abu Bakar of Johore, in the 1860s. By 1885, Sultan Abu Bakar relocated his family back to Johore and the house Bidadari was put up for rent.[15] Thereafter, records of the house were vague, but advertisements from 1897 suggest that D. Brandt, the Honorary Consul for the Austro-Hungarian Empire, took up residence in Bidadari.[16] By 1902, Brandt and his family had left Singapore and Bidadari was put up for lease again.[17] Eventually, the Bidadari house was demolished in 1915.[18]

However, the demolition of the Bidadari house did not signal the end of residential life in Bidadari. The presence of other residences for European settlers in a map from the 1860s shows that the area already had a growing residential population, with named houses and cottages dotting the area.[19] For instance, Woodsville house stood in a former sugar plantation in Bidadari, spreading across the Kallang stream. Robert Carr Woods, the editor of *The Straits Times* at the time, bought over the plantation and built the house called "Woodsville" after his name. Later in 1890, the house site was split into Woodsville and Woodside cottage, serving as residences for two lawyers, Edward Rowland Koek and Cecil Augustus Evans respectively.[20] Other houses in the area, namely Ayer Jerneh, Goldburn, Budleigh and Woodleigh houses also served as residences for British families.

The Alkaff Gardens

Beyond these residences, the major project that would inject life into the Bidadari area was the building of Alkaff Gardens. Syed Abdulrahman bin Shaikh Alkaff's family firm, Alkaff & Co, conceptualised "an attractively planned garden city of about one thousand buildings of shophouse, terrace house and bungalow types on the site".[21] The building of homes in the Alkaff Garden was "doing a very great deal towards solving the housing problem in Singapore".[22]

The Alkaff Gardens opened in 1929 and became a distinct recreational attraction in the Bidadari area. Its lush greenery, aesthetic infrastructure, and its suite of recreational activities made it a popular evening and week-end resort for visitors.[23] The large pond in the centre of the site was retained and converted into an ornamental lake with gardens surrounding it.[24] Replete with Japanese teahouses, sidewalks lined with granite chips, Japanese arches and bridges, the Alkaff Gardens boasted a tranquil environment for strolls that cleared the mind and calmed the heart.[25] This picturesque scene drew in visitors and made the garden a haunt for picnickers.[26] Writing an opinion piece to the newspaper, author "Lucky Moon" described her experience after visiting the Gardens:

> This picturesque retreat is run by Japanese [sic], and the setting is in Japanese style, showing beautiful landscape gardening at its best. Japanese food, and cold refreshments are obtainable.[27]

Later in 1935, a well-known Chinese merchant decided to add to the range of amenities available in the Gardens by building "a number of boat-houses

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05 An artist and her daughter at the Alkaff Gardens, 1930
Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

06 Boating at the Alkaff Lake Gardens, 1950s
Singapore Federation of Chinese Clans Associations Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

07 Houses in Sennett Estate, 1970
© Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reprinted with permission.

08 Minister for Foreign Affairs S Rajaratnam inspecting Willow Avenue Secondary School's NPCC guard of honour contingent, 1966
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

09 View of Willow Avenue Secondary School, 1966
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

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somewhat similar to those on the Pearl River in Canton". These boats could be rented from pavilions for activities such as boating and fishing.[28] In the following year, plans were even drafted to include a cinema and cabaret in Alkaff Gardens.[29]

However, the outbreak of WWII shattered the peace in Alkaff Gardens. As the headquarters of the Singapore Volunteer Field Ambulance Corps, Alkaff Gardens was shelled by the Japanese in an attempt to rout out the Volunteer Corps. The shelling inflicted extensive damage on the Gardens, destroying significant chunks of granite slabs, ornamental seats and buildings such that its "bare wooden skeletons retained traces of shell splinters". As "an idyllic spot for jaded city-workers to take a breather" before WWII, the Gardens became "a ghost of its former self", overgrown with "long grass, weeds, trailing branches" and "only a dirt road leading to the Gardens".[30] Even as picnic parties eventually resumed at the Gardens after the war, its general neglect attested to the lingering legacy of WWII.

In 1950, the Sennett Realty Co Ltd bought the Gardens from the Alkaff family, with the intention of building shops and houses meant for 10,000 persons. The impending destruction of Alkaff Gardens elicited protests from the public who wrote into *The Straits Times* asking for the government to step in to restore and retain it as an open green space for the public.[31] Even though the old lake in the Gardens was described as "a hole in the ground filled with rain water and breeding mosquitoes", many were still distressed about the possible destruction of the old lake.[32]

Hence, even as construction of Sennett Estate began in February 1951, Alkaff Gardens was left untouched, giving people more time to reminisce about the old days. It was only in 1964 that Alkaff Gardens, which had become an unkempt green space, was finally levelled to pave the way for other developments.[33]

Educational Institutions

In 1964, the Ministry of Education acquired the site where Alkaff Gardens was situated to build a new educational institution. This was in response to the "heavy demand for places in schools in the area".[34] The new school, Willow Avenue Secondary School, was part of an $18 million project by the government to "build 41 new primary and secondary academic and technical and vocational schools throughout the island".[35] Construction for Willow Avenue Secondary School campus began in May 1964 after Alkaff Gardens was levelled, and the old lake was filled up.[36] The opening of Willow Avenue Secondary School in July 1966 heralded the start of a new chapter of life for Alkaff Gardens and Bidadari. The school served students for 25 years before it closed in 1990 due to falling enrolment.[37]

A vibrant secondary school, Willow Avenue Secondary School boasted a wide array of Extra Curricular Activities (ECAs) with uniformed groups, and over 20 sports, societies and clubs.[38] The school's NPCC unit was particularly noteworthy, having won multiple competitions since its inception. These included the inter-unit Blades' Challenge Trophy in 1968 and the inter-unit Cheam Kim Seang Annual Revolver Shooting Competition in 1969.[39] Today, the

10 View of new HDB flats of Bidadari, 2019
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

memory of Willow Avenue Secondary School lives on in the form of Facebook community groups created by former students. Within these community groups, former students and teachers catch-up, reconnect after many years, and fondly reminisce about the past. In the group, former students also share photographs that they have kept over the years, depicting the different batches of students, as well as life in the school.[40]

Willow Avenue Secondary School was not the only school in the vicinity. Cedar Girls' Secondary School was established at Cedar Avenue in 1957.[41] The two schools shared a healthy neighbourhood rivalry in the form of yearly inter-school sports competitions as participants of the Serangoon District Tournaments.[42] After Willow Avenue Secondary School closed, its premises was taken over by Cedar Girls' Secondary School, where it remains to this day.

Conclusion: A New Chapter

As we've seen, Bidadari's history certainly encompasses more than just that of a burial site. Alkaff Gardens, the various residences in the area, Willow Avenue and Cedar Girls' school are all evidence that Bidadari contains far more stories of the living than the dead. Looking forward, the area may soon come to be associated with even more life and family, rather than death and burial grounds. In 2013, Bidadari was announced as the site of a new housing estate, envisioned to be a "Community in the Garden". Located near Singapore's city centre, these new projects have proven to be immensely popular, garnering a large number of applicants with each new release.[43] Exciting new estate projects in Bidadari reinvigorate life in the area by drawing on its lively history. This is seen in the referencing of Alkaff in the names of the Built-To-Order (BTO) projects, such as Alkaff Vista, Alkaff Lakeview and Alkaff Court View.[44] The plans for Bidadari aim to build a "tranquil urban oasis", reminiscent of the Alkaff Gardens that once adorned the area.[45] By providing a new generation of housing for Singaporeans, Bidadari will transcend beyond its past association with death and instead create new stories of life and living.

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11 Aerial view of Bidadari estate, 2013
Image courtesy of the Housing & Development Board

01 Panoramic view of Buona Vista with the MRT in the foreground, 2019
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

BUONA VISTA:
A VIEW BEYOND THE POLIS

Text by Lim Hui En, Isabel

02 A map showing the southern part of Singapore, which includes Buona Vista Village and Pasir Panjang at the end of Buona Vista Road, 1945
Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

03 Singapore Rubber Works Ltd. at Pasir Panjang, 1930
Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

04 Kampong houses on stilts at Pasir Panjang, 1950
Bukit Panjang Government School Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

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Introduction

"Buona Vista, to me, would be the industrialised area around the Buona Vista MRT [station]." This was the response of Magena Yeo when asked to define the locale. Having grown up in the era after the establishment of the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system, she, like many other Singaporeans today associate Buona Vista with the area immediately around its namesake MRT station. For her, this "industrialised area" also covers the sites of research and learning, such as the glass-lined buildings of Fusionopolis and Metropolis.[1] However, if one were to look beyond and into the history of Buona Vista, a very different view awaits.

Historically, maps of Singapore have defined Buona Vista as the area directly adjacent to the eponymously-named road, which stretches from Holland Road in the north to Pasir Panjang Road in the south. The christening of the road was first announced in 1900 in *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, whose editor opined that it "really presents the most beautiful view in the island".[2] *Boa vista* means "good view" in Portuguese and is a term normally used to describe scenic areas that abut the coastline.[3] The name as chosen by the Rural Board thus accurately reflected the beauty of the area, as described by *The Singapore Free Press* in 1899:

> [T]he new road from Holland Road to Pasir Panjang Road… winds through a rather pretty country, mostly devoted to pineapples, but undulating and cleared, giving some good views… The climb over the range is by good gradients, and the view from the gap at the top, over the outer western harbour, with the Carimons (now Great Karimun and Little Karimun) in the distance, is very fine.[4]

Origins and Communities of Buona Vista

These "good views" were enjoyed by the various communities that settled in the vicinity. From the turn of the century, the area was home to hundreds of Chinese squatters who planted vegetables and fruits such as pineapples.[5] Then in 1907, the wealthy merchant Tan Kim Seng acquired a land grant from the colonial government to establish an estate situated between Pasir Panjang, Pandan and Telok Blangah; Buona Vista Road was situated in the middle of this land grant.[6] Initially named Tan Kim Seng Estate, Tan's descendents renamed it to Pasir Panjang Rubber Plantation in 1910 and put the land under the management of the Kim Seng Land Company. Along

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05 The Gap was a scenic route that stretched from Kent Ridge to Pasir Panjang, early 20th century
Image courtesy of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

with this development, the Chinese farmers in the area were asked to grow rubber instead of fruits to contribute to the Pasir Panjang Rubber Plantation.[7]

The Malay and British presence was also felt in the area. At the shoreline close to the end of present day South Buona Vista Road, lay a kampong ("village" in Malay) known locally as Tanjong Mat, which was inhabited by Malay fishermen and farmers.[8] In 1930, the Rural Board renamed the kampong to Buona Vista Village.[9] Because of the area's hilly terrain, Buona Vista was also an ideal location for the British-led Singapore Volunteer (Artillery) Corps to conduct firing exercises during the early-20th century.[10] However, apart from the occasional military use, the area remained rural and underdeveloped.

Enjoyment and Leisure Before the War

Apart from the British military, other segments of the European community also patronised Buona Vista for its scenic spots. One popular place was known informally as the Gap at South Buona Vista Road, which essentially consists of a clearing through a dense range of hillocks that leads towards the coast.[11] In 1928, *The Straits Times* reported that the Gap offered "Singapore's favourite view of the sea".[12] Possibly, glowing assessments such as this prompted the Kim Seng Land Company in 1932 to build the Gap House, situated where the National University Hospital now stands, as a sightseeing destination and a leisure spot.[13] The house was opened to the public on 1 January 1935 and *The Singapore Free Press* reported that afternoon teas and parties were hosted there.

Newspaper advertisements even went on to boast that the Gap House "[commanded] a wonderful view of the sea, islets and glorious sunsets". No less notable were the performances held there, which included Monday night piano recitals by acclaimed Jewish pianist Werner Baer.[14] However, by the early 1940s, press reports on the Gap House began to diminish, and the last mention of the Gap House in local print media was in 1941.[15]

Beyond its stunning views, the long and winding road at the Gap also played host to a number of motorcycle and automobile races from the 1920s onwards.[16] These races were known as hill climbs, which were a nod to the area's hilly terrain. In 1927, the inaugural race was organised by the Singapore Volunteer Corps, with participating racers hailing from camps and military installations around the island.[17] Reported by *The Straits Times* as "Singapore's most popular motor sport event", it was announced that interested spectators could get seats to watch the spectacular event for only a dollar.[18]

Two other recreational areas – Pasir Panjang Park and Haw Par Villa were established along the Pasir Panjang coastline in 1933 and 1937 respectively. The latter was built by Aw Boon Haw as a gift for his brother Aw Boon Par.[19] Better known as the brothers behind the well-known Tiger Balm ointment, they opened the park to the public, as a way of cementing their social standing through public philanthropy. The park was filled with statues of mythological creatures and stories from ancient China, as the brothers wanted to showcase Chinese traditions and moral values to its visitors.[20] For many Chinese parents, these displays were a convenient medium for moral education and imparting of traditional Chinese values.[21] Additionally, patrons also frequented the park for picnics, its popular Haw Par Swimming Pool and its mini zoo of live animals.[22]

A short distance from Haw Par Villa stood Pasir Panjang Park, which was established by the Rural Board in 1933.[23] The park was built on the site of the former Beri-Beri Hospital, which operated from 1907 to 1925 to treat patients suffering from beriberi, a disease caused by a deficiency of Vitamin B1. Over time, Pasir Panjang Park became the favourite haunt for children in Buona Vista to engage in a variety of land and sea sports.[24] Clearly, people of all walks of life found sources of leisure at Buona Vista, with the Gap House and the Gap attracting upper class Europeans, and Haw Par Villa and Pasir Panjang Park, both of which still exist today, catering to the rural communities in Buona Vista.

The Japanese Occupation and Its Impact

Coming on the heels of the roaring thirties, Buona Vista's repute as a recreation site was negatively affected by the Japanese Occupation of Singapore from 1942 to 1945. Initially shut to the public by Japanese forces, Pasir Panjang Park remained closed even after the occupation had ended, with the British government citing that they "urgently needed the site".[25] Interestingly, however, this post-war episode demonstrated the park's popularity, particularly given that a strong outcry arose in the media for the park to be reopened. One member of the Rural Board was reported to have objected "very strongly [to] having to put up with them (the British Army) for another 18 months".[26] In 1954, it was announced that the park would finally be reopened again.[27] This was followed with another announcement by the Rural Board in 1956 of a $70,000 project to transform Pasir Panjang Park into a "rural seaside promenade".[28] By the 1960s, the park held band concerts, bird singing competitions and boat races to revitalise the leisure scene that the area had once been associated with.[29]

Not unlike Pasir Panjang Park, parts of Haw Par Villa were similarly destroyed during the bombing raids which accompanied the Japanese invasion.[30] At that time, the Aw Brothers fled overseas and Japanese forces took over the grounds of Haw Par Villa to monitor naval activity along the Singapore coast. After the war, Haw Par Villa began the process of rebuilding.[31] With the repair works, Aw Boon Haw also added statuaries such as the "10 Courts of Hell" and "Journey to the West" into the myriad of illustrations within the park. After Aw Boon Haw's death, his nephew Aw Cheng Chye continued to add new statuaries to the park, such as the "International Corners".[32] Through such efforts, Haw Par Villa was eventually able to regain its former popularity.

Races at the Gap also resumed after the war, starting in 1946 with motorcycle trials in preparation for an event called the "big Malaya Command". *The Singapore Free Press* reported that the trials comprised of "17

06 One of the earliest motor races held at the Gap, 1927
© *Singapore Sports Council*

07 A racer making the turn at the motor race held at the Gap, 1927
© *Singapore Sports Council*

08 Minister for culture and social affairs Othman Wok opens the bird singing contest at Pasir Panjang Park, 1966
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

09 Scene at Haw Par Villa during Chinese New Year and Hari Raya Puasa, 1965
Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

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hazards in all" to select the best racers.[33] Nevertheless, the frequency of motorcar races being reported in the newspapers gradually diminished over time for reasons unknown.[34]

After Singapore's Independence

After Singapore gained its independence, the government's emphasis on rapid urbanisation and modernisation indirectly affected the draw for many of Buona Vista's leisure sites. Pasir Panjang Park, for instance, which previously enjoyed an enviable spot in front of the ocean, was affected by land reclamation works in the 1970s to house new warehouses.[35] These warehouses were meant to provide berthing facilities for lighters and coastal vessels, which were increasingly important to Singapore as it developed into a regional trading hub.[36] As a result, a portion of the beach in front of the park was no longer accessible to the public. Similarly, by the 1970s, regular races at the Gap had diminished into once-a-year events by the Singapore Motor Sports Club that catered only to locals.[37] This was possibly due to the departure of the British army after Singapore was granted independence. The last reported race at the Gap was in 1986.[38]

In the name of urbanisation, Buona Vista was further being transformed into a modern hub with the introduction of new high-rise buildings, research and development facilities, office buildings and modes of transportation. By 1973, the Housing and Development Board's (HDB) new Ghim Moh Estate was in the process of being built; with flats that could accommodate about 20,000 people.[39] Buona Vista had also become more accessible with the opening of the Buona Vista MRT Station in 1988.[40] It is therefore unsurprising that Buona Vista gradually became defined as the area around the MRT station instead of the area around Buona Vista Road, since it was the more accessible of the two locations.

The increased accessibility of Buona Vista also paved the way for new amenities and working areas to be developed. For instance, in 1997, the Ministry of Education (MOE) Headquarters relocated from Kay Siang Road to Buona Vista, directly opposite the MRT

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station.[41] Additionally, Jurong Town Corporation (JTC) also announced plans to build a science hub at Buona Vista in 2000.[42] The area was rechristened "One-North" (from the previous "Science Hub") with reference to Singapore's unique location – one degree north of the Equator.[43]

Gradually, various polis-es, such as Fusionopolis, and Biopolis were established in Buona Vista, or more specifically, One-North.[44] The word "polis", which originally referred to a city-state in ancient Greece, alludes to an advanced level of civilisation – something that is echoed in the numerous research and development institutions found in Buona Vista. As more of such developments arrived, the perception of the area gradually evolved from a place of enjoyment and leisure into one of knowledge, research and innovation.

Nevertheless, there are also new elements of Buona Vista that tie back to its leisure roots. The Star Vista, which opened in 2012, is one such example. The building contains about 100 dining, retail and service outlets across three levels.[45] The Star Performing Arts Centre, "Singapore's first 5,000-seat performing arts theatre", is also located inside The Star Vista, and has played host to numerous performing artists from Harry Styles to Yiruma.[46]

Yet another example is the Mediacorp Campus, which relocated to One-North in 2015.[47] Home to one of Singapore's largest media companies, the campus also houses the MES Theatre at Mediacorp, which has played host to performers such as Eric Nam, a Korean-American singer, who held his first live concert in Singapore there in 2017.[48] It therefore seems that the legacy and heritage of Buona Vista as a site for recreation and enjoyment continues to persist, albeit in a different and less prominent way in comparison to the old recreational sites of the past.

Conclusion

As Singapore modernised over the years, Buona Vista also developed in tandem; causing its association with leisure and entertainment to shift towards modernity, innovation and higher learning. The story of Buona Vista parallels the historical trajectory of modern Singapore, transforming from rural settlements into a modern polis. Today, the natural "good view" of Buona Vista has been replaced with a modern skyline of buildings. However, anyone longing for the good view of old Buona Vista can still take a slow drive down South Buona Vista Road, one of the five heritage roads of Singapore, to get a taste of the long and winding road that used to host races, the hilly terrain, and the beautiful greenery that still exists today.[49]

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10 Aerial view of Bunoa Vista estate, 1976
Image courtesy of the Housing & Development Board

11 View of Ghim Moh estate, 1977
© Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reprinted with permission.

12 The Star Vista, 2019
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

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KEMBANGAN:
AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

Text by Tan Jia Yi

01 View of the housing estate that now sits on former Kampong Kembangan, 2019
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

When asked about what Kembangan meant to him, long-time resident Imran Rahim hesitated. After much thought, he finally answered – Kembangan is "home".[1] Although it may sound cliché, the answer is heartfelt and meaningful. In looking at the trajectory of Kembangan's development, the community has consistently expanded its own definition to embrace more and more peoples and cultures, becoming "home" for many. The name "Kembangan" originates from two languages, Bahasa Melayu and Bahasa Indonesia. The Malay word "pengembangan" and the Indonesian word "perkembangan" both connote the idea of expansion, development or evolution.[2] This etymology aptly reflects the town's continual expansion into a more inclusive community, a process which has been ongoing since its genesis.

01

Kembangan today can be delineated as the historical locations of Kampong Pachitan and Kampong Kembangan, both of which were roughly situated around present day Kembangan Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) station. These neighbouring kampongs, comprising a predominantly Javanese population, are arguably the cultural and historic heartlands of the Kembangan area. Glimpses of this Javanese cultural heritage can still be seen today, with streets such as Lengkong Satu (Malay for "Bend One") and Jalan Senang (Malay for "Happy Road") retaining their names from the time of the establishment of the area. Over time, the community expanded to include a diverse array of residents, giving Kembangan an increasingly multicultural and diverse identity. The district of Kembangan also rose to meet new challenges when a developing Singapore saw the rise of marginalised groups in society such as drug addicts and criminal offenders. Racial issues receded and social ones arose, but Kembangan's residents made the same conscious effort to extend and welcome these different groups into society. Indeed, Kembangan has remained true to its name, evolving across the years to extend its inclusivity and allow its residents, regardless of racial or social differences, to call it home.

Javanese or Malay?

Early Javanese settlers in the 1800s were mostly craftsmen and traders.[3] By the 1920s, the Javanese established their community in an area that eventually came to be Kampong Pachitan.[4] Kampong Pachitan derived its name from Pachitan City in East Java, attesting to the large Javanese numbers in the area.[5]

02

Many worked here to procure the funds used for *haj*, or pilgrimage, as doing so was banned in the Dutch East Indies, which included Java.[6] In 1932, when Kembangan was first named, the locale already had a distinct Javanese character.[7]

However, as a result of colonial policy, the Javanese were subsumed under an expanded 'Malay' category. When the British administered the 1911 Federated Malay States (FMS) census, they classified Javanese, Boyanese and Acehnese as races under the collective header of "Malay population". Such a classification had its issues, as it oversimplified the varied ethnicities found across the Malay world, who originated from different geographies. Furthermore, the census makers did not include the sub-ethnic groups under each racial group, making the "Malay" category even more simplified.[8] After independence, this Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others (CMIO) model in Singapore remained as a legacy of "colonial racialisation".[9] Suryakenchana Omar, the current honorary secretary of the Javanese Association of Singapore, argues that today, many Singaporean Malays simply perceive themselves as Malays, even if they are of Javanese origins.[10]

The idea of a distinctive Javanese culture was further eclipsed with the absorption of Javanese culture in the creation of the Malay Settlement in 1929.[11] Kampong Melayu, another name for the Malay Settlement, encompassed areas such as Kembangan, Eunos and Geylang Serai in its borders delineated by Changi Road and Paya Lebar.[12] The Malay identity was the main criteria for who could reside in or receive aid from the Malay Settlement, which was created to "promote the political, social, moral and intellectual advancement of the Malays".[13] Only British Malays or British-protected Malays

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02 Map showing Kampong Kembangan and Kampong Pachitan, 1954
Map taken from onemap.sg

03 Malay kampong house in Kampong Kembangan, 1985
Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

04 Children at Kampong Kembangan, 1963
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

were permitted to reside in the Settlement.[14] Those who identified themselves as being part of a Malay community thus banded together in ethnic solidarity despite their varied backgrounds. Among those who pitched the idea of the Settlement to the British colonial government was the Kesatuan Melayu (Malay Union), which sought to rally most of the Malay organisations in Singapore.[15] Together, they aimed to give the Malay community a strong voice, especially for those of the poorer class who faced difficulties due to rising property prices.[16] With these developments, the Javanese community was re-categorised by colonial society into one that was simply known as Malay.

A Multicultural Community

Kampong Kembangan, however, did not exist only as a purely Malay community. Over time, much of Singapore's population moved out of Singapore town and into the rest of the island, including Kampong Kembangan. This created social environments of racial multitudes and diversity.

This move towards a multicultural Singapore, however, was fractured by the 1964 racial riots. These riots arose from plausible instigation of racial conflict between the Malay and Chinese by the Singapore United Malay National Organisation (SUMNO), as well as the question of Malay dominance.[17] The violence from the riots soon "spread to neighbouring areas like… Kampong Kembangan".[18] Racial tensions were further inflamed by rising political tensions between PAP and SUMNO in the 1963 elections, which revolved around the issue of Malay primacy versus multiculturalism.[19]

Nonetheless, by the end of 1964, the racial riots had demonstrated that communal solidarity was

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still prevalent in Kampong Kembangan.[20] Indeed, residents of Kampong Kembangan at the time revealed that there was evidence of racial tolerance and acceptance, suggesting a concern over their neighbours' welfare regardless of racial differences.[21] According to then-resident Wee Tew Lim:

> My family was staying in Kembangan, which was the Malay-dominated area, on the fringe of the Malay kampongs. We were not sure whether there [would] be violence or not. But fortunately, good sense prevailed, and the people in the kampong all managed to look out for each other and [did not] make a big deal out of it. [We agreed that] what has happened was not within our control, so let's live peacefully as good neighbours.[22]

In addition to acceptance, Wee's reflection even suggests that in Kampong Kembangan, inhabitants became closer in order to better protect their kampong, regardless of racial issues:

> In those days there was no [hostility between] races other than the riots because of Malaysia. Most people accept each other as friends and we get along very well. I have very good Malay friends, even after the riots of course, we're still good friends. There's no reason for us to be antagonistic towards each other. We're very good neighbours and friends, and we do care for each other.[23]

While the 1964 riots may have been a step backwards from the goal of a multicultural Singapore, it appears that, despite the antagonism of the larger groups, racial hostility did not prevail in the everyday lives of Kampong Kembangan's residents. As Wee aptly remarks, "We all stayed there for a long time. Neighbours are neighbours, and you don't [let an event like that affect you]."[24]

Extending the Warmth of a Community

Wee's memories of Kampong Kembangan was reflective of social cohesion, and this spirit of

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05 Crowds from the Kampong Kembangan constituency at a food and financial relief distribution booth for riot victims, 1964
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

06 Crowds at Kampong Kembangan Community Centre during then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's visit, 1963
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

07 Kembangan Community Club, 2019
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

08 HDB blocks in Kembangan estate, 2019
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

inclusivity and openness continued in the form of various community support groups in Kembangan. In the 1970s and 1980s, racial issues in Kembangan receded but new social challenges arose. During this period, Kembangan's community faced the problem of drug addicts and ex-offenders who struggled at the sidelines.[25] Keeping with the spirit of inclusivity, many residents of Kembangan chose not to respond negatively with stigmatisation and rejection and instead offered assistance and support to these wayward youths who were part of their community. The community of Kembangan extended aid and sought to reintegrate these residents back to society.

Beginning with the drug issue, support groups in Kembangan facilitated multiple rehabilitation projects for drug addicts in order to ease their transition back into society.[26] The "Kampong Kembangan Experience" was a project that succeeded in reducing the number of drug addicts arrested and detained in drug rehabilitation centres. A taskforce was set up in the late 1970s with Abdul Halim Kader, a member of the Kampong Kembangan Citizens' Consultative Committee (CCC), leading the effort to curb youth drug addiction. The team comprised entirely of residents from Kembangan, aided by the Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association (SANA) and the police.

Together, they identified and regularly visited drug addicts detained in rehabilitation centres. Once these detainees were released, the aftercare officers counselled them and aided their job searches. The project had been so successful that the number of drug addicts arrested and detained in drug rehabilitation centres reduced from 102 in 1977 to 41 in 1978 and to four in 1982.[27]

A similar project was again carried out by residents in 1985, when the trend of glue-sniffing arose among Kembangan's youths. In an elaborate plan, shopkeepers noted the name, address and telephone number of anyone under 16 who bought products containing glue or rubber solution. Using the information, the task force reconvened to contact the families, checking whether the youths had been sanctioned to buy these products. These commendable efforts demonstrated the fervour of the community in not only embracing those who had erred, but also in taking further steps to reintegrate them into society and supporting them to minimise reoffending. Baey Lian Peck, then President of SANA, accurately summed up the cooperative and united spirit of the residents, "Kampong Kembangan is an example of what a community can do if they are committed."[28]

The Taman Bacaan Halfway House was another volunteer initiative set up in 1994 that sought to rehabilitate women who were former drug offenders. The programme had two unique schemes. The first was a residential plan where inmates were allowed to return home and provided with a support network. The volunteers in the House would help with costs of utilities, food and the education of inmates' children. With sturdy community support, the halfway house reported in 2004 that 75% of drug offenders did not relapse. This was a breakthrough in terms of statistics from the 1990s, where reports indicated that inmates typically relapsed up to six times. The second scheme was another highly effective plan, with the families of inmates being allowed to stay with them for a few days at the halfway house.[29] This scheme was targeted towards female inmates with young children. Abdul Halim Kader, President of Taman Baacan Halfway House since 1979, stated that "when [an inmate's] children tell her to stop taking drugs because they don't want to be alone, it is more successful than anything else we can do". Furthermore, the children would show their schoolwork to their mothers and sleep with them in their beds. The proximity of living with loved ones was a great contrast to the solitude of prison cells, and became an effective deterrent against relapse. On 1 May 2009, the halfway house at Kembangan closed after rehabilitating a total of 500 inmates.[30] Overall, the continuing presence of such successful drug rehabilitation initiatives in Kembangan throughout the 1970s to 2000s clearly demonstrated the community's ability to extend compassion to those who had stumbled, and aided them in their rehabilitation.

In recent decades, Kembangan faces a new challenge – mentally ill elderly who reside in the area. The community's latest project as of June 2018, the Local Community Support Network, is a familiar response to aid them. Made up of volunteers trained by government agencies and healthcare institutions such as the Institute of Mental Health (IMH), the Network aims to identify the healthcare needs of their beneficiaries and refer cases for further medical help if necessary. The Network also stresses the importance of raising awareness of the importance of mental health for the elderly, which has been a burgeoning problem due to the nature of Singapore's ageing population.[31] As the newest stepping stone in an illustrious history of rehabilitation projects, the Network signifies a continuing trend of Kembangan extending its communal warmth to others.

Enduring Inclusivity

Throughout Kembangan's history, there has been a consistent broadening of groups that have chosen to call Kembangan home, befitting the town's etymology of expansion. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Javanese inhabitants assimilated into a category that encompassed all Malays regardless of backgrounds. Thereafter in the 1960s, Malay dominance in Kembangan gave way to a wider multiracialism that was inherent to Singapore's founding ethos. Subsequently, even as racial issues receded after the formative years and social issues arose in the 1970s, Kembangan continued to mould a community that expanded day by day, embracing those who had been marginalised by society. For 72-year-old resident Imran Rahim, who has lived through many of Kembangan's transformations, it is indeed a home of continuing inclusivity. [32]

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SELETAR:
FROM FISHING VILLAGE TO GLOBAL AIR HUB

Text by Jason Prasad

01

Seletar is a district located within Singapore's North-Eastern region. Boasting a population of just under 300 people, it is amongst Singapore's most sparsely populated areas in the present day.[1] Most of Seletar has been given over to the development of Singapore's aerospace industry. Despite Seletar's sparse population, the area carries a rich history that stretches all the way back to Singapore's precolonial days.

Seletar was first an enclave for the Orang Seletar in the precolonial days, before being redeveloped for the rubber industry.[2] By the 20th Century, the British turned Seletar into an integral part of its force projection within Asia, with the construction of Royal Air Force Seletar Base (RAF Seletar). Following the British withdrawal, Seletar was gradually developed into a hub for the civilian aviation industry with the development of the Seletar Aerospace Park.

Early Days: A Home for the Orang Seletar

Seletar's pre-colonial residents, the Orang Seletar, had their roots amongst the Orang Laut, the sea-people of the Malayan Peninsula.[3] These people were initially referred to by the appellation of the Orang Selat (Celates in some transliterations), or the people of the Straits, referring to their concentration along the Straits of Malacca.[4]

It was within these waterways and rivers that the Orang Selat engaged in trading, fishing and commerce raiding.[5] The Orang Laut as a whole built up a reputation amongst colonial authorities within the region as maritime marauders and raiders, raiding both indigenous and foreign merchant and commercial vessels that plied the waters of the Malay Peninsula.[6] It should be noted that for the populace of the Malay Peninsula then, commerce raiding was an accepted practice and a critical part of their economic activities. However, the colonial authorities found such disruptions to trading and commerce unacceptable, and set out to crack down on piracy activities.

The Orang Laut as a whole came under the attack of the British, Portuguese and Dutch colonial authorities that operated in the region. Through engagements with the Europeans and forced resettlement away from the coastal areas, the Orang Selat populace reduced significantly. However, there was a small proportion that instead withdrew to less-developed areas within the Malay Peninsula and away from the colonial authorities' attention.[7]

The Orang Selat chose the North-Eastern coast of Singapore to form their enclave due to its similarities with their former home along the Straits of Malacca.[8] Singapore's North-Eastern coast possessed similar mangrove forests and had a similar riverine region as the Malaccan Coast.[9] Having fully withdrawn to the peripheries, the Orang Selat gradually fell out of the radars of both the colonial authorities and the Malayan Johor Sultanate, the latter of which the Orang Selat had ostensibly been subjects of since the 19th Century.[10] The Orang Selat who formed this enclave remained riverine nomads, living with their boats and generally engaging in fishing and other maritime activities.[11]

Ultimately, this enclave did not escape the British Empire's push to develop and settle Singapore as a colony, which began in earnest around the mid-19th Century. Encroachment into the Orang Selat's (now known as the Orang Seletar) enclave meant that the Orang Seletar were forced to undergo yet another exodus, gradually scattering across the peninsula.[12] Their former home, now known as Seletar, was earmarked for the rubber industry's use.

A Short Stint Supplying the Rubber Industry

From the mid-19th to early-20th Century, the British colonial authorities began to redevelop the Seletar region to address their needs for rubber within the metropole and the wider region.[13] Seletar's rubber supplied the automobile industry, which was at this point, coming into its own as a market industry.

The major companies that made up Seletar's rubber industry during this period included the British-led Singapore United Rubber Plantation Limited and the Bukit Sembawang Rubber Company, which was managed by Lim Nee Soon.[14] Despite rubber being lucrative and in demand, the focus of the region eventually evolved towards the development of Seletar as a maritime and aerial hub due to its central location.[15] In order to get the land necessary to support this development, Seletar's rubber plantations had to be cleared away. The plentiful demand for Straits rubber would instead have to be met by other plantations within the Malay Peninsula.

Serving as a Military Base for the British

The British envisioned a two-phase development of Seletar. In the first phase, an airbase (RAF Seletar) would be developed for primarily military, but also commercial and civilian use.[16] The second phase would see both the continued development of RAF Seletar as well as the development of a harbour along the coastline adjacent to RAF Seletar.[17]

Planning for this redevelopment of the Seletar Region concluded in 1921 and work began in the same year. The construction and redevelopment were largely supervised by engineers and pioneers from the British Colonial Army and carried out by both local workers as well as other manpower drawn from the Colonies over a period of seven years from 1922 to 1928.[18] Part of this construction work was also undertaken by Samsui women, whom the British referred to as "Concrete Lizzies".[19] A permanent RAF garrison was then established within RAF Seletar, operating from 1928 to 1971, with the exception of four years from 1942 to 1945 when it was occupied by the Japanese during World War II. After 1971, control of the base was turned over to Singapore. Whilst under the control of the British, the airbase was garrisoned primarily by a ground-based air-defence squadron, several transport squadrons and a nominal fighter complement.[20] The

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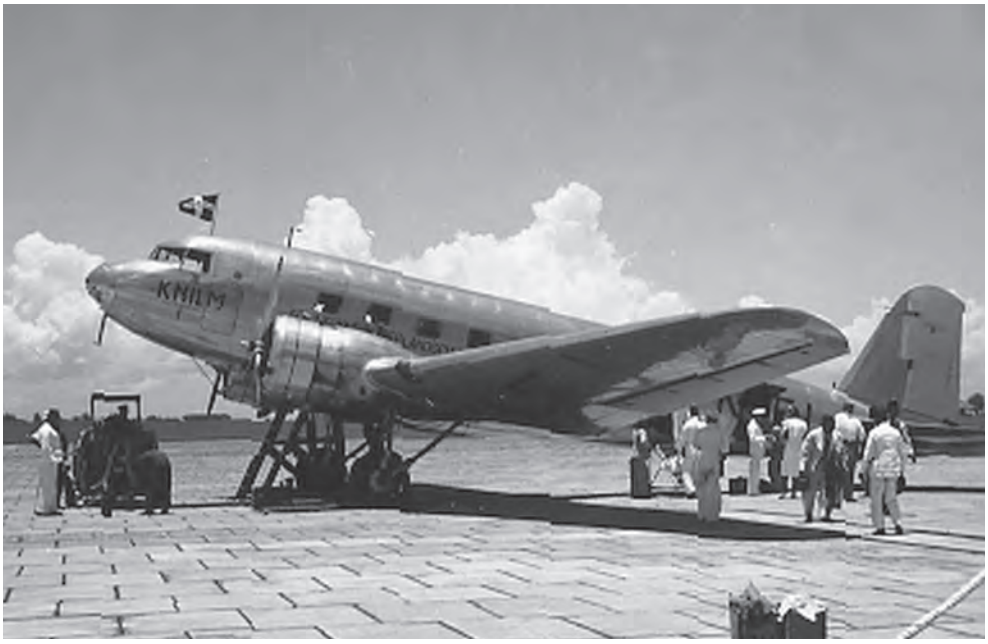
01 Seletar Airport Terminal, 2019
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

02 Nee Soon rubber factory in Seletar, 1900s-1930s
Image courtesy of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

03 Chinese female construction workers at RAF Seletar, 1930s
RAFSA Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

04 Rubber tappers in Seletar, 1900s-1930s
Image courtesy of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board



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05 An aircraft from KNILM (Royal Netherlands Indies Aviation Company), the colonial airline responsible for commercial flights, 1937
RAFSA Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

06 Provision shops at Jalan Kayu village, which was situated just outside of Seletar Airbase, 1970
RAFSA Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

second phase of Seletar's development, the harbour, was realised slightly further along Singapore's northern coast, together with the construction of the sprawling Sembawang Naval Base.[21]

Even though it was primarily a military installation, RAF Seletar also briefly functioned as Singapore's civilian airport from 1930 to 1937.[22] The Dutch-based KLM Airline was the first to land at Seletar airport in 1931, although regular services to Singapore did not start until 1933. One of the first routes involving Singapore was operated by the now-defunct Imperial Airways, flying through London, Cairo, British India, Singapore and Darwin. Qantas Empire Airlines (present-day Qantas Airlines) took over this route in 1934.[23] The airport at Seletar linked Singapore to the rest of the world by air, and saw a substantial number of civilians passing through. Amongst these visitors was the famed actor Charlie Chaplin, who visited Singapore on four occasions – twice in 1932, once in 1936 and lastly in 1961. He presumably would have passed through RAF Seletar on his visits in 1932 and 1936 as it was the only civilian airport operational at the time.[24]

The sheer volume of civilian flights passing through RAF Seletar, however, was proving disruptive to military operations. This necessitated the construction of an alternative airport, the Kallang Aerodrome, which was completed in 1937. Following which, all civilian aviation were shunted over, thus relieving RAF Seletar of its burden.[25]

The development of Seletar township was closely linked to the growth of RAF Seletar. First built during the 1920s, the township continually expanded its service offerings to cater to the needs of the base. There were various service industries located within the township such as barbers, tailors and provision shops to provide for the comforts of the servicemen in the base. As a result, Seletar was adversely affected when the British withdrew from Singapore. Due to the infeasibility of maintaining a forward military presence alongside domestic financial woes, the British announced their intention to withdraw all forces that were "east of Suez" by the mid-1970s. This meant a gradual withdrawal from their bases in both Malaya and Singapore. However, in 1968 the year of withdrawal was postponed to 1971.[26] This was significant as the British forces in Singapore had contributed to approximately a quarter of Singapore's Gross National Product or total economic activity prior to withdrawal.[27] Additionally, Singapore could also no longer depend on the British for defence. The immediate economic effects of impending British withdrawal were especially pronounced in the towns that had existed and thrived alongside British presence in Singapore such as in Sembawang and Seletar, where Sembawang Naval Base, RAF Sembawang and RAF Seletar were. There was uncertainty as to the future of Seletar township, especially for the people living outside the bases. Fortunately for the local workers within the bases, they were able to take some comfort in knowing that their interests would be looked after by the newly-established Bases Economic Conversion Department.[28] For instance, Ajith Prasad, who grew up in the vicinity of Sembawang Naval Base (then Singapore Naval Base) recounted how his father, a canteen operator in the base fell into times of hardship following British withdrawal. The family lost a stable source of income and their spending power was reduced significantly.[29] It was through the Bases Economic Conversion Department that employees like Prasad's father found new employment.

The Bases Economic Conversion Department oversaw the commercialisation of lands and businesses in and around these bases, while the transfer of bases was handled directly by the armed forces of both Singapore and Britain. With respect to RAF Seletar, portions of it came under the control of the Singapore Air Defence Command, the precursor to the Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF).[30] The remainder was then commercialised.[31] The final British troops would withdraw by 1976 after assisting in the training of local forces on the various systems located in the base.[32]

Its Role as a Commercial Aviation Hub Today

Seletar's role as a hub for the aerospace industry began to grow after the British left Singapore. In addition to its continued operations as an airport, a major development for Seletar after 1971 was the construction of the Seletar Aerospace Park (SAP) where RAF Seletar once stood. The SAP is a 320-hectare mixed-use area comprising both an

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industrial area meant for the aerospace industry, as well as Seletar Airport.[33]

The SAP was constructed with the intention of supporting and expanding Singapore's aerospace industry with added industrial capacity and space.[34] It was envisioned as a hub to attract both Multinational Corporations (MNCs) and local aviation companies to set up their headquarters within Singapore. The first phase of development and the initial construction for SAP occurred from 2007 to 2010, whereupon the first tenants moved in. Since then, it has expanded and at present boasts more than 60 MNCs and local companies housed within the industrial park. These MNCs and companies focus on either the maintenance and technical aspects of aviation or the business and administrative side of it.[35]

While the development of the SAP's industrial zone has indeed been a huge boon to the aviation industry, the most well-known and tangible (to the general public) development of Seletar in recent years has been the upgrading, expansion and re-opening of Seletar Airport. While the airport's first phase of upgrading

07 Aerial View of Seletar Airport, 2012 *© Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reprinted with permission.*

08 View of the Seletar Aerospace Park's industrial area, 2019 *Image courtesy of National Heritage Board*

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and expansions was concurrent with SAP's first phase, the main phase of expansion was from 2015 to 2018.[36] During this period, the airport was fully shut down and the passenger terminal was completely rebuilt. Construction was completed punctually and Seletar Airport now functions as the hub for all turboprop aircraft operations within Singapore, while Changi instead focuses on jet aircraft operations.[37] When combined with the role that the SAP as a whole is envisioned to play for the industry, Seletar is poised to play a new and important role in Singapore's aviation and tourism industries.

If we take a step back and look at Seletar's development over the past two centuries, we see a town that has changed considerably – from a simple enclave for the Orang Seletar, into a collection of rubber plantations, and finally for almost a century (since 1922), an integral part of Singapore's aviation industry. Seletar might be sparsely populated, but its role in Singapore's history and its future should not be forgotten. It has played a core role in the development of Singapore, especially with regards to the aerospace industry, and will quite certainly continue to do so for many years to come.

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SINGAPORE RIVER:
AN EVOLVING "RIVER OF LIFE"

Text by Koh Hong Kai and Low Rozanne

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01 Elgin Bridge at night, 2016
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

02 Lighterboats at the mouth of the Singapore River, 1900s
Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

03 A storyteller at the Singapore River, 1960
Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

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Whether among locals or tourists, the Singapore River is considered one of the nation's iconic landmarks. Tourists, in particular, can often be seen gushing at the river's pristine waters whilst exploring the bustling entertainment, nightlife and food options nearby. Conscious of its appeal, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) has made it a point to continually update the Singapore River to ensure that it measures up to its reputation as a "premier destination".[1] Looking at the river in its modern state, however, it can be hard to imagine that it once played quite a different role. During colonial times, it was the nation's economic lifeline, facilitating the bulk of the port city's trade flows through shipping activities that congregated around the river.[2] These activities brought about human interactions, the formation of communities and the establishment of livelihoods, such as those of the lightermen, along the river.

Being part of the one of most prominent industries along the river, the lightermen have seen economic trade winds and developments along the river throughout the years. For instance, the increase in trade flows from the colonial era as a new British port-city, and the river clean-up during Singapore's years of independence both marked a shift towards a more diversified economy around the river. These developments deeply affected the people and communities living in the area, in particular, the aforementioned lightermen whose livelihoods were dependant on the trade plying down the river. By looking at the history of the Singapore River through the lens of the lightermen, we are able to see the impact that these developments had on the social landscape, as well as witness the diversity of lived experiences for all who came into contact with the river.

Trade and Growth of the Lighterage Industry

The boom and growth of the lighterage industry – and subsequently the development of a diverse social landscape around the river can be traced back to Singapore's roots as a British port-city. British colonisation of Singapore was borne mainly from strategic and economic concerns.[3] A letter from an unnamed British official stationed in Penang sums these concerns nicely: "[Singapore was] calculated to give us (the British) the complete command of the Straits of Malacca and fair participation in the valuable trade of the Eastern Islands".[4] Furthermore, it "breaks the spell of Dutch supremacy and monopoly over the whole of the Archipelago".[5] As intended, the Singapore River quickly became the centre of this burgeoning trade, courtesy of its natural and safe harbour.[6] However, the size of the river limited the size of the vessels that could enter; vessels weighing over 40 tons were prohibited from entering the river except during emergencies.[7] This necessitated lightermen and the development of the lighterage industry.

Lightermen were manual labourers who unloaded cargo from ships in the outer sea and loaded it onto their *twakows* or *tongkangs* (lighterboats), before bringing these goods into the quay where merchants would be waiting. Bigger vessels thus had to rely on the lighters which were able to enter the shallow depths of the Singapore River. Lightermen were mainly of Indian or Chinese descent, drawn by the economic opportunities generated by British colonialism.[8] Together with other manual labourers, they were part of the bustling coolie trade of the 19th and early-20th century, where large numbers of indentured labourers were brought into Singapore to help alleviate the labour shortage.[9] One such labourer, former lighterman, Lim Kwang Hee, further revealed that he migrated to Singapore because "of the messy political situation [back home in China]" and that he believed "migrating over to eke a living was a better option".[10]

Life on the Singapore River

As transient migrants, the lives of these lightermen were inextricably linked to the river.[11] In fact, they were even described as a "floating colony" on the Singapore River.[12] Lightermen were expected to stay near the river and their *twakow* due to the nature of their work. Cargo ships might arrive at any moment, and their services would be required at these instances. Hence, the lightermen often congregated along the Singapore River, building their work and social lives around it. They preferred to live on their lighterboats (instead of on land) for practical concerns such as rental and easy access to work.[13] A lighterman, known as "Old Man Tan", said that he "prefer[red] to sleep in the *tongkang* when the weather at night [was] fine", and that he was still doing so even when the lighterage industry began to decline in the early 1980s.[14] Thus, it was only natural that the lightermen would have a distinct influence on the Singapore River's social landscape, given their tight links to the place.

One example of the lightermen's impact on the social environment was in the area of entertainment. Vices such as prostitution and opium were common and readily available in close proximity to the river. In fact, licensed opium dens stood in the vicinity of

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Pagoda Street, Duxton Road and Boat Quay, filling the streets with "whiffs of the drug". In a 1982 interview, Leong Chee Sang recalled that about 80 per cent of lightermen in his grandfather's *tongkang* quarters took opium. Vice aside, lightermen also turned to the storytellers who had set up shop near the river for news and entertainment. Specifically, it was reported that three Teochew storytellers stationed themselves at Read Bridge, to cater to "people living in the coolie *keng* by the Singapore River".[15] Presumably, their audiences included Teochew lightermen, with the Hokkien lightermen congregating near Coleman Bridge and China Street instead. The atmosphere by the river must have been eclectic, with the listeners to these storytellers numbering well into the hundreds on some days.[16]

In addition to fuelling the demands for entertainment along the river, the lightermen also brought along with them many of their religious beliefs and practices. For example, due to the dangerous nature of their work, many Chinese lightermen kept and maintained altars to Mazu, Goddess of the Sea on their lighterboats and along the river, as they believed that she would be able to keep them safe.[17]

These spiritual activities of the lightermen were not confined to the river. As with most Chinese immigrants, the lightermen, upon arriving from China to Singapore would often make their first stop to temples such as the Fuk Tak Chi Temple (for the Hakka and Cantonese) or the Thian Hock Keng Temple (for the Hokkien) to give thanks, as well as pray for safety and prosperity from the deities.[18] Historian Stephen Dobbs further noted an interesting ritual where lightermen would also make an annual trip to Kusu Island during the ninth lunar month to pay respects to Tua Pek Kong – the protector of the Singapore River. The lightermen and their families would travel over to the island in their lighterboats stocked with food and items for the festivities, which included socialising and relaxing on the island after their prayers.[19]

Even after the colonial period, the Singapore River's role in entrepot trade continued to surge, bringing about economic development and opportunity, as well as large scale immigration and growth for the lighterage industry.

Moving Forward – The River Clean-Up

By the time the 1970s came around, however, the lighterage industry witnessed a new phase for the Singapore River starting to take shape, changing and affecting the livelihood of the lightermen in the process. In the years after independence, Singapore's survival relied heavily on its ability to stay economically relevant. The increase of direct trading activities and import quotas from trading partners were threatening profits from entrepot trade.[20] As a result, when the People's Action Party (PAP) government came into power, their eyes were set on industrialisation, in hopes of reducing Singapore's reliance on entrepot trade.[21] The Singapore River was poised to take on a different role, as Singapore's economy transitioned into a more service-oriented one. However, before this transformation could take place, an extensive river clean-up was first required.

Having been the focal point for global and regional trade passing through Singapore, the Singapore River had by the 1970s become severely polluted.[22] Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong himself reminisced that, in 1977, the river water was "black, notoriously smelly and toxic".[23] In all, the Singapore River clean-up campaign took 10 years of hard work and cost $170 million. Squatters on the riverbanks were resettled, farms relocated and street hawkers moved.[24] Shipping activities and trade were also shifted to Keppel Harbour.[25] This shift resultantly led to a reduced dependence on the lightermen for the transportation of goods from ship to shore.[26] Eventually, by 1983, the remaining lightermen on the Singapore River were transferred to the new Port of Singapore Authority (PSA) facilities at Pasir Panjang, where the shipping industry continues to be concentrated today.[27]

The scene of the last 800 lighters of the Singapore River making their final journey down the river and out to the open sea marked an end to the "old way of life" and an image of the river that many Singaporeans had become accustomed to.[28] The clean-up had switched up the physical and social environment of the river, bringing about drastic changes for the lightermen. The river was even described as a "dead snake", devoid of its former role, life and vibrancy.[29]

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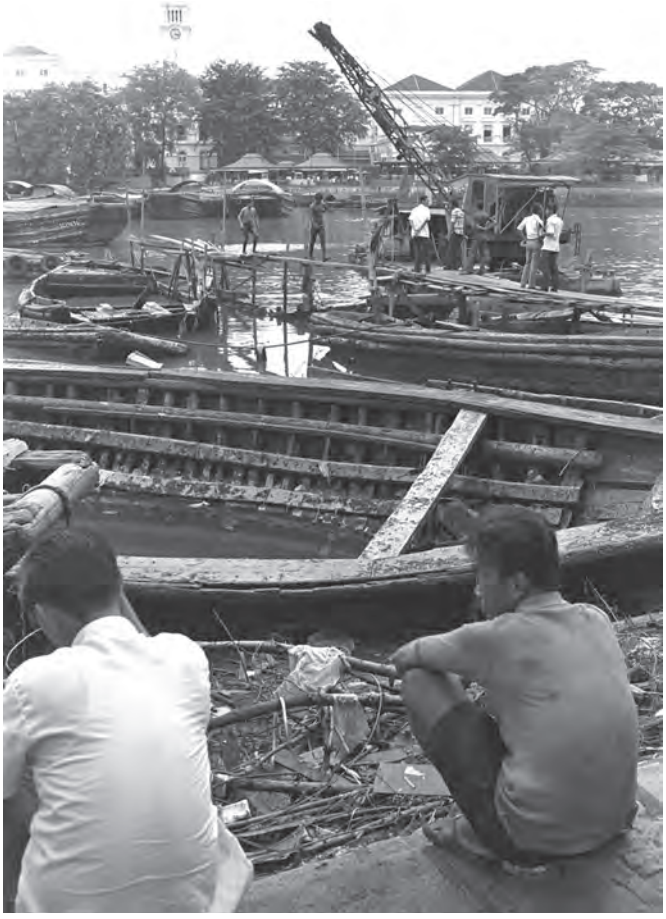

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04 Worshipper at Thian Hock Keng Temple, 1962
Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

05 Clean-up of the Singapore River, 1977
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The River Today

Fortunately for the Singapore River, the clean-up campaign did not signal the end of the lighterage industry on the river. Instead, just as scholars Leonie Sandercock and Kim Dovey noted about the transformative abilities of waterfronts to reverse patterns of decline and create new urban zones that bring about both pleasure and profit, the Singapore River was successfully reinvented.[30] As a result, the lighterage industry found itself serving a new purpose on the river – tourism.

Following the river clean-up, while the community and lightermen living on the river may no longer exist, the legacy of the lighterage industry lives on with lighterboats continuing to ply the waters of the river, this time transporting tourists on sight-seeing cruises. As these lighterboats travel along the river, the passengers they ferry witness a new space that has been created for tourists and locals alike to enjoy. The URA envisioned to revitalise the area to "bring about a new and interesting way of life to replace the old", thus giving birth to the "River of Life".[31] Steeped in history and heritage, the river and many iconic landmarks such as the Raffles Landing Site, the Singapore River Bridges and the Asian Civilisations Museum have become must-visit spots for tourists.[32] At the same time, for many Singaporeans, the river is known for being a place that "throbs with life even after dusk", thanks to the presence of many pubs, discos and other entertainment outlets.[33] The river has also become a hub for people to appreciate the arts, playing host to a series of sculptures in bronze.[34] Passengers can catch a glimpse of all of these sites and features of the revitalised space as the lighterboats travel along the Singapore River.

As the winds of economic change shifted the river's focus from trade to tourism, the lighterage industry, which has been a part of the river's economic ecosystem since the age of Colonial administration, is also forced to adapt and change to the new climate. While it might seem discouraging that the lightermen no longer live as a community along the river today, the legacy they leave behind remains strong within the new social landscape.

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06 Night view of Clarke Quay, 2016
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board


SOMERSET
NOVOTEL
clarke quay

01

LITTLE INDIA:
A LITTLE SLICE OF INDIA OR SINGAPORE?

Text by Goh Ngee Chae Joshua

"Little India in Serangoon Road, where the smell of spices, the preponderance of vegetables and fruit over meat, even the colours, lead the senses to tell you, you cannot surely be in the same city…"[1]

Such was the highly essentialised image of Little India presented by *The Singapore Experience*, a 45 minute-long film commissioned by the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB) in 1979 to promote Singapore as "the most surprising tropical island on earth".[2] In depicting Little India as a chaotic medley of exotic sights and smells, the film transformed the precinct into a distant oriental bazaar – an unexpected anomaly in modern Singapore's well-ordered urban landscape.

In a sense, certain aspects of Little India's urban landscape do indeed recall life in the Indian subcontinent. A travel magazine from 2001, for instance, characterised Little India as "a cleaner, more wholesome version of Madurai or Madras". Just like in any Indian bazaar street, a wide variety of Indian goods can be found in Little India from silk sarees to the latest Hindi music.[3] Even migrant workers from the Indian subcontinent themselves find Little India to be comfortingly familiar. As Siva, a Tamil migrant construction worker who frequents the precinct puts it:

> [Little India] is like India. Feels like home. Can see Tamil people, can be happy. Feels like we have come to our country. We think that way and come here, only once a week on a Sunday.[4]

However, in examining Little India's place heritage, it would be a mistake to focus solely upon its superficial foreignness. Far from being a faithful replica of a Madras street bazaar, the area now known as Little India has historically been multi-ethnic in character. Indeed, as late as 1975, the journalist Florence Tan reported that Little India was better known to Singaporeans as "Tek Kah" (Hokkien for "under the bamboos").[5] Although the precinct has since come to be more strongly associated with the Indian diaspora in the public imaginary, indelible traces left behind by the historic presence of other ethnic communities make the story of Little India truly Singaporean in nature.

Multicultural Beginnings of Little India

The multicultural heritage of Little India extends back to the early days of the British settlement in Singapore during the early-19th century. During this period, today's vibrant precinct was nothing more than a low-lying swampland on the outskirts of town. A nod to this terrain can be found in the etymology of the area's earliest place name, Serangoon. Though the origins of this toponym remain hotly debated, it was likely derived from *burong ranggong*, a petite marsh bird.[6]

That being said, early 19th century Serangoon was not entirely devoid of human habitation. Long before the first Indians set foot in the area, Serangoon was already home to a well-established Malay-Baweanese kampong located near Rochor River, which was an access way for small boats to reach the open sea.[7] As there were lime pits in its vicinity, this kampong eventually came to be known as "Kampong Kapor" (Malay for "lime").[8] During the 1820s, Chinese farmers also started to settle in the area along the Rochore River where the iconic Tekka Centre now stands.[9] Not only did the drained marshland provide fertile land for agricultural activities, Serangoon's proximity to town also made it convenient to transport produce for sale in markets such as the Telok Ayer Market.[10]

The wide range of produce grown by these Chinese farmers was subsequently reflected in several colloquial place names which emerged as referents to sub-districts in the area. The presence of vegetable gardens at the northern tip of Serangoon Road was alluded to via the place name "Nan Sheng Hua Yuen Pien" (Mandarin for "fringe of garden in the south"). Likewise, the widespread presence of jackfruit trees in Serangoon gave rise to the area being termed "Mang Chai Chiao" (Hokkien for "feet of the jackfruit") by residents in the vicinity.[11]

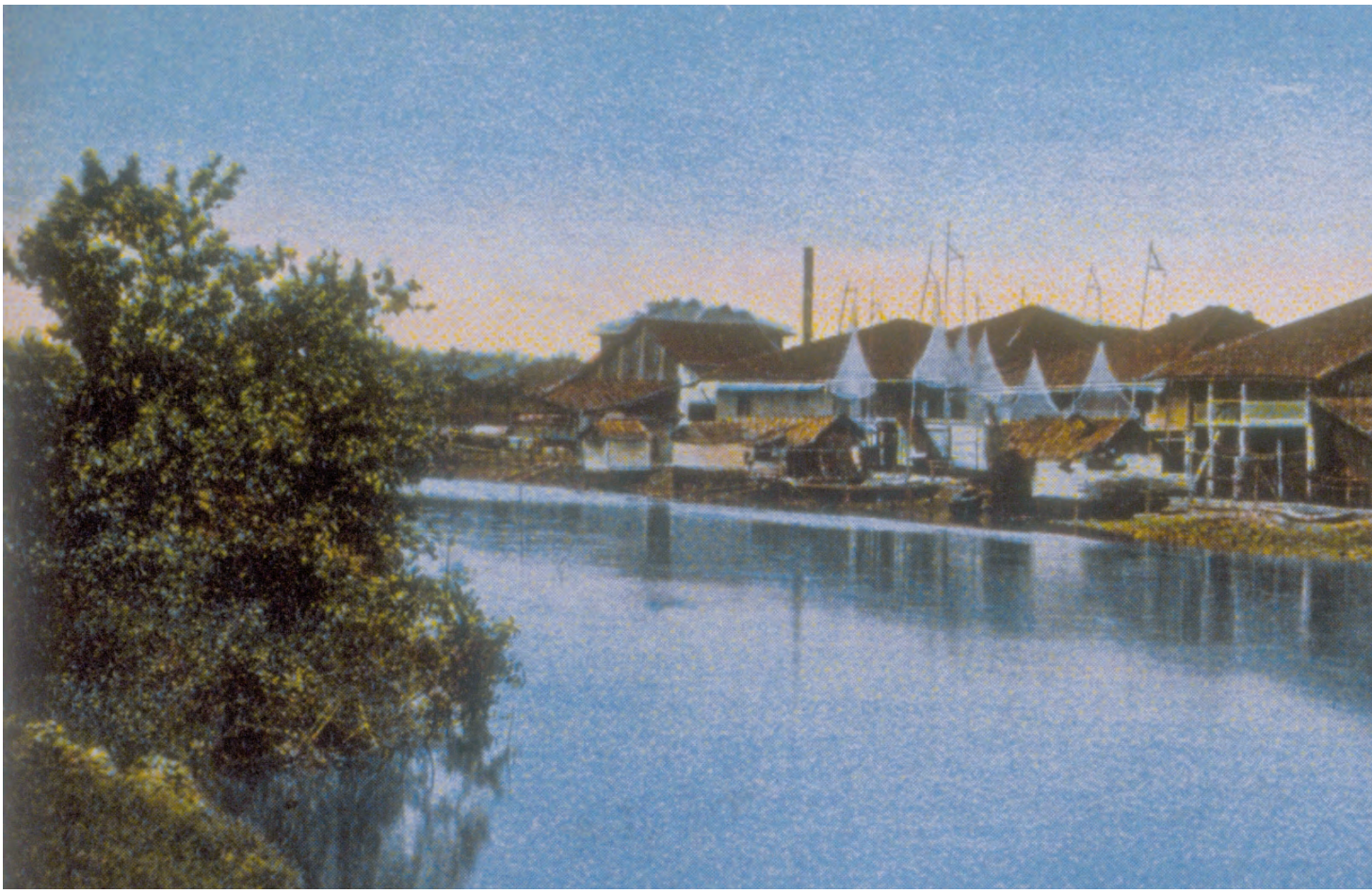
At the same time, the swampland around Serangoon Road proved to be a particularly attractive grazing ground for Indian cowherds. Not only did Serangoon's many freshwater ponds and mangrove swamps make ideal bathing areas for water buffalos, there was also ample supply of grass to serve as fodder. Additionally, its thick bamboo groves provided useful construction materials for cattle pens.[12]

The presence of these cowherds was indirectly catalysed by the presence of Indian convicts housed in the nearby Bras Basah district. Starting from 1825 onwards, the British brought in large numbers of convicts from Bengal, Madras and Bombay to serve as public works labourers. These convicts opened up this swampy expanse of land by laying one of Singapore's earliest roads, Serangoon Road.[13] Though the exact date of the road's completion is unknown, an 1828 map drawn by Lieutenant Jackson already describes Serangoon Road as a "road leading across the island".[14] Such construction activities required the usage of many buffaloes to drive bullock carts. At the same time, these convicts also represented a ready market for dairy products such as ghee and milk.[15]

Indeed, cattle rearing became such a prominent industry in Serangoon that a newly established kampong in the area was named Buffalo Village by the authorities in 1835. This village was later renamed as "Kandang Kerbau", the Malay term denoting a buffalo shed. Notwithstanding its name, Kandang Kerbau was much more than a village inhabited solely by Indian cowherds. It was in fact a multi-ethnic settlement with instances of different races working hand in hand to protect the peace. On October 1835, *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* reported that some Javanese assisted Indian police peons in apprehending an armed gang of Chinese bandits. This was despite the fact that the target of these bandits was the house of a Bengalee (Indian) rather than a member of their own community.[16]

The Emerging Indian Enclave

Later on, during the 1920s, the municipal authorities started to house its ever-growing pool of (largely Indian) daily-rated manual labourers in the area. Due to the lack of housing in the main town area, many municipal employees were housed in the government's newly-built terrace houses in Kampong Kapor.[17] Though officially designated as Municipal Quarters, these buildings ended up



serving as dormitories for coolies and peons, as well as homes for married men and their families. These buildings were later demolished to make way for private housing developments during the 1990s.[18]

The construction of such quarters reflected an important demographic shift for the area's Indian community. While most Indian migrants to Singapore were initially bachelors who planned to eventually return to India, there was also a growing number of married couples who decided to settle down for good.[19] This demographic shift, according to scholars Sharon Siddique and Nirmala PuruShotam, served as the foundation for the growth of Serangoon's Indian enclave. With the stabilising presence of Indian families in the area, more commercial migrants such as family astrologers and goldsmiths were in turn incentivised to set up shop in Serangoon. Such services then attracted even more Indian migrants to the area. For instance, most eating establishments in Serangoon were initially coffee shops run by

01 Deepavali lights along Serangoon Road, 2016
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

02 Kampong Boyan by the banks of Rochor River, c. 1900
Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

03 A bullock cart and electric tramcar on Serangoon Road
Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

04 A bullock cart transporting pineapples to preserving factories in the Serangoon area, c. 1900
Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

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Chinese proprietors. It was only during the 1920s and 1930s that Serangoon's earliest Indian eating houses, such as the famous vegetarian restaurant chain Ananda Bhavan, were set up in response to the growing demand.[20]

The growth of the Indian enclave in Serangoon gradually started to sputter to a halt with the decline of Indian immigration to Malaya during the mid-20th century. Due to the onset of the Great Depression in the 1930s, there was a marked fall in the demand for unskilled Indian labourers.[21] The passage of the 1953 Immigration Ordinances also completely ended the so-called "fresh immigration" of unskilled Indian labourers into Malaya.[22]

Nonetheless, the Indian enclave at Serangoon continued to flourish. Although the area gradually outgrew its initial role as a residential district for new Indian migrants, the emerging generation of Singaporean Indians continued to treat Serangoon as what Siddique and Shotam termed as an "Indian community space". Housewives, they observed, would make weekly trips there to stock up on "basic Indian essentials" like spices and also purchase embroidered textiles at places such as the iconic, Govindasamy Pillai Singapore Pte. Ltd.[23] In a similar vein, Hindu devotees would celebrate festivals like Thaipusam near the Perumal Temple at Serangoon Road.[24] It was thus no wonder that the renowned journalist Wendy Hutton observed the presence of a so-called "little India" atmosphere at Serangoon Road in 1972.[25]

Shifting Perceptions of Little India as an Indian Enclave

Even then, the Indian enclave in post-war Serangoon did not exist in a vacuum. In her study on the place history of Little India, the geographer Nafizath Bharzana Begam observed that inter-ethnic mixing based upon interpersonal ties formed an "intricate community network" in post-war Little India. She cited a succession of oral history interviews personally conducted with residents who spent their childhoods in Serangoon during the post-war years. One R. Krishnan, for instance, fondly recalled being invited to eat in the mosque with his Muslim friends during holidays like the birth of Prophet Muhammad. His Muslim friends themselves would in turn also go to the Mariamman Temple along South Bridge Road for a cure when afflicted with chicken pox.[26] Similarly, another Indian named Mr Rama reminisced that the neighbourly relationships with non-Indian neighbours were ones in which:

> Everybody knows everybody and there was a lot of intermingling. Neighbours became next to relatives. The Chinese speak Tamil and the Tamils speak Chinese dialects and Malay. An interracial community existed in Serangoon Road.[27]

It was only during the late 20th century that perceptions of Little India's apparent "foreignness" began to emerge. Starting from 1979, the STPB started to actively promote Serangoon Road as Singapore's "Little India".[28] Framed as a homogenous ethnic enclave, Little India's rich multicultural heritage was occasionally overlooked in order to emphasise its exoticness. A 2009 web advertorial for the Uniquely Singapore tourism campaign, for instance, described Little India as a place with a "strong, heady scent of spices" and "…streets [that] beckon you to a cornucopia of ethnic jewellery, jasmine garlands and silk saris".[29]

This perception is further entrenched by the fact that present-day Little India has become a popular weekend enclave for migrant workers from the Indian subcontinent. Since 1978, Singapore has experienced an ever-growing influx of South Asian migrants working in industries such as construction.[30] While these workers usually live in dormitories far removed from the city centre, it was reported in 2013 that as many as 20,000 of them would travel down to Little India on Sundays.[31] It is particularly telling that the sociologist Carrick Ang used the cheeky turn of phrase "little slice of India" to describe Little India on Sundays.[32]

Conclusion: A Little Slice of Singapore

Despite its unescapable links to the Indian community, Little India's multicultural place history nevertheless continues to stay strongly engraved within the Singaporean collective memory. This was exemplified by the government's attempt to rename the iconic present day Tekka Centre into the pinyin-ised toponym "Zhujiao Centre" in 1982.

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05 Established in 1924, Ananda Bhavan Restaurant is still serving loyal customers today, 2016
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

06 Municipal quarters along Rowell Road, 1992
Lee Kip Lin Collection, Image courtesy of National Library Board, Singapore

07 Housewives and shoppers shopping at Tekka market, 1971
© Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reprinted with permission.

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It was eventually forced to revert back to its old name after numerous complaints were received. Not only was "Zhujiao" difficult for the non-Chinese to pronounce, it also lacked the historical significance of "Tekka".[33] More tellingly, former resident Geoffrey Abisheganaden, in a 1987 letter to *The Straits Times*, made his case for "Tekka" by displaying a surprising familiarity of the various languages used in the area:

> As one born within the sound of cow-bells and the smell of *kambing-kambing* (Malay for "goats") in lovely government quarters at the canal end of Buffalo Road, I was naturally unhappy that Kandang Kerbau and Tek Kah market had suddenly and purportedly become Zhu-jiao, which might be mistaken for pigs' trotters.[34]

Indeed, many other traces of Little India's multicultural heritage can still be found even today. Hindu devotees walking along Race Course Road on Sunday, for instance, can easily find themselves rubbing shoulders with Chinese Christians from Foochow Mission Church.[35] Similarly at Dunlop Street, Muslim devotees emerge on Fridays from one of Singapore's oldest mosques, the Abdul Gafoor Mosque, which has been standing in Little India since 1907.[36] In this sense, the toponym "Little India" is somewhat of a misnomer. As much as the area has an undeniably strong association with the Indian community, Little India's heritage is undoubtedly an inheritance shared by all Singaporeans. By digging deeper, we have seen how place history of the precinct, coupled with the community's collective memories have resulted in a culturally diverse legacy that belies the present-day perception of Little India's homogeneity.

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08 Jothi Store and Flower Shop was founded in the 1960s and has since been selling traditional Indian garlands, betel nuts and prayer items, 2016
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

09 Tekka Centre, 2016
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

10 Mutton stalls at Tekka Centre, c. 1982
Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

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EPILOGUE:
REVISITING PLACE IDENTITY

Text by Goh Seng Chuan Joshua

01

Beginnings and Endings

The introductory article to this four-issue Bicentennial series opened with a rather indisputable assertion: that place identities in Singapore consisted of "interwoven layers of cultural meaning, historical significance and social memory". Furthermore, the foreword proposed that places in Singapore are "same-same, but different", with distinct narratives "intertwin[ing] and harmonis[ing] into one that is… Singaporean".[1]

In fact, place meanings are rarely cast in stone. For while places may be planned, individuals and communities may subsequently attach meanings that are independent of their prescribed character to these areas, which then result in multifaceted place identities.[2] The articles in this series reference a similar understanding of place identity. Be it the case of Joo Chiat which exudes a cosmopolitan air contrary to its state-promoted identity as a Peranakan enclave, or Yishun whose character is interposed between perceptions of oddness and ordinariness, it is clear that place identities are rarely simply built and narrated. Rather, they are in constant flux; of building, un-building and re-building, with beginnings and endings less clear than often conceived.

This epilogue focuses on the various forces that shape place to showcase a more complex picture of place identities in Singapore. One that pays heed to the interrelated and interdependent relationship

between physical geography and historical processes, one which acknowledges the tension between the planned, personal and lived realities, and one which, most importantly, challenges our inclination to see history as a single linear narrative.

Between Physical Geography and Human Process

Spanning only 42 kilometers, it is arguably this image of a compact and homogeneous island that sustains the belief that all places in Singapore are "same-same but different".[3] Yet, as the introductory article has acknowledged, our island nation is not lacking when it comes to significant variations in geology and terrain. The articles in this series reveal that the relationship between geography and place is more complex than often assumed. For example, while the sandy beaches of Pasir Ris and Punggol initially signified their relative inaccessibility, their perceived distance from town soon morphed into a point of allure for those seeking to escape from the bustle of urban life. To the colonial eye, both districts were in the first instance *ulu* (Malay for "remote"). However, when combined with their seafront charms, they transformed into places that exuded resort-like tranquillity. Likewise, the knobbly granite terrain and dense forests that represented the impenetrability of Singapore's interior, were the same features that later contributed to Bukit Timah's value as a mining location and our green lung worthy of being preserved.

While the natural environment may provide a backdrop to how a sense of place develops, human development on this natural environment creates a new amalgamated identity. The article examining Orchard details precisely how place identities could be quite literally constructed. In this instance, the department store, CK Tang was built despite the prevailing belief that geography (the presence of an adjacent cemetery) would render the venture unprofitable. By 1958, however, Orchard, which was originally devoted to nutmeg plantations, was successfully transformed into a lively retail belt. In other cases, man not only ignored the dictates of geography but defied it entirely. The seaside town of Marine Parade, built literally on water in the 1970s with sand excavated from Tampines, was one such example. By working with the environmental limitations, the colonial administrator, the entrepreneur and the Housing Development Board (HDB) town planner,

01 Sir Stamford Raffles landing site, 2019
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

02 Pasir Ris Beach, c. 1970
Image courtesy of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

03 Punggol Seashore, 1890s
Lim Kheng Chye Collection, image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

04 The former C. K. Tang department store, early 1980s
Image courtesy of C. K. Tang Ltd

05 A view of Bukit Timah's greenery from Singapore Quarry, 2016
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

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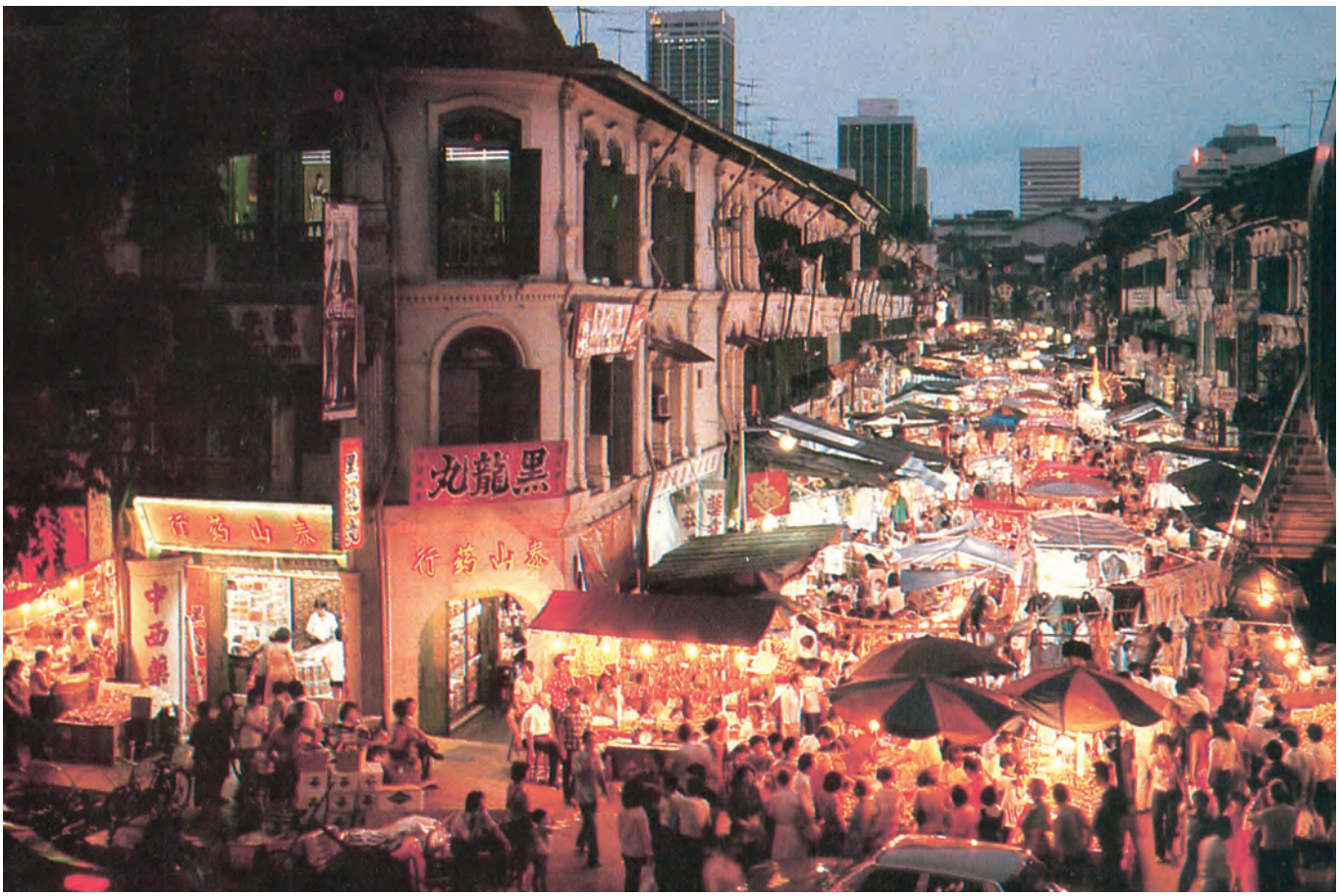
showed the ability to shape place out of space. The HDB, of course, has had a profound impact on the shape and form of place identities in post-independence Singapore as evidenced quite simply by the prolific amount of HDB-inspired planning typologies across the island. This is a theme that was first expressed in the introductory article and subsequently resurfaced in many of the articles in this bicentennial series.

Between Planned and Personal

Yet, as geographers Brenda Yeoh and Lily Kong clearly articulate, place identities can never merely be prescribed from above, but must always include an emotional perspective as well. This is termed by fellow geographer, Yi-Fu Tuan, as "topophilia" or a love of place.[4] While each article in this series testifies to this intersection between place-as-planned and place-as-lived, a few are also embodiments of how lived experiences can influence the way a place is understood. Yishun, which is often satirised as a place where the odd occurs, speaks best to this phenomenon. As the author of the article suggests: it is precisely the town's unpredictable charm that has endeared it to residents. An attachment to place, however, may derive from a broader familial sense of belonging. Two articles in this series – Bishan and Jurong aptly demonstrate this. In the former, the writer reflects on how the burial of his great-grandfather in the sprawling grounds of the former Peck San Theng cemetery gave an emotive salience to the idea of "living with the dead". In the latter, the strong friendships that the writer formed during her years at Jurong Junior College compelled her to identify with Jurong. Jurong's seclusion, is in her eyes, scintillating; its serenity, spellbinding.

Just as familial and friendship bonds shape place identity, place meanings formed around shared cultural or religious identification are also able to produce a sense of place that is both enduring and seemingly immutable. As cultural precincts in Singapore's downtown core, both Kreta Ayer and Little India epitomise how certain districts continue to derive their place identity from the lasting historical imprints etched by community groups on the landscape. Yet, as writers across this series have



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06 The night bazaar at Pagoda Street, c. 1970s
Image courtesy of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

07 Deepavali Festival Village along Campbell Lane, 2016
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

08 Patrons of diverse cultures having their meals at the Ramadan Bazaar, 2018
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

09 Boat Quay, 2015
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

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taken pains to emphasise, such place identities need not be exclusionary in nature. As the writer analysing Hougang suggests: its place identity as a former "Teochew Kingdom" is one that "surpasses divisions in race and religion to encompass anyone who shares in the Teochew culture at the former back harbour of Singapore".[5] In other words, while identity markers like food and language are often the factors that exclude, in cosmopolitan Singapore, they perform an inclusive role, connecting peoples from different backgrounds.

Between Past, Present and Future

Hougang, which has both retained and shed elements of its Teochew-oriented character over the years, is an example of how past and present are mutually entangled in collective memory. The article on Hougang demonstrates just how the concept of time in place identities can become distorted. Indeed, rather than unfolding linearly, place identities often reflect the unpredictable overlap between contemporary meanings and a community's historical memory. Such time fragments are periodically being compressed, exaggerated or purposefully forgotten.[6]

In the case of Eunos, Eunos Abdullah's vision of a self-sufficient Malay settlement has, in Singapore's post-Independence years, been replaced with a multicultural community where mutual help is conceived of in a broader manner. In other instances,

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historical legacies look set to continue informing place identities, albeit in entirely new forms. For instance, Serangoon Gardens today continues to be defined by its sizeable expatriate community not unlike its past.

The future, in all its indeterminacy, is perhaps the often side lined dimension that shapes place identity. In fact, the tendency to downplay the critical role played by futurity is somewhat true of cultural analyses in general.[8] Almost all the articles in this series have alluded in some ways to place identities and their relationship with the future, often with acknowledgement of the open-ended and unsettled character of a place's current landscape.[9] Moreover, a quick survey through Singapore's recent history – from the 1970s vision of a spick-and-span Singapore River to recent plans for a Great Southern Waterfront – easily attests to how the changing ideals of a future-to-come have continuously exerted force on places in the here and now. Today's Singapore River district with its curious amalgam of towering skyscrapers and repurposed *godowns* serves as the embodiment of futurity concretised. This is bolstered by numerous other cases that similarly attest to the power of the future in shaping the present landscape – be it the *polis* at Buona Vista which emerged in tandem with Singapore's research and development (R&D) aspirations, or the upcoming town at Bidadari, which seeks to realise the urban planners' dreams of a town amidst nature. Yet, in all such cases, it is too simplistic to assert that the past has no role to play in the now. As the unsuccessful attempt to rechristen Bukit Panjang as Zhenghua in the 1980s demonstrates, the past and its links to place can never be totally eradicated. History's legacies often live on in familiar yet unexpected ways. In Bukit Panjang's case, the grassroots movement to preserve its toponymic heritage proved oddly reminiscent of the forms of collective action which had once defined it as a "town on the byway". History's relationship with place may thus prove cyclical rather than linear. It is history-as-social-memory that matters where place meanings are concerned, rather than history-as-a-linear-process, in which events are arranged and ordered neatly by historians with the benefit of hindsight.[10]

Endings and Beginnings

In 1995, renowned architect Rem Koolhaas expressed the fear that the breakneck speed of development in Singapore was resulting in a "tabula rasa". This term denoted a razed plane bereft of any traces of the past, that would, in turn, produce a new, sterile, and clinical landscape.[11] Some 20 years later, it is clear that the worst of Koolhaas' fears have not come true. Unprecedented alterations to Singapore's landscape have indeed taken place, but these developments have neither obliterated nor replaced distinctive place identities in Singapore. As all articles in this bicentennial series have highlighted, a complex process of layering has been afoot – one in which new meanings of place build upon rather than completely replace the old; but also one in which old layers occasionally come to the fore when unearthed.

The popular perception of Singapore being continually confronted with the erasure of its place heritage is one that remains. This is accentuated whenever a major redevelopment project – be it the demolition of flats at Dakota Crescent or the excavation of Bukit Brown – hits the headlines.[12] Moreover, concerns remain that preservations of the past, as in the case of Tiong Bahru, are but token showcases preserved to placate criticism, and simply existence of places sans their actual spirit. In what ways, if any, can the ordinary Singaporean respond? There is no easy answer to this; but we can, perhaps, take guidance from Australian academic Paul Carter, who on the occasion of Australia's bicentenary commemoration in 1988, critiqued the tendency to see history merely as a "form of writing, a linear archive manufactured after the event".[13] Arguing against the primacy given to "cause-and-effect narrative history which [gives] the impression that events unfold according to a logic of their own", he called instead for "history in motion" – one in which processes are "continually beginning and continually ending", and where "history and the making of history are one and the same thing".[14] His contention for society to look beyond history as a form of written narrative, and consider how history is continually enacted, performed and constituted is one that we could pay heed to as well. For this reason, it is only apt that the first article in this issue on Tiong Bahru marks both an end and a beginning. It is the end of an anthology, but it is also a beginning for all of us to consider the lived, affective ways in which we create, and mould place histories and identities in our everyday lived realities.

Further Reading

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Notes

[1] Lim Wen Jun Gabriel, "Introduction: Building Singapore's Place Identity," *MUSE SG* 11, no. 37 (2018): 5, 9.

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[5] Bryan Goh, "Diversity in a Teochew Enclave," *MUSE SG* 11, no. 38 (2018): 10.

[6] Brenda S. A. Yeoh and Lily Kong, "The Notion of Place in the Construction of History, Nostalgia and Heritage in Singapore," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 17, no. 1 (1996): 60-61.

[7] James Mah Yi Hong, "Serangoon Gardens: Living Side by Side with the Europeans," *MUSE SG* 12, no. 39 (2019): 9.

[8] Arjun Appadurai, "The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition," in *Culture and Public Action*, eds. Vijayendra Rao and Michael Walton (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 60.

[9] Mitch Rose, "The Problem of Power and the Politics of Landscape: Stopping the Greater Cairo Ring Road," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 32, no. 4 (2007): 470-471.

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[11] Rem Koolhaas, "Singapore Songlines: Portrait of a Potemkin Metropolis… or Thirty Years of Tabula Rasa," in *Small, Medium, Large, and Extra Large*, eds. Rem Koolhaas, Bruce Mau, and Jennifer Sigler (Rotterdam: O10 Publishers, 1995), 1015-1021.

[12] Melody Zaccheus, "Demolition Work to Start for Dakota Crescent and Pearl Bank Apartments," *The Straits Times*, October 8, 2019, https://str.sg/J33V; "Singapore digs up graves to build new motorways, including Bukit Brown cemetery where early Chinese immigrants rest," *South China Morning Post*, January 3, 2019, https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/2180501/singapore-digs-graves-build-new-motorways-including-bukit.

[13] Paul Carter, The Road to Botany Bay: *An Exploration of Landscape and History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 346.

[14] Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, xvii, 346, 351.

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