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BIENNIAL











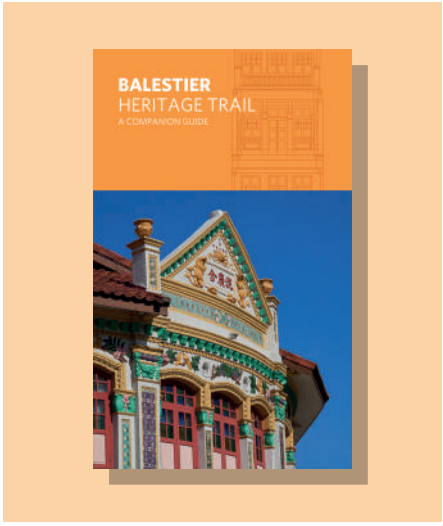

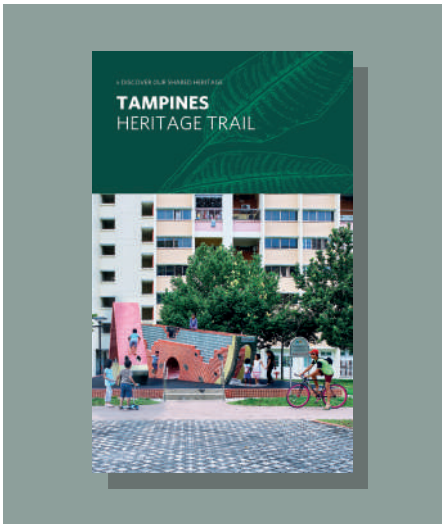

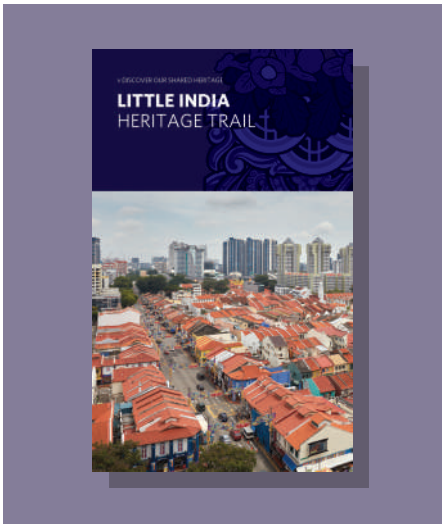

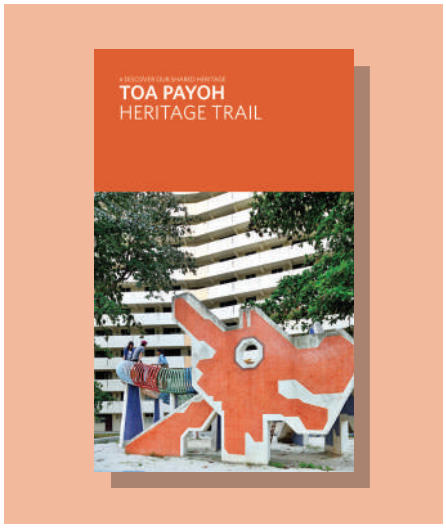

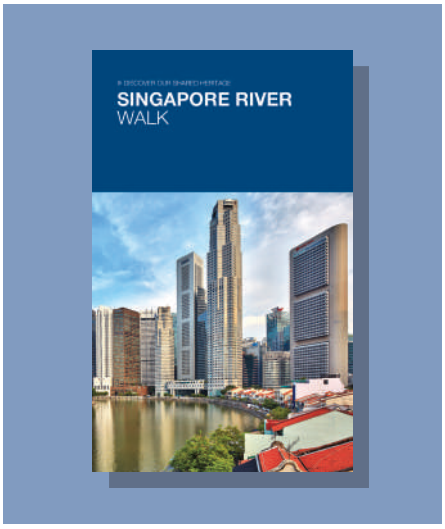

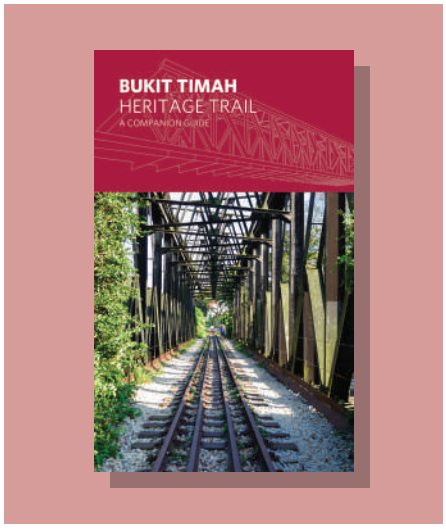

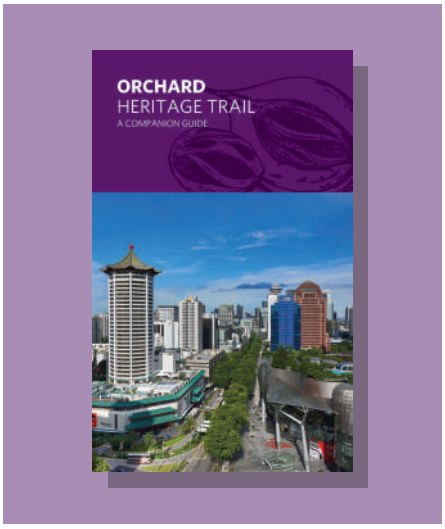

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FOREWORD

Welcome to the second issue of our four-part series that commemorates Singapore's bicentennial by showcasing place histories which have shaped and contributed to the Singapore Story!

For this issue, the National Heritage Board has partnered students from National University of Singapore's History Society (NUS HISSOC) to jointly explore the history of eight more towns, their key milestones and the challenges they have faced in their development.

We first shine the spotlight on Hougang and Chai Chee, highlighting how these two towns navigated their changes in ethnic composition and built up a strong spirit of neighbourliness. We also trace the evolution of two formerly remote towns, Woodlands and Jurong, into industrial and transport nodes that played key roles in Singapore's economic development.

We then examine how the philanthropic legacies of Eunos and Whampoa were kept alive through the various community self-help initiatives in these towns, and explore the interesting transformation of Tai Seng from a town once known for its gang and criminal activities, to a quiet industrial and residential estate today.

This issue ends with a feature on Orchard, Singapore's most prestigious address, tracing its evolution from an area of plantations and nutmeg orchards to a desirable suburb and finally to the shopping heart of Singapore it is today.

On behalf of the team at MUSE SG, we hope that you will find the place histories of these eight towns to be interesting and insightful, and we certainly hope that they will spark off your interest to explore even more of Singapore's rich heritage!

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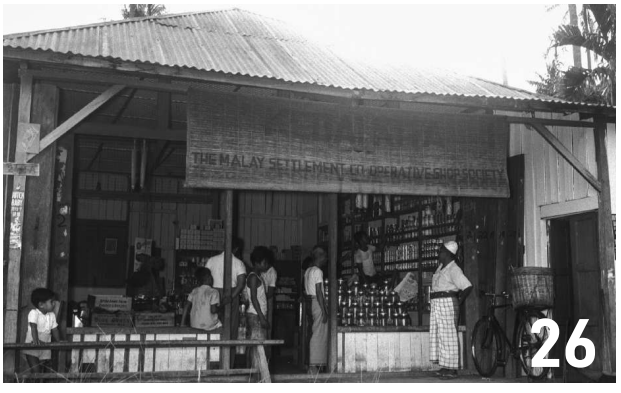
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HOUGANG:
DIVERSITY IN A TEOCHEW ENCLAVE

Text by Bryan Goh

01 Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 2018
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

02 Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1976
Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

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I recently had a memorable encounter. After getting into a taxi and informing the driver of my destination, I was identified as a fellow *Aukang-nang* (a Teochew phrase meaning someone from Hougang). Puzzled, I asked the driver how he knew that I was a resident and not merely a visitor. He responded: "Only *Aukang-nang* would pronounce the place as 'au-kang' and not 'hou-kang' or 'how-gang'; you must be an *Aukang-nang*!"

It seems like being an *Aukang-nang* is synonymous with belonging to the Teochew dialect group, given how the place name is pronounced. Beyond language, many people in Hougang are also linked to the Catholic faith. Michael Chiam shares that when people "see my Catholic name, and hear me speaking Teochew, they immediately know I am an Aukang-boy".[1]

This article explores the common practices and experiences of the Aukang-nang that have, over time, solidified into the place heritage that sets the Aukang-nang apart as a unique community. The term Aukang-nang eventually expanded to include non-Teochews living in the area who both spoke the Teochew dialect and adopted Teochew cultural practices.[2] As a long-time resident of Hougang, I feel a certain pride in belonging to such a heritage, which also resonates in the taxi driver's proclamation – "you must be an Aukang-nang!"

Hougang or Aukang?
More Than Just a Difference in Spelling

"Aukang", which literally means "back harbour" in Teochew, refers to Singapore's north-eastern harbour located at the end of Serangoon Road, near Sungei Serangoon. This was in relation to Keppel Bay, the main "front harbour" in the south. Similar to other trunk roads in Singapore, Serangoon Road was marked using stones placed in one-mile graduations from the General Post Office (present day Fullerton Hotel). This legacy of referring to landmarks based on their location vis-à-vis the milestones still resonates in Hougang today. It is not uncommon, still, to hear *Aukang-nang* refer to the Kovan area as Aukang Lak Gor Cheok, which translates directly as "Hougang's 6th milestone".[3]

After the Speak Mandarin Campaign in 1979, the Housing & Development Board (HDB) started referring to Hougang Town by its Mandarin-based name "Hougang" instead of the original Teochew name "Aukang".[4] However, the two names do not refer to the exact same boundaries. Present-day Hougang Town is bordered by the Kallang-Paya Lebar Expressway, Upper Paya Lebar Road, Yio Chu Kang Road and Buangkok Drive. This covers a much larger area than the historic boundaries of Aukang which Rev. Fr. Augustine Tay calls a "Teochew Kingdom".[5] Tay is the first *Aukang-nang* to become the Parish Priest (2002 to 2007) of the Roman Catholic Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Nativity Church) there.

This "Teochew Kingdom" of Aukang comprised of numerous kampongs located from around the 5th milestone of Serangoon Road (around Upper Serangoon Shopping Centre today) to the fishery located at the end of Serangoon Road (around Punggol Park today). Between Yio Chu Kang Road and the 5th milestone, the Eurasian communities resided in bungalows amidst their fruit orchards.[6] However, the two communities did not live in mutual isolation. One site of interaction was the popular Simon Road Market at the 6th milestone. The market, frequented by both Eurasians and Teochews, was named after Simon Aroozoo (1849-1931), a Eurasian who had inherited the land from his boss, the wealthy estate owner Gan Eng Seng (1844-1899).[7] Over time, the *Aukang-nang* label was gradually extended to these Eurasians living on the fringes, who also conversed fluently in Teochew, the lingua franca of the market.[8]

Places such as Simon Road Market and its surrounding sites of interaction established Aukang as a social centre of present-day Hougang Town. The rest of this article further evidences a diversity of communities which identified with each other as *Aukang-nang* through the common, albeit unspoken, norms and practices linked to the locale.

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03 Shophouses along Upper Serangoon Road, 1986
Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

04 Kampong Serangoon Kechil, one of the kampongs of Aukang, 1986
Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

05 St Paul's Church, 2018
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

Diversity Amidst a Teochew-Catholic Majority

The first records of a community at the end of Serangoon Road were written by a French priest, Fr. Ambrose Maistre, of The Société des Missions étrangères de Paris (MEP) order.[9] He noted that the first settlers were a handful of Teochew farmer-fishermen from Shantou, China. Maistre arrived in 1852 after these Teochews had put down roots to attend to their pastoral needs. In 1857, Maistre purchased a plot of land from the British East India Company and built a small attap church. Following the establishment of the physical church was an influx of Teochew Catholics aided by the missionary networks of the MEP. Maistre aided the migration through his contact with the MEP bishop in Shantou.[10]

The MEP also started the fishery that would eventually become known as Kangkar ("river mouth" in Teochew) to facilitate the farmer-fisherman lifestyle of the Catholic Teochews.[11] With the MEP granting plots of mission land cheaply for residential and farming activities, the community grew, and by the 1920s, kampongs like Aukang and Kangkar (formally known as Serangoon Village) had been established.[12] At the core of Aukang was the Nativity Church built in 1901, which grew in tandem with the local Catholic Teochew community. By 1933, the church had to double in size to cater to the larger congregation.[13] A couple of decades later, another two new churches were started in the area – the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary near the 5th milestone in 1953, and the Church of St Anne's in Sengkang in 1961.[14]

By 1970, about 70 per cent of Aukang's residents were Teochew Catholics, a legacy of the church's role in developing the area. Aukang thus gained a reputation as the "Holy Land" of Singapore.[15] This title was not only ascribed by the *Aukang-nang*, but even memoralised in the Nativity Church's 150th Anniversary Magazine, "Holy Ground".[16] This reputation came from the church having produced the highest number of ordinations into the Roman Catholic clergy, including those of local archbishops Nicholas Chia and William Goh.[17]

The church also played an important role as an education provider for residents in Aukang. Due to the availability of cheap mission land, there was an unprecedented concentration of Catholic schools in Aukang. By the 1950s, there were four Catholic schools in the area. These schools had a lasting impact on the *Aukang-nang* as they provided residents with a common educational experience. Three of these schools – Montfort School, Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (CHIJ) Punggol Convent and Holy Innocents High School – continue to operate in Hougang today.[18] The fourth, Hai Sing Catholic School, relocated to Pasir Ris in 1990.[19] The non-Catholics in Aukang also attended these schools, and some like Justina Yeo and Michael Chiam converted

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06 Masjid Haji Yusoff, 2018
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

07 Nine Emperor Gods Temple, 1980
Ronni Pinsler Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

08 A procession at the Nine Emperor Gods Temple, 1990
Singapore Tourism Board Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

upon graduating from them, claiming that it was a natural step in life as they were already accustomed to the Catholic routines.[20]

Besides the Catholics, other religious groups were also present in the Aukang area, such as the small Anglican community of Saint Paul's Church. Started as a house church catering to the English-speaking community in the 1930s, St Paul's Church eventually moved into a new building in 1936, where it is still situated today.[21] The Muslim community, too, had their place of worship at Masjid Haji Yusoff, which was completed in 1921 and extended in 1973.[22] Interestingly, some Malay children also attended the Catholic schools. Fr. Tay, who attended Montfort School, recalls playing at the house of his classmate Ali Bin Abdullah. After a whole day of climbing trees and eating rambutans, Ali's Malay mother would call out to them in Teochew and ask them to drink her home-brewed cooling tea of Chinese herbs to alleviate the "heatiness" of rambutans.[23]

Even within the Teochew community, not all members were Catholic. Taoist Teochews worshipped at the Tou Mu Kung temple built in 1921 at the 5th milestone. The temple, which is also referred to as Kew Ong Yah Temple ("Nine Emperor Gods Temple" in Teochew) was built by Ong Choo Kee as a dedication to the Nine Emperor Gods, whom he learnt about during a work trip to Penang.[24] Worshippers would partake in a yearly procession with an urn containing the Nine Emperor Gods, carrying it in a sedan chair from the temple to Sungei Serangoon. *The Straits Times* reported numerous occasions whereby it drizzled during the procession, even in the fairest of weathers – an omen that the gods approved of their conduct.[25]

In 2005, both Tou Mu Kung and Nativity Church were gazetted as National Monuments. These institutions were recognised as being "closely associated with the social life and activities of people, organisations and institutions that have an impact on the community and nation".[26] Their concurrent gazetting reaffirms that religious diversity of Hougang. Yet, this diversity was anything but divisive. In fact, Rosie Lim, who lived in a kampong at Holy Innocents Lane, recalls her neighbour sharing food used in Taoist prayers: "It's not about being Catholic or Taoist, we were one kampong. When our Taoist neighbours shared prayer offering food, we will just join them and eat."[27] These interactions between *Aukang-nang* of various faiths further exemplify a perception of each other as members of the same big kampong, a community that transcended both race and religion.

Hougang's Economic Centres: Defining the Community

This pan-ethnic definition of the *Aukang-nang* also resonates in the two economic centres of Hougang between the 1950s and the 1980s. The first is the Kangkar fishery, which at its prime, saw over 40 tonnes of fish sold daily via the ninety-odd trawlers coming in before dawn each day.[28] Kangkar became incorporated into the shared experience and identity of the *Aukang-nang* due to its proximity to their daily lives. It was even rumoured that an *Aukang-nang* could tell the freshness of a fish just by looking at it.[29] After the auction at the Kangkar fishery, most of the fishmongers would bring their wholesale purchases down to the second economic centre – the 6th Mile Simon Road Market.[30]

The Simon Road Market was the go-to place in the 1960s for fresh produce from the farms of Hougang and Punggol, and fish from Kangkar.[31] It was a social node of interaction, and aptly exemplifies how the *Aukang-nang* identity transcends racial groups. Fr. John Amestoy, for example, was a French priest posted to Nativity Church who spoke fluent Teochew. He is remembered as someone who was often given freebies at the market as he won the hearts of the stall owners with his Teochew jokes.[32] The small Malay community's presence could also be felt. *The Singapore Monitor* reported in 1984 of a stall by Sadiron Abdul Jafar at the Simon Road Market which sold "*mee rebus* at unbeatable price". The stall, established in 1954, gained a reputation for its 50-cent *mee rebus*.[33] When asked, long-time residents like Rosie Lim and Maria Chng recall it as "the best *mee rebus* they have ever had".

As part of HDB's plans to develop a town centre for Hougang, a market and hawker centre with 183 stalls was built in 1984 at Block 209, opposite the Simon Road junction.[34] Most of the former hawkers and stall owners were relocated to the newly furbished stalls to continue their family businesses. The descendants from a Muslim stall formerly from the old market occupy such a stall at Block 209 today. Maria Chng warns against commenting negatively about the stall or its food in Teochew, because the Malay stall owners can understand every word, being the second generation of *Aukang-nang*.[35]

09 A stall at Simon Road Market, 1986
Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

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10 Hougang Street 21, Block 209 market, 2018
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

Harbour No More

The development of Hougang Town meant that Kangkar fishery had to move, first to Punggol in 1983, and then again to Sembawang in 1997.[36] The harbour also had to make way for the development of Sengkang and Punggol. Kangkar is today memorialised through the names of Kangkar Mall at the 7th milestone, and the Light Rapid Transit (LRT) station in Sengkang. As for the scatterings of kampongs, they have faded into the history books, following the nationwide transition into the urban age.

Yet, it can be said that the heritage of the *Aukang-nang* persists today despite the realities of modernisation. From 1975 to 1980, the government acquired much of the land in Hougang for redevelopment. While most of Hougang's kampong dwellers were resettled into New Towns, a number of *Aukang-nang* later purchased resale flats to move back to the area. One such resident is Lim Sui Kok, who explained that "we like this place, it has become so much a part of us".[37] Today, Nativity Church still conducts Teochew Masses and retains its practices as a "Teochew parish".[38] The large presence of Catholic schools within the area has not changed, although they have been joined by other secular schools like Xinmin Primary and Secondary School and Yuying Secondary School.[39] Moreover, there remains a significant number of Teochew porridge, Teochew fishball noodles, and even Teochew cake shops along Aukang Lak Gor Cheok next to Simon Road.

Through the years, the people of Hougang have created a community built upon shared memories of activities conducted throughout the estate. It is clear then that the place identity of Aukang as the "Teochew Kingdom" is a notion that surpasses divisions in race or religion to encompass anyone who shares in the Teochew culture at the former "back harbour" of Singapore. It is this heritage that evokes a sense of pride when these Singaporeans call themselves *Aukang-nang*.

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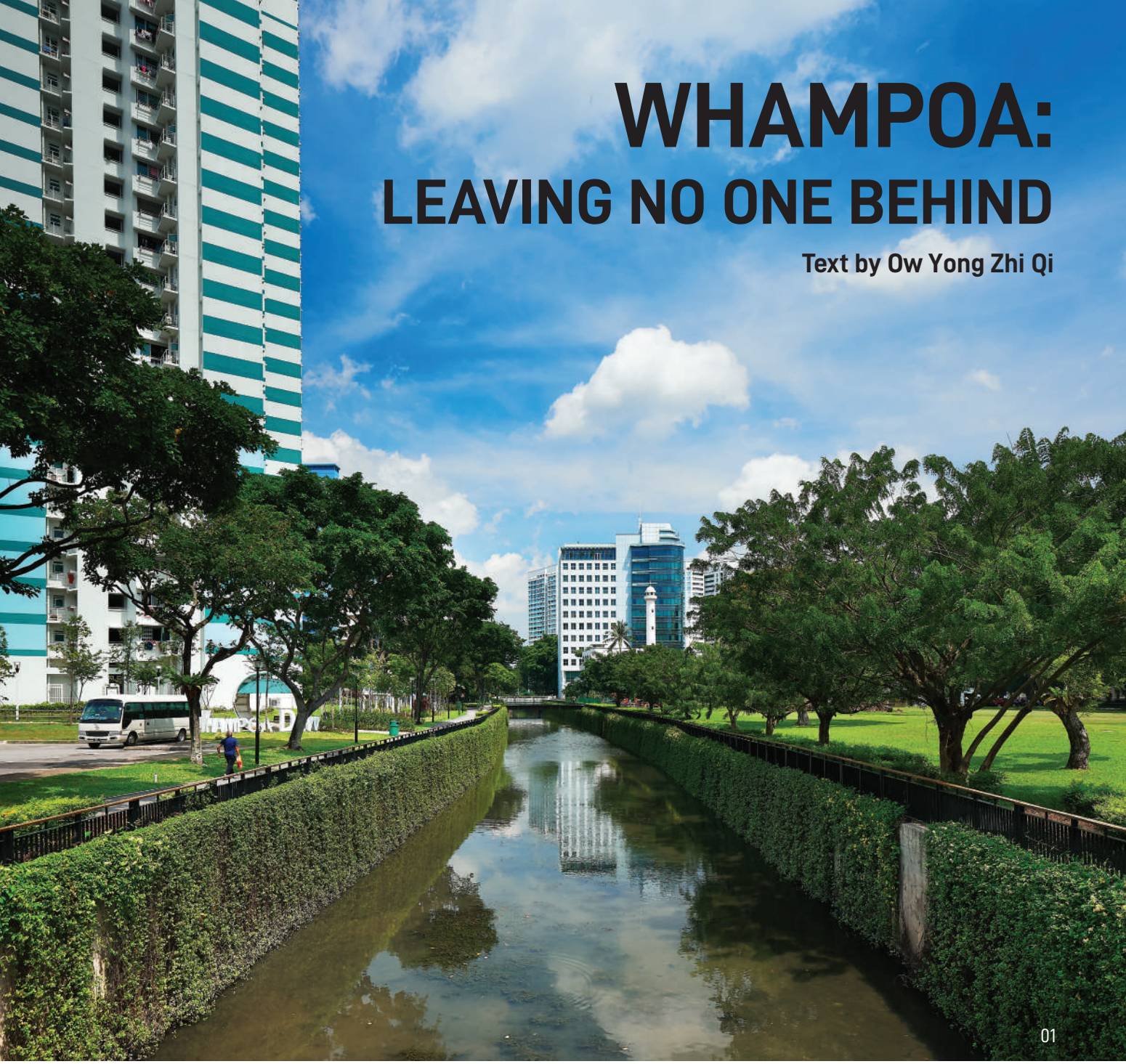
WHAMPOA:
LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

Text by Ow Yong Zhi Qi



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From the early days of Chinese and Indian labourers working on sugarcane plantations to a predominantly-elderly housing estate today, the people of Whampoa have navigated through many epochs in Singapore's history. Throughout, Whampoa has been home to a significant range of vulnerable populations – especially the poor and elderly. By using these communities as a lens to examine the historical trajectory of Whampoa, this article outlines the evolution of Whampoa within the changing landscape of Singapore.

Behind the Names: Joseph Balestier and Hoo Ah Kay

Two place names stand out when we examine the history of Whampoa. The housing estate that is Whampoa today used to be part of an area called Balestier Plain, named after Joseph Balestier, appointed the first American Consul to Singapore in 1837.[1] There, Balestier started a sugarcane plantation, manned by Chinese and Indian labourers, which catered to the English market.[2] In order to process the raw sugarcane, a canal was cut from a small river, channelling water to power a water wheel and

to transport sugar for export. This river came to be known as Balestier River, and was later renamed Sungei Whampoa in the early 1900s.[3] Eventually though, Joseph Balestier deemed his sugarcane business unprofitable and left the area in 1848 after putting the estate up for sale in the same year.[4] However, there were no buyers and the land was acquired by the colonial government in the mid-1850s.[5]

The name Whampoa derives from Hoo Ah Kay, a Chinese businessman who had the rare ability to speak English at a time when most of his non-British contemporaries could not.[6] He could therefore straddle the civilisational border lines between the burgeoning Chinese community and the British colonial authorities in 19th century Singapore. Also known as Whampoa after his hometown, Huangpu, in China, Hoo was the first and only Chinese to be an extraordinary member in the Executive Legislative Council, as well as the consul in Singapore for Russia, China, and Japan.[7] Hoo owned several properties at Serangoon Road (near today's Boon Keng MRT) and along Balestier Road; the latter perhaps explaining why Balestier River was renamed Sungei Whampoa. Subsequently, the river's name likely informed the naming of today's Whampoa housing estate.

Hygiene, Society and the Early Development of Whampoa

While Hoo may have been able to maintain a clean and luxurious residence in Serangoon, the Whampoa area was constantly plagued with sanitation issues.[8] In the mid-1800s, Whampoa was used by the colonial government as quarters for Indian convict labourers, as well as burial grounds for the nearby hospital.[9] In 1857, the plot of land cornering Balestier and Serangoon Road had been designated by municipal authorities for a Paupers' Hospital, later known as Tan Tock Seng Hospital. However, there was insufficient hospital staff, the wards were untidy and unhygienic, and convict inmates often escaped from the hospital grounds, resulting in diseased individuals roaming the streets.[10]

The authorities also allotted burial grounds for the many squatters and coolies residing in the area.[11] However, a lack of funds meant that burials were not done properly, leading to remains resurfacing and decomposing body parts washing into Sungei Whampoa.[12] The concerns regarding hygiene conditions in Whampoa were exacerbated by the perennially water-logged and mosquito-ridden grounds, as well as the presence of quarantine hospitals in the early 1900s.[13] In 1905, *The Straits Times* reported that a "kling" (colonial-era term for an Indian) living within the huts beside Tan Tock Seng Hospital had caught the plague due to the horrifying sanitation conditions that beleaguered the poor in the area.[14]

Some improvement was seen in the early 1900s. With the relocation of dye houses from Bukit Timah to Balestier Plain, supporting private enterprises also emerged, including horse and cattle sheds, as well as shophouses.[15] The latter would come to shape and define the landscape of Balestier Road. Concurrently, the colonial government also increased its regulation of activities, such as monitoring the hygiene of dhobis and piggeries to maintain a clean water source.[16] Nevertheless, much work was still needed to clean up the area.

01 Sungei Whampoa and surrounding flats, 2018
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

02 Tan Tock Seng Hospital, 2018
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

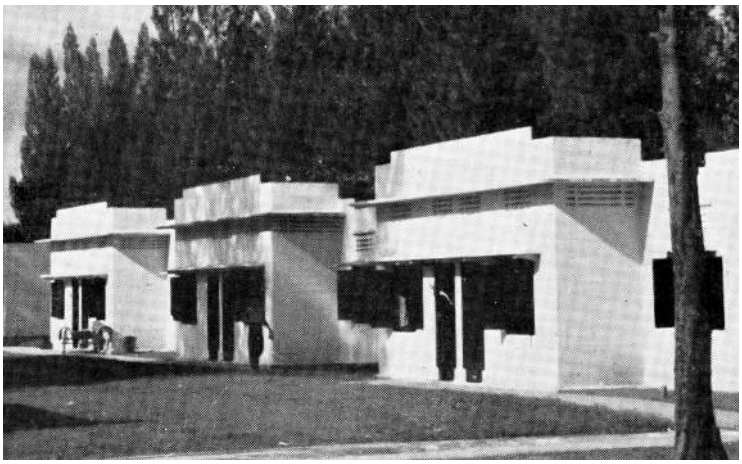
02

The issue of hygiene took another step forward when the municipal government embarked on improving living conditions across Singapore.[17] A proposal to create a housing estate was conceived in the 1910s to deal with the daunting squatter population in the area.[18] This was followed up, in 1918, with a Select Committee recommendation that government subordinates' quarters be built at Balestier Road.[19] However, it was only in 1922 that the government finally announced the construction of temporary housing at Rangoon Road and Balestier Road. These 50 buildings were completed and occupied by 1923.[20]

In 1932, the Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT), the colonial precursor to the Housing & Development Board (HDB), began constructing permanent public housing on Balestier Plain.[21] Originally, the SIT planned to build "small coolie dwellings of three rooms" but ended up constructing "artisan quarters" instead. As the name of these dwelling simply, they were targeted at skilled or semi-skilled workers who could afford to pay a higher rent than unskilled coolies.[22] These quarters were situated around Lorong Limau, off Kim Keat Road. By 1932, 224 artisan quarters had been built, with the number growing to 558 by 1940.[23] These houses marked the beginning of Whampoa's transformation from a squatter settlement into a modern housing estate.

As of September 1939, it was recorded that about 3,800 squatters were still living in poor and insanitary conditions. To alleviate the problem, the municipal committee decided to provide clean piped water and install sanitation infrastructure in the area. The laying of water mains in the area off Sungei Whampoa was also accompanied by the closing of unhygienic wells close to the river.[24]

Alongside the colonial government's attempts to improve the living conditions of the poor were services set up by philanthropic individuals



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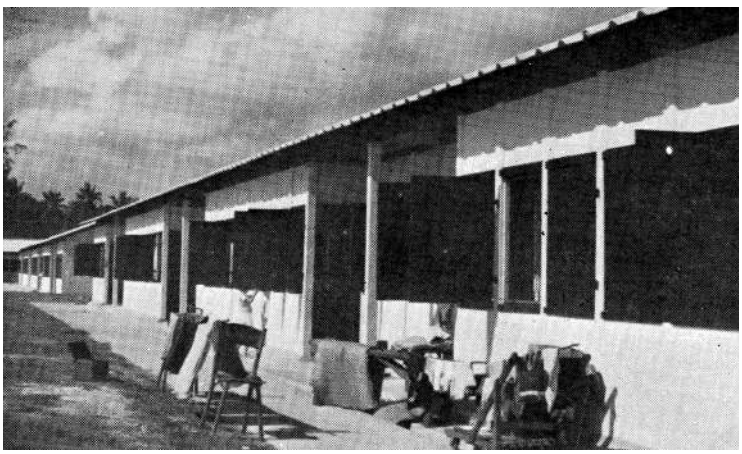

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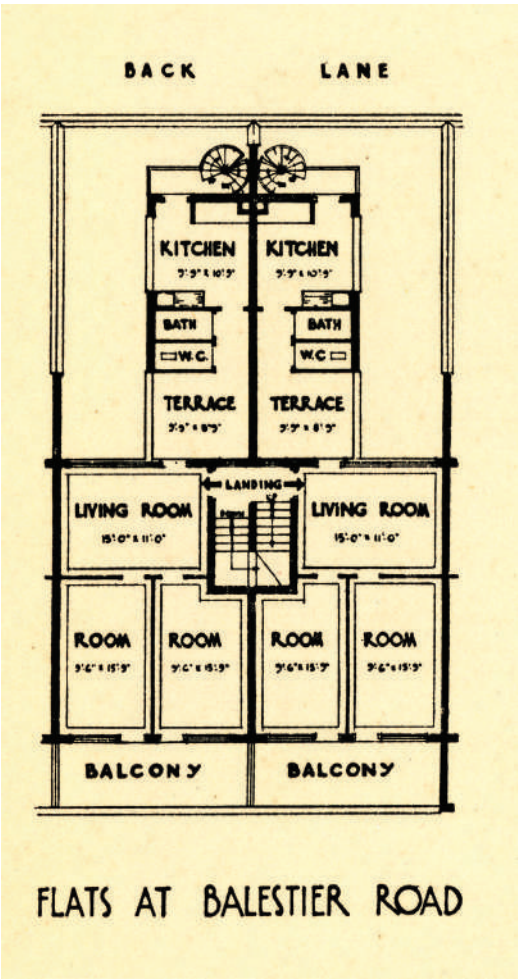

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providing much-needed medical care. For example, the Hainanese Free Clinic provided hospitalisation beds, while an eye hospital set up by Dr Tan Soo Hock offered free eye treatment to the needy.[25] The existence of such charitable organisations helped to fill the gaps left by the government, and mediated the harsh consequences of poverty in Whampoa.

Post-War Development

During the Japanese Occupation, the landscape of the Balestier area was temporarily altered. Many former tenants of the SIT estate at Lorong Limau. had been evicted by the Japanese.[26] Adding to this number of displaced persons were those whose homes were damaged by bombs.[27] Temporary attap dwellings thus started to appear on open fields.[28] The "attendant filth" that accompanied the overcrowded area compelled the SIT to repair roadside drains, concrete paths and back lanes at huge cost.[29] The wake of the Occupation also saw mosquitoes and sanitation of Whampoa again becoming a pressing issue.[30] The Occupation had lasted three years but its ramifications would take a long time to rectify. This was despite the SIT swiftly launching new housing projects in 1947 and 1948 to tackle the squatter problem.[31]

03 Single-storey Artisans' Quarters built by the SIT, 1932-1940
From The Work of the Singapore Improvement Trust, 1927-1947, Image courtesy of Singapore Improvement Trust

04 Tenants moving into the SIT houses at Balestier, undated
From The Work of the Singapore Improvement Trust, 1927-1947, Image courtesy of Singapore Improvement Trust

05 Plan showing interior of SIT flats at Balestier Road, 1932-1940
From The Work of the Singapore Improvement Trust, 1927-1947, Image courtesy of Singapore Improvement Trust

06 Sungei Whampoa, 1983
Lee Kip Lin Collection, Image courtesy of the National Library Board, Singapore

It was during this post-war period that a Whampoe Estate [sic] was constructed, which consisted of 200 artisan's quarters and 192 prefabricated houses along Kim Keat Road. Next to it was Rayman Estate, another SIT development named after Lazarus Rayman, the former Chairman of the SIT. This estate was located closer to the present-day Whampoa Drive. However, both Whampoe and Rayman Estates were often collectively referred to as "Whampoa Estate" in the press, perhaps due to their proximity to Sungei Whampoa.[32]

The hurried building of new accommodations in the Whampoa area resulted in many basic amenities being omitted. The SIT's incomplete installation of electric lights facilitated many instances of petty theft undertaken by those whom SIT Chairman Lee Choon Eng called "bad hats" in the area.[33] Furthermore, many flats did not have piped water, leading residents to rely on public water standpipes.[34] Even though the Balestier Community Centre pressed for amenities like improved lighting and private water supplies for Whampoa residents, these uncomfortable living conditions continued.[35]

The cash-strapped SIT could do little to improve the situation. The low rental of SIT quarters led to a loss of one million dollars in 1952 and half a million in 1953, preventing the SIT from embarking on other pressing housing projects.[36] In 1954, an unpopular rent hike was imposed to allow the SIT to embark on planned works in Havelock Road and Telok Ayer while the residents of Whampoa continued to struggle with muddy back lanes and rain entering the kitchens of apartments.[37] However, Whampoa residents continued to live there, possibly due to their financial situation and a lack of affordable alternatives.

Nevertheless, against the backdrop of slow but continual development, new recreational activities that entertained the masses began to emerge. In the late 1940s, the travelling Sheum and Kamala Circuses applied to the SIT for permission to hold their shows in Whampoa.[38] By the 1950s, such applications to provide cheap entertainment were sent to the Balestier Community Centre instead. These included Chinese wayang (theatrical shows) held at the Rayman Market during the seventh lunar month; today, the Goh Chor Tua Pek Kong Temple near Whampoa still continues to hold wayang performances for the community during important festivals.[39]

While these activities were enjoyable for the adults, the lack of playgrounds meant that children in Whampoa had to improvise. As Tan Ser Kiat, a former student of the Whampoa English School in the late 1950s, relates, aside from some after-school gallivanting, he and his friends would play by Sungei Whampoa and hunt small wild animals.[40] Open-air cinemas in schools were also a cheap option for the community at 10 cents per person. Lim Siam Kim, a former student of Rangoon School in the mid-50s, recalls how he would bring his own stool and "an umbrella in case it rain[ed]" to watch the cinema shows at Whampoa School.[41]

07 Shophouses between Kim Keat Road and Whampoa Drive, 1982
Lee Kip Lin Collection, Image courtesy of the National Library Board, Singapore

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08 Water kiosk at Boon Teck Road, 2018
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

09 Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital, 2018
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

Modern Whampoa

In the 1960s and 70s, living conditions across the island started to improve as the newly established HDB stepped up efforts to resettle villagers into modern housing.[42] Described as a "pocket of poverty" by *The Straits Times*, Whampoa underwent much-needed redevelopment by the HDB in the 1970s.[43] The concrete lining of Sungei Whampoa, new and improved flats by the HDB, and the construction of a hawker centre helped to improve conditions in the "modern slum".[44] The new flats replaced most of the old SIT houses at Whampoe, Rayman and Lorong Limau Estates.

Additionally, the Whampoa Citizens' Consultative Committee began initiatives like the Whampoa Welfare Fund, to help deserving students from poor families with bursaries and to provide the community with welfare grants and recreational activities.[45] To give those who struggled to make ends meet a means of income, stalls in some void decks in Whampoa were built by the HDB and given to the area's social welfare recipients to run.[46] Finally, there was also the Whampoa Consumers' Club, which represented the eagerness of residents to help their own needy families through recreational activities and scholarships. This club was run entirely by volunteers, comprising mainly of residents from Whampoa.[47]

The legacy of ensuring that the vulnerable do not get left behind is still going strong in Whampoa today. The Whampoa Family Service Centre continues to serve the needy in the estate with the promise to "improve the well-being of individuals at every stage of life".[48] Whampoa is also home to Singapore's last free water kiosk at Boon Teck Road – a reminder of times when clean water was a luxury to the working class, and people like rickshaw pullers and bullock cart drivers would stop by to cool off. Volunteers from Thong Teck Sian Tong Lian Sin Sia, a religious charitable organisation along the same street, continue to maintain the kiosk for the occasional thirsty passer-by.[49]

The Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital at Serangoon Road, which took over the former grounds of Tan Tock Seng Hospital in 1910, has also managed to stay true to their original mission.[50] Set up to provide free medical services for the poor and aged, the charitable organisation continues to rely on donations to provide quality care for their patients.[51] With additional governmental aid, the hospital completed the redevelopment of its premises in March 2018, making it the largest single-site nursing home in Singapore.[52]

Future development plans of Whampoa Estate also take into account the area's growing elderly population. As part of the Jalan Besar Town 5-Year Concept Master Plan (2016-2020), senior citizens' fitness corners, residents' corners, and community plazas will be built to encourage interaction between ageing residents.[53] This will

supplement the 2015 initiatives by the Tsao Foundation's Community for Successful Ageing at Whampoa (ComSA@Whampoa).[54] Together, these public spaces and facilities provided by the Town Council and ComSA will enable Whampoa residents to spend more quality time with their families and build meaningful relationships with their neighbours while remaining physically and psychologically healthy in their old age.[55]

Concluding Thoughts

Like most parts of Singapore, life in Whampoa has certainly improved over the years. The old clinics and unhygienic attap huts of yesteryear have given way to state-sanctioned charitable organisations and neatly maintained high-rise flats. Regardless of the changes, communities in the Whampoa area have continued to look out for the vulnerable amongst them. In the past, the poor and sick relied on the generosity of wealthy individuals and philanthropic organisations while today, the needs of the growing elderly population are catered to through subsidised healthcare and customised community facilities to ease their lives.

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CHAI CHEE: IN THE SPIRIT OF NEIGHBOURLINESS

Text by Gavin Leong

01

Chai Chee has gone through great change over the decades, from a rural community of Chinese settlers in the 1920s into a multicultural urban housing estate today. The town's name, which means "vegetable market" in Hokkien (菜市), is indicative of its early history. Indeed, the defining social node of the area was a bustling market which existed before the Japanese Occupation and around which the village developed. Today, the zinc roofs, attap huts, vegetable farms and marketplace have given way to modern Housing & Development Board (HDB) flats, shopping centres and other amenities. Nevertheless, the sense of neighbourliness that originated from its kampong days continues to persist in Chai Chee, where a closely-knit community can still be found.

Chai Chee's story began almost a century ago at the junction between Peng Ann and Peng Ghee roads, which was a common meeting place for people.[2] Over time, farmers from nearby districts such as Bedok, Tanah Merah and Kembangan began to convene here to sell their produce. It is not known when the first vegetable seller set up shop at this junction, but a bustling market soon emerged.

This commercial activity soon led to the development of a predominantly Chinese kampong in the area, also named Chai Chee.[3] By the 1930s, the village had grown to accommodate roughly 50 houses and several hundred villagers, mostly Hokkiens. These houses, often inhabited by extended families of 15 to 20 people, were mostly made of attap and

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01 Chai Chee, 2018
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

02 Vegetable farm in Chai Chee, undated
Image courtesy of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

03 Yew Ghee Sia, undated
Image from Chai Chee Revisited (1993) by Sumiko Tan, Michael Liew and Kampong Chai Chee CCC

04 Early HDB flats in Chai Chee, 1970s
Image from Chai Chee Revisited (1993) by Sumiko Tan, Michael Liew and Kampong Chai Chee CCC

wood (zinc roofs were a rarity then).[4] The market served as the de facto centre of the village for many years, even attracting customers from other parts of Singapore.[5] Besides vegetables, other produce such as meat, fish, biscuits and other snacks were also sold there. Hawkers set up their stalls in the early hours of the morning, and operated until around 11am.[6]

Eventually, Chai Chee developed beyond just a place for commercial activity to include other communal spaces. There was a wayang stage in the centre of the marketplace where villagers watched free performances during festivals such as the Seventh Month or Lunar New Year, while the Kong Eng Open Air Cinema screened both Chinese and English films.[7] In terms of education, there was Pin Ghee Public School, which was built with donations from members of the Chinese community.[8]

In 1942, the Japanese invasion and occupation of Singapore disrupted the peace of everyday life. Yeo Hong Eng, writer and long-time resident of Chai Chee, recalls that many people sought refuge

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with relatives and friends by fleeing to rural areas, including Chai Chee.[9] The family of Chua Tian Chye, who lived at Desker Road, also fled to a relative's house in Chai Chee.[10] The population here swelled with wartime refugees and remained so until the war ended in 1945. After that, the people of Chai Chee were able to slowly begin the task of rebuilding.

Civic organisations such as Yew Ghee Sia (友义社) would play a key role in post-war rebuilding and recovery efforts. This organisation was started in 1940 to help opium addicts but became dormant during the Japanese Occupation (1942-1945). Later, it resumed its activities in the post-war period and established a centre for opium addicts.[11] According to Yeo, the association also ensured that its members received adequate treatment for tuberculosis (a lethal disease in the 1950s) at the SATA Chest Clinic in Chai Chee.[12] Another organisation was the Lam Yong Poh Clan which started various scholarship funds for its members.[13] This spirit of helping the community during tough times eventually became a characteristic of Chai Chee's heritage.

Social life in Kampong Chai Chee throughout the 1950s and early 1960s generally carried on as it did before the Japanese Occupation. Yeo recalls that the kampong consisted mostly of Hokkiens, with relatively few Teochews, Cantonese or Hainanese, and even fewer Indians and Malays, as most of the latter lived in nearby Kampong Melayu. Festivals such as the Seventh Month continued to be celebrated on the same wayang stage. Community bonds among residents also remained strong, with hawkers, shopkeepers and customers reminding each other to buy traditional food for prayers at the end of the month.[14] Yeo recalls that the community was so close-knit that residents could immediately tell if you were a new resident or a stranger.[15] The community was also protective of each other and Yeo remembers that when narcotics officers came, no one would rat out the street vendors who were selling contraband cigarettes.[16]

In 1968, three years after Singapore's independence, the Kampong Chai Chee constituency was established with the People's Action Party's Sha'ari Tadin serving as its first Member of Parliament.[17] At this point, there were still enclaves of Chinese and Malays in Chai Chee and Kampong Melayu respectively.[18] However, in the 1970s, Chai Chee saw the development of both a housing and an industrial estate.[19] This transition from the old attap or zinc-roofed huts to the new HDB flats created changes in dynamics as different ethnic groups, such as Malays from Geylang Serai, relocated to Chai Chee. This meant that the predominantly Chinese community had to learn to accept their new neighbours, thereby breaking the long-time segregation of the Chinese and Malay communities.[20] Simultaneously, these residents also had to deal with the impact of resettlement as they transitioned from their old rural lifestyles into apartment-style living.[21] By 1975, Chai Chee's population had swelled to 20,000 due to resettlement efforts. Even the iconic Chai Chee marketplace was rehoused from the junction between Peng Ann and Peng Ghee roads to the former Block 29 along Chai Chee Road – a cleaner environment, but one that lacked the informal familiarity of its previous location.[22] The market has since been replaced with newer residential dwellings.

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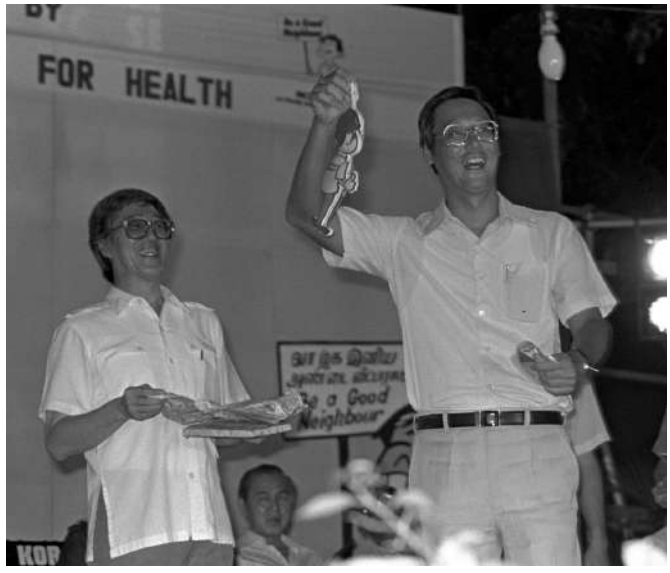

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Over time, Tadin began initiatives that were in line with the spirit of Chai Chee's sense of community. This included organising send-off dinners for the young men of the constituency entering National Service.[23] There were also contests for the cleanest blocks, kampongs and stalls as part of the government's Keep Singapore Clean Campaign to foster a sense of ownership among residents. Additionally, a grassroots initiative meant to protect the interests of residents was introduced, called the Chai Chee Consumers' Club. This helped residents fight inflation by selling essentials such as rice, sugar and milk powder at low cost. Perhaps the camaraderie and spirit of communal help that was once present in the vegetable market could be said to have continued through the Consumers' Club. The club was closed in 1976 and was replaced by an NTUC cooperative store. As with the club and the vegetable market before, residents would still be able to purchase affordable commodities.

The Chai Chee Citizens' Consultative Committee (CCC), a grassroots organisation that helped bridge the gap between residents and their leaders, was crucial in implementing campaigns and helping the community. In 1973, together with the Lions Club of Singapore West, the CCC organised a charity variety show to raise money for a Kampong Chai Chee Scholarship Fund. It also created a central fund-raising body for the whole constituency in 1977, the first of its kind in Singapore.[24] The CCC encapsulated Chai Chee's sense of community and togetherness, working closely with MPs such as Tadin, and later, Major Fong Sip Chee to organise events, as well as represent the concerns of the people. Fong, who was elected as MP of the constituency in 1976, launched the Good Neighbour Day movement in 1982 to promote neighbourliness, harmony and tolerance among residents.[25] For the inaugural Good Neighbour Day, grassroots leaders published a book titled *Our Cultures: Yours and Mine* to educate people and promote cross-cultural understanding.[26]

Fong also addressed the nostalgia felt toward the kampong past and suggested that despite these new high-rise living spaces, a lasting community spirit could still be forged within the "vertical kampong".[27] To this end, he worked with grassroots leaders to create Micos (Malay, Indian, Chinese and other Singaporeans), a mascot that symbolised the spirit of good neighbourliness in Kampong Chai Chee.[28] Fong also gave names to the four committee zones of Chai Chee, which previously went by numbered designations, to provide a more personalised flavour and strengthen each zone's sense of identity.[29]

There was also an initiative to turn Kampong Chai Chee into a "garden estate" with better amenities and communal spaces.[30] The former vice-chairman of Kampong Chai Chee CCC, Tan Kheng Jin, said in an interview that the collective effort of the community was important, and done in the spirit of *gotong royong* (the idea of helping each other).[31] These *gotong royong* projects were organised by the

CCC to repair roads and bridges, and beautify the environment.[32] Indeed, after the constituency was formed, political institutions recognised this spirit of community in Chai Chee and utilised it to implement new initiatives and changes.

More jobs were also created as the industrial estate developed, and companies were invited to set up factories. An example is the Rollei camera company's training centre and factory, established in 1971.[33] That same year, more flats were built to accommodate new factory workers.[34] Chai Chee was by then an urbanised HDB estate, with shophouses, factories, a school and even a community centre. Concomitantly, the Chinese and Malay enclaves of old gave way to a new multicultural constituency.[35]

The spirit of good neighbourliness in Chai Chee that began in the kampong days persisted into the 1990s, as seen through numerous kind gestures by residents. One such example is Tay Suat Beng, a retired kindergarten teacher who helped a struggling family by buying necessities for cooking and books for their boys in school. He was later awarded Kampong Chai Chee's 1996 Good Neighbour Award.[36] Other individuals included Tan Choon Kiang, who brought lunch to the elderly and disabled of Chai Chee estate and spent time with them, as well as Nabi Ha binti Malim, a Residents' Committee secretary of Ansar neighbourhood who initiated a survey whereby the results persuaded the HDB to sell flats to many residents living in rented units.[37] During the period of haze in 2013, Poh Seng Kah along with his brother and son, were also noted for their help in distributing N95 masks to fellow residents in Chai Chee. This was a demonstration of neighbourly concern which helped the community even before government responses could fully tackle the larger problem.[38]

Over its long history, Chai Chee's communities have repeatedly shown what good neighbourliness is by helping each other in times of need. From a village of attap huts and vegetable farms, the landscape of Chai Chee has seen much change to become the urbanised housing estate of today. Since the 1990s, there has been an increase in high-density housing around Chai Chee. In addition, an Integrated Transport Hub with residences has been built above Bedok bus interchange, and Kampong Chai Chee Community Centre has relocated into the new Community Club at Heartbeat@Bedok.[39] While segregated racial enclaves have given way to a multicultural town, the spirit of community and neighbourliness from the kampong days centred around the vegetable market seems to have endured numerous physical changes, and looks likely to persist into the future.

07

05 Opening of the Chai Chee Consumers' Club, 1974
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

06 Minister of Defence and Second Minister for Health Goh Chok Tong (right) and Minister of State for Culture and Member of Parliament for Chai Chee Major Fong Sip Chee (left) at the opening of Chai Chee Good Neighbour Day, 1983
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

07 Heartbeat@Bedok, which houses the Kampong Chai Chee CC, 2018
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

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EUNOS:
A LEGACY CONTINUED

Text by S. Sivapriya

01

Time has witnessed the transition of Eunos from a planned settlement allocated as a Malay reserve, to an area that nurtures unplanned social developments through community self-help initiatives. The name "Eunos" comes from one of Singapore's most notable leaders – Mohammed Eunos Bin Abdullah. Eunos Abdullah was the first Malay representative to be allocated a seat in the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements in 1924.[1] Through his position, Eunos Abdullah strongly advocated for "Malays to be given a fair share in the Government of the country".[2] He also encouraged the formation of self-help groups to address pressing socio-economic issues such as education and housing.[3] His vision for the preservation of the community was often articulated through policies underscoring their socio-economic development, preserving the essence of "Malayness" and fostering Malay nationalism.[4]

Also realising the need for greater political representation beyond the Legislative Council, Eunos Abdullah rallied the elites of the Malay community to form the Malay Union (also known as Kesatuan Melayu Singapura) in 1926.[5] The Malay Union aimed to "encourage the Malays to play a more active role in the government and to make the community more aware of the importance of education and an understanding of the politics of the country".[6] As the Malay Union's first president, Eunos Abdullah championed the creation of Singapore's first designated Malay Reserve – Kampong Melayu or the "Malay Settlement", a large part of which would later become today's Eunos.[7]

Following Abdullah's numerous petitions to the Legislative Council for land grants, Kampong Melayu was finally formed in 1929.[8] Abdullah's concept of Malay nationalism centred around creating a "*bangsa* community", which he described as the construction

01 Eunos MRT and its surrounds, 2018
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

02

of a Malay race through the establishment of a Malay village.[9] In his words, Kampong Melayu served as a place where Malays could preserve their "Malayness" by "living among their own people in the manner to which they were accustomed".[10] Hence, the Malay Reserve provided a base for promoting Malay culture and strengthening Malay nationalism.[11]

Creation of Jalan Eunos Malay Settlement

The 1929 Great Depression occurred immediately after the proposal for the Malay Settlement was approved, creating massive setbacks to Eunos Abdullah's plans. Unemployment and high rent made resettlement unaffordable, leaving 90 per cent of land plots unoccupied.[12] The loss of rent from vacant houses, coupled with the shortage of government funds, resulted in the stalling of infrastructural developments within Kampong Melayu.[13]

Despite these ongoing problems, Kampong Melayu was renamed Jalan Eunos Malay Settlement in 1930, a reflection of Eunos Abdullah's contributions and legacy.[14] Plans were made for the houses to be neatly arranged within the area, and the municipality was to provide basic amenities such as water standpipes, roads and markets. Furthermore, the government laid out a set of rules and regulations for the planned Malay Reserve. Notably, occupation was confined to "persons belonging to any Malayan race, professing the religion of Islam, and born in Singapore". Houses were also leased out on a rental-basis and no house deeds were issued to settlers.[15]

The lack of government funding during the Great Depression served as an important reminder to the Malay community of the importance of banding together through mutual self-help initiatives.[16] This led to the creation of the Singapore Malay Settlement General Purposes Co-operative Society in 1936, which aimed to provide Eunos villagers with basic necessities at low prices.[17] Furthermore, the Great Depression also illustrated the pressing need for Malays to be economically self-sufficient. Hence, in 1938, the Malay Union organised Singapore's

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02 Malay Settlement Co-operative Society, 1956
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

03 Malay Settlement Co-operative Society shop, 1953
Registry of Co-operative Societies Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

04 Yang Di-Pertuan Negara Yusof Ishak at the opening of a painting class by the Malay Youth Artists group at Kampong Melayu Boys' School, 1964
Yusof Ishak Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

first *pasar minggnan* (traditional Malay fair) to "get together all Malays and encourage them in the art of selling and in the art of handicrafts", thus promoting entrepreneurialism amongst the community.[18] Another institution that catered exclusively to the Malay population was Sekolah Perempuan Melayu (also known as Kampong Melayu Boys School), located at the centre of the Malay Settlement. Opened in 1936, the school reflected Abdullah's aim of providing Malay boys with education, so as to facilitate social advancement.[19]

Formal regulations and settlement planning helped ensure that only Malays resided within the Malay Reserve.[20] For example, loudspeakers at the Sekolah Perempuan Melayu broadcast the news in Malay across the settlement every evening.[21] Although such measures maintained a sense of "Malay exclusiveness" in terms of population demographics, there were still cross-communal interactions with the Chinese and Arab communities that lived in the surrounding areas. One such community was the Chinese-majority Kampong Batak, located at the intersection of Jalan Eunos and Changi Road, in close proximity to the Malay Settlement. Cross-cultural interactions with residents there included mutual visits during festive occasions such as Hari Raya Aidilfitri and Chinese New Year.

Another community consisted of early Arab merchants such as the Alkaffs, who developed key communal spaces in the areas surrounding the Jalan Eunos Malay Settlement.[22] They built Masjid Al-Kaff at Jalan Abdul Manam in 1932, which became a notable site for religious congregation for the residents of the settlement.[23] Such sites not only encouraged community bonding, but also influenced the lived experiences of the residents of the Jalan Eunos Malay Settlement.[24]

Japanese Occupation

Eunos was left in a state of great disrepair after the Japanese Occupation from 1942-1945, especially because the Japanese used the Jalan Eunos Earth

Quarry to discard large amounts of spent ammunitions.[25] The resulting unhygienic living conditions caused outbreaks of diseases, which the government tried to combat by establishing a government healthcare facility within the Malay Settlement.[26] Education was also affected as shortages of resources and building funds resulted in the closure of schools all around Singapore.[27] In Eunos, the Malay community decided to step up and carry out post-war initiatives targeting socio-economic development in areas such as education, embodying the spirit of self-help envisioned by Eunos Abdullah.[28]

One such example was the establishment of a branch of Sekolah Menysal or the "School of Disappointments", a Malay girls' school, within the Jalan Eunos Malay Settlement. Che Fatimah binte Haji Haron, a Malay women's activist, had recognised the importance of education for Malay women and started the first branch near Arab Street in 1945. Referred to as the "queerest school in Singapore" by *The Singapore Free Press*, this school aimed to reverse the lack of literacy amongst the Malay women and their reliance on menfolk. Hence, the age of students ranged from 15 to 60, with even mothers and grandmothers allowed admission. Che Fatimah single-handedly supported the school at a cost of $120 every month.[29] According to her, the school provided a meeting place for Malay women to catch up on education, and was a key pioneering institution in the emancipation of Malay women.[30] However, due to increasing operational costs, Che Fatimah was unable to continue the operation of the school's various branches and handed over the reins to the Malay Union's Women's Wing in November 1947. Through this collaboration, the Eunos branch was transformed into Kampong Melayu Girls' School.[31]

In 1960, the area known as Jalan Eunos was extended, and the Chinese population at Kaki Bukit was absorbed into the Eunos area.[32] This boundary shift turned Eunos from a purely Malay Reserve into a place housing Malays and Chinese. Like their Malay neighbours, the Chinese villagers too exhibited a spirit of self-help by creating the Jalan Eunos Vernacular Beneficial Association in 1958.[33] Members donated $1 every month, and the association gave out annual bursaries to members' children who excelled in their studies.[34]

Abdullah's vision of promoting socio-economic development remained a relevant goal for the Eunos community, as seen from the various government initiatives and ground-up community efforts. The government-initiated Malay cooperatives that existed before the Japanese Occupation continued to provide basic necessities at reduced prices for the Malay community.[35] However, they did not promote socio-economic progress, prompting Eunos residents to create the post-war Malay Thrift and Investments Co-operative Society (MTICS) to address this issue. The MTICS received monetary grants from the government to help Eunos residents set up small businesses. Furthermore, the society brought Malay fishermen together to pool their catch and sell them at fixed prices.[36] This community initiative resulted in price stabilisation and reduced competition between fishermen, allowing for some form of economic stability among these fishermen.

Merger and Race Riots

Although racial relations in the Jalan Eunos Malay Settlement were positive up till this time, the 1963 merger of Singapore with Malaysia saw the politicisation of race-based issues, heightening racial tensions between the Chinese and Malays. Tensions peaked in 1964 when numerous racial conflicts erupted all over the island, resulting in Eunos experiencing one of the worst fires in Singapore.[37] Many Chinese and Malay families were displaced after their attap houses in the Jalan Eunos Malay Settlement were badly burnt in the fire caused by rioters following clashes during Prophet Muhammad's birthday procession.[38] Fortunately, the spirit of self-help persisted in the form of the Jalan Eunos Benevolent Association, which gathered relief cash and food parcels to aid around 20 affected families, regardless of their race.[39]

Following the riots, high crime rates and lawlessness plagued Eunos, pushing residents to come up with their own solutions.[40] Kampong Tengah, a village located within the Eunos area, pooled resources and cash contributions to build a permanent police post in 1965, replacing the former overly cramped mobile police post.[41] This community initiative not only resulted in greater police protection and lowered crime rates, but also set a fine example for other villages dealing with issues of lawlessness.[42]

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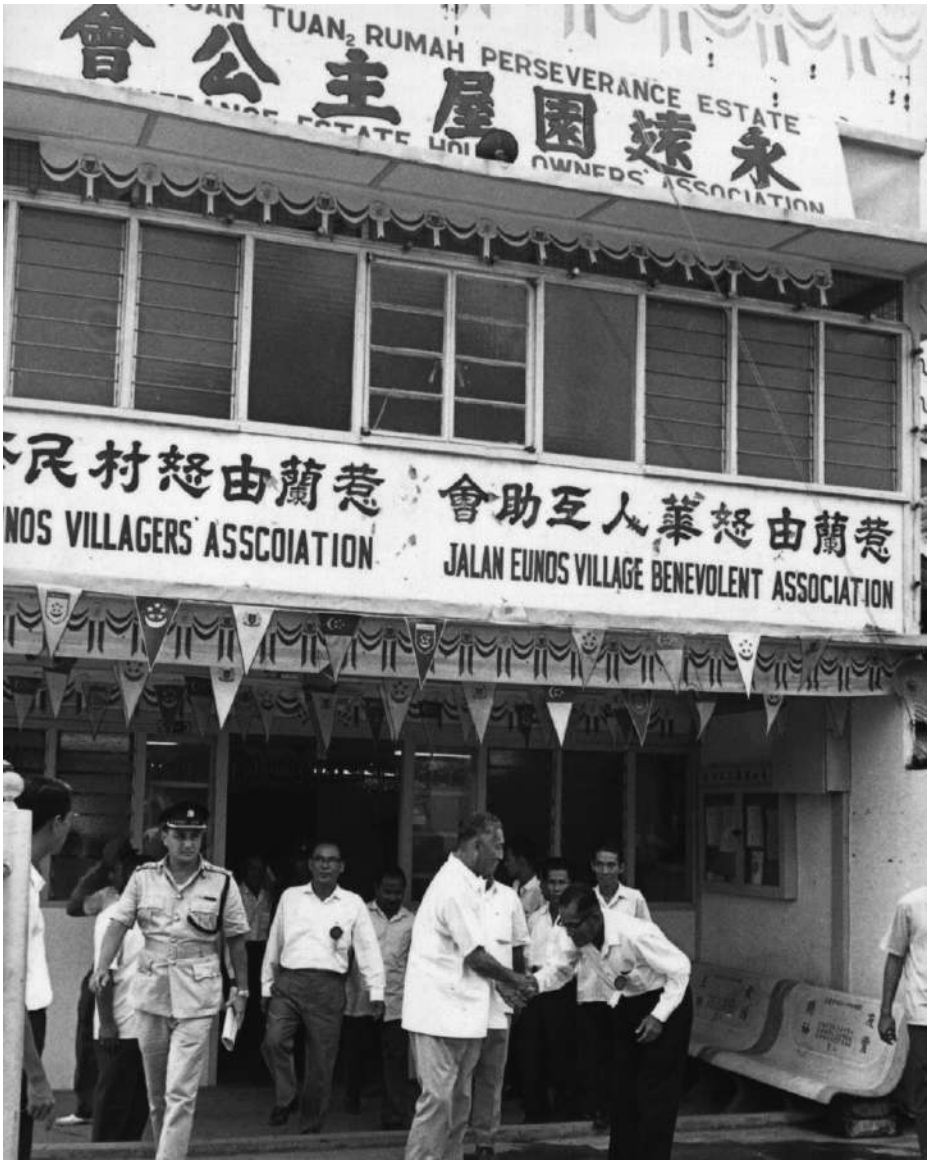

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05 Kampong Eunos fire site, 1963
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

06 Jalan Eunos Village Benevolent Association, 1967
Yusof Ishak Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Changing Estate, Continued Vision

In 1981, the Jalan Eunos Malay Settlement made way for the building of a new Housing & Development Board (HDB) estate and the Pan-Island Expressway. The residents, who were "temporary occupational license holders", were resettled near Bedok.[43] Through this new redevelopment plan, the old Jalan Eunos Malay Settlement was reorganised into adjacent districts such as Eunos, Bedok and Kaki Bukit.[44]

Even so, Eunos Abdullah's vision of nurturing socio-economic development in Eunos persists today in the form of various social welfare organisations. Currently, Block 3 Eunos Crescent houses a "caring hub" at its void deck with three Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs) located side-by-side.[45] These are Shan You Wellness Community, Tembusu Senior Activity Centre, and Thye Hua Kwan Pan-Disability Centre@Eunos. Also located within walking distance from the "caring hub" is Ain Society, a VWO providing social and educational programmes.[46]

Each VWO targets different segments of the community, providing holistic help to Eunos residents. For example, the Tembusu Senior Activity Centre focuses on providing eldercare for active senior citizens, while Thye Hua Kwan Pan-Disability Centre@Eunos focuses on providing aid to residents with physical disabilities.[47] Eunos resident Lee Hark Kee shared: "It is good to have many centres, as not all centres organise the same activities."[48]

Lily Ee, an elderly lady living in the Eunos Crescent Rental Housing flat, added that "it is very convenient to have so many centres nearby. I do not need to cross roads and just have to walk a short distance."[49] The close proximity of the centres also allows residents to engage in various activities from different centres. Resident Sukina Bte Kitto takes full advantage of this proximity by attending brisk walking classes in Tembusu Senior Activity Centre in the mornings, before walking over to Ain Society located in the adjacent block to participate in Tai Chi classes in the afternoons.[50]

Although Eunos Abdullah's vision was largely Malay-centric, the growing multiculturalism of Eunos has transformed its social welfare organisations into facilities for anyone in need of help, regardless of race. According to Sukina: "All races can come to Ain Society to attend the brain stimulation classes, it keeps your mind active".[51] Likewise, the Muhammadiyah Health and Day Care Centre located within Eunos is a Muslim organisation that is open to all, and sees a constant stream of non-Muslim patients.[52]

07

07 Jalan Eunos Malay Settlement, 1975
Housing & Development Board Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

08 The "caring hub" at Eunos Crescent, 2018
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

08

The Legacy Lives On

Through the various phases in history, the place identity of Eunos has slowly evolved from that of a Malay Reserve to a multicultural settlement that is known for housing a multitude of social welfare organisations offering community support to all races. Although Eunos Abdullah's vision of preserving "Malayness" within a racial enclave is no longer applicable, his aim of promoting socio-economic progress remains relevant and has evolved to encompass the larger community. Furthermore, Eunos has and will continue to evolve to address the needs of its future residents. Developmental projects such as future Built-To-Order flats will draw a younger population into the mature Eunos estate with a large proportion of elderly residents, and Eunos will have to strike a balance between addressing the needs of its older as well as younger residents.[53] Hence, in spite of the ever changing demographics of Eunos, it seems that Abdullah's legacy of self-help will continue to live on, albeit in different ways.

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TAI SENG:
THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF CHARN MAU HERN

Text by Goh Poh Ting Priscilla

01

Present day Tai Seng was originally part of a larger locale known as Charn Mau Hern. Meaning "lemongrass farm" in Teochew, Charn Mau Hern hints at the agricultural beginnings and demographics of the Chinese Teochew community that used to live there. The area of Charn Mau Hern stretched from Geylang Serai to Upper Serangoon Road, and was bounded by present day Paya Lebar Road, Upper Serangoon Road, Changi Road and Bedok Reservoir.[1] Over time, however, the association of Tai Seng in the minds of Singaporeans has evolved from a place of lemongrass farms into a crime-ridden neighbourhood and eventually into an industrial and housing estate. As we observe these transformations of Charn Mau Hern, one cannot help but notice also a parallel with the broader development of Singapore.

Initially, Charn Mau Hern was part of the Perseverance Estate owned by Jose d'Almeida, one of the earliest European settlers and landowners in Singapore. He was attracted by Singapore's strategic location, which he discovered while working as a doctor on board a Portuguese warship on its way to Macau.[2] He entrusted a sum of money to Francis James Bernard, the son-in-law of Colonel William Farquhar, and instructed him to obtain a piece of land and construct a house on his behalf. In 1825, d'Almeida and his family moved to Singapore, living in the house situated along present-day Beach Road.[3] Unfortunately, an economic recession in 1865 bankrupted d'Almeida's company and the estate was taken over by John Fisher.[4]

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01 Tai Seng industrial estate, 2018
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

02 Lemongrass, 1985
Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

03 Paya Lebar Airport, 1950
Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Fisher was a rice merchant, the proprietor of Singapore Rice Mills, a distiller and an essential oils manufacturer.[5] He strategically shifted the agricultural activities in Charn Mau Hern from sugar and nutmeg towards lemongrass, which was farmed for his essential oils business. The lemongrass was also exported to western countries such as America where they were used in the manufacture of soaps and scents. The success and significance of these lemongrass plantations gave Charn Mau Hern its name amongst the numerous Chinese inhabitants in the area. Ultimately though, Fisher's essential oils business failed in 1900 as the turn towards industrialisation saw global demands shifting to cash crops such as rubber.[6]

As the demand for lemongrass waned, the existing plantations were transformed into rubber plantations. To process the rubber, Chinese entrepreneur Ang Yong Huat established the Tai Seng Rubber Factory in the 1930s. Ang came to Singapore from Guangdong in 1913 at the age of 22. Upon seeing the opportunities in Singapore, he brought his sons Chye Joo and Chye Liak over the following year. Ang Chye Liak eventually became an active community leader, and in recognition of his contributions to the community, Lorong Serai at Paya Lebar was renamed Lorong Tai Seng in 1940 after the Tai Seng Rubber Factory ceased operations.[7]

The district's development from an agricultural-industrial district into a residential estate began at the turn of the century. This gradual development of settlements was marked by several mileposts, the first being the inauguration of Paya Lebar Presbyterian Church by Chinese missionary Tay Sek Tin in 1903.[8] The establishment of such places of worship hints at the transformation of Tai Seng from workplace to residential settlement, catering to the community that had possibly settled near their place of work.

The second milepost was the setting up of Paya Lebar Wireless Station at Lorong Tai Seng in 1915.[9] It was a pioneering wireless communications facility in an era when wireless technology was still in its infancy and the Morse Code (telegraph) functioned as the main platform for long-distance communication. The Paya Lebar Wireless Station was developed simultaneously with a similar facility in Penang to improve communications between the two ends of British Malaya. The station was completed in September 1915 and by the following month had begun communicating with maritime traffic around Malaya.[10]

The third key development was the laying of Kim Chuan Road, which was first mentioned in the newspapers in the 1920s. Beginning from Paya Lebar Road, the new main road provided access to the estates, factories and settlements deep within Kampong Batak, a Malay settlement situated north of Perseverance Estate.[11] The road was a vital link to the church and the wireless station, and served as a transport artery for the locale. By the mid-1930s, municipal water pipes providing fresh water had also been laid along the stretch of Paya Lebar Road between Serangoon and Macpherson Roads. The villagers of Lorong Tai Seng no longer had to rely on water wells but had access to fresh water, exemplifying a new level of urbanisation for the locale.[12]

During the Japanese Occupation, many people sought refuge in the houses and the air raid shelter near the rubber plantation at Lorong Tai Seng.[13] They stayed on even after the Japanese surrender, forming a new cluster of residences known as Kampong Tai Seng.[14] In the 1940s, crime activities proliferated at Kampong Tai Seng due to the large number of poverty-stricken "refugees". In one instance, three Chinese robbers, one armed with a revolver, broke into a house in Lorong Tai Seng at 3am on 29 August 1947. They escaped with a total of $191 in cash and jewellery, which was a sizeable amount at that time.[15] In 1948, *The Straits Times* published a police reward of $1,000 for information about the persons responsible for shooting two men in the Aik Hoe Rubber Factory.[16] Gradually, Tai Seng became so notorious for criminal and gang activities that many taxi drivers refused to venture there.[17]

Nevertheless, by 1950, plans had been made for the new international airport at Paya Lebar to be built in close proximity to the crime-stricken area. These plans worried the residents of Kampong Tai Seng who feared being evicted. As a result, there were protests by squatters and factory owners in 1951 despite the government's reassurance that it was too early to presume that the kampong would be affected.[18] Interestingly, the kampong dwellers ended up with a different predicament. The laying of Airport Road increased the length of path that cut across the Paya Lebar plain, inhibiting the natural flow of accumulated water from running into the sea.[19] Thus, between November and December 1954, after the completion of the road, the area was struck by a massive flood.[20] Farmers lost their crops and poultry. The situation was so severe that the Government had to issue about 1,000

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04 Shophouses at Lorong Tai Seng, 1962
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

05 Lorong Tai Seng, 1980s
Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

food vouchers to the affected farmers.[21] The aid, amounting to $50,000, continued until February 1955.[22] This dissatisfaction and failing businesses plausibly contributed to the atmosphere of crime and violence, with desperate villagers turning to illegal means to survive. Coupled with the presence of Chinese secret society Su Hong Seng, which was active in Lorong Tai Seng during the late 1940s, the infamous reputation of Tai Seng as a crime-stricken area persisted.[23]

The history and development of Tai Seng between 1950 and 1980 revolved largely around the airport. Paya Lebar Airport was opened on 20 August 1955 and served as Singapore's only commercial international airport for the next 26 years.[24] As earlier feared, 2,000 squatters had to be resettled to a site in Bedok.[25] The presence of the airport also halted plans for urban development in the area because the 1951 plan initially reserved the Lorong Tai Seng stretch for possible extensions of Paya Lebar Airport. This changed during the 1970s with the construction of a new airport at Changi and the conversion of Paya Lebar Airport into a military base.[26] After the relocation of the airport, urban development resumed in the area, paving the way for removal of the area's association with crime, but also erasing remnants of the old kampong in the process.

In the 1970s, the police mounted Operation Eagle which targeted known secret society haunts and trouble spots; 27 people were rounded up in the Tai Seng area.[27] After Operation Eagle, there were hardly any serious crimes reported in the area.[28] Evidence of Tai Seng's cleaned-up reputation could be seen through the omission of Lorong Tai Seng from Operation Senjata in 1983 – another major police onslaught on crime, which targeted areas such as Beach Road, Queenstown and Tanglin.[29]

Alongside its improving reputation, the association of Tai Seng as a residential area became increasingly prevalent. In 1960, the Housing & Development Board (HDB) was created to specifically tackle the housing problems caused by Singapore's fast-growing population.[30] However, the catalyst for the development of modern housing in Tai Seng was a fire which occurred in 1961. On 9 August 1961, a tailor's pressing iron short-circuited at Lorong Tai Seng, causing sparks to ignite a pile of joss paper, which spread into a fire that caused $300,000 in damages. The fire destroyed 11 shophouses, 9 attap huts, 12 food stalls and a temple, leaving more than 250 people homeless.[31] 117 of the victims were housed at the nearby Playfair Boys' School, where Social Welfare Department officers were seen "registering those who wanted Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) flats" the very same day.

From 1970 to 1999, all the residents of Kampong Tai Seng were resettled into public housing. They were compensated and allocated public housing flats by the HDB while enterprises were offered alternative places to operate their businesses. Kampong Tai Seng had been a Chinese village, and the HDB's aim of building a multiracial and multicultural society together with land scarcity demanded the dissolution of old kampongs which were enclaves of specific ethnic groups.[32] This dissolution was not without loss. In the early days, Lorong Tai Seng was bustling with Chinese wayang (Malay for "theatrical performances") and hawker stalls, especially during the Hungry Ghost Festival. However, by 1970, the area's last kampongs had started to fade into the pages of history books. Lorong Tai Seng's lively weekly *pasar malam* (Malay for "night market") and the nightly screenings at the open-air Kwang Meng Cinema, gradually ceased to exist.[33]

Further transformation took place over the next three decades as Lorong Tai Seng was cleared of residents and converted into an industrial estate to provide supporting services for large industries such as steel fabrication, and general electrical and mechanical services by Jurong Town Corporation (JTC).[34] In July 1979, JTC exchanged 380 hectares of land allocated for residential use at the east of Jurong Lake for 232 hectares of land gazetted for industrial use with the HDB.[35] Part of the latter area of land included Lorong Tai Seng, which was redeveloped into Tai Seng Industrial Estate in 1986.[36] Multinational companies such as DHL Express moved into the newly minted industrial estate, gradually turning Tai Seng into an industrial-commercial hub.[37] Today, DHL's warehouse and office, as well as its Asia-Pacific and emerging markets headquarters, continue to be situated at 1 Tai Seng Drive, a stone's throw away from the former Lorong Tai Seng Market.

Moving forward, there are plans to relocate Paya Lebar Air Base in 2030, which will free up 800 hectares of land in Tai Seng. This plan was first announced by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong during his National Day Rally Speech in 2013. He shared that the land would be used to build new homes, offices, factories, parks, living environments and communities.[38] History seems to have come a full circle, with the relocation of the airport again serving as impetus for transformation in Tai Seng. Nevertheless, future transformations promise to be less drastic, with amenities mentioned by PM Lee during his rally speech reinforcing Tai Seng as both a residential and industrial area.

Undoubtedly, the area known today as Tai Seng has undergone a series of transformations. From its humble agricultural origins into a lemongrass plantation for business exploits, and from a crime-stricken area that many avoided into an industrial-commercial hub, Tai Seng seems to be a microcosm of Singapore's historical narrative. In fact, Tai Seng, which means "big city", brings to mind the larger city of Singapore. Coming a long way since the 19th century, with the advent of the British, participation in the international economy, recovery from the Japanese Occupation, and gradual modernisation and industrialisation,

the many transformations of Tai Seng parallel the broader developments of Singapore. Tai Seng today retains its industrious spirit from which it first got its name. Amidst the changes to the infrastructural landscape and demographics of the locale, Tai Seng continues to play host to the factories and commercial firms based there, and promises to keep doing so in the future to come.

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01

WOODLANDS:
SINGAPORE'S BORDER TOWN

Text by Nathene Chua Qi Qi

"Wah! Need to bring passport ah?" is a popular phrase used in jest when one mentions Woodlands. As the northern-most town on the island, Woodlands has developed in tandem with the cross-border links between Singapore and Johor Bahru. Old town maps, newspaper reports and oral history interviews tell the story of a remote place that has transformed into a regional hub. Through it all, Woodlands has always oriented itself around the physical, economic, social and cultural links between Singapore and Malaysia, accommodating the flow of people and goods across the Straits. This mingling of people from both sides of the border in Woodlands testifies to the town's unique identity.

One of the earliest mentions of Woodlands is found in an 1890 edition of the *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, which reported that a Malay woman had drowned in the waters off the "seaside estate known as Woodlands".[1] The British referred to the place as "Woodlands" since the coastal area covered with Keranji trees appeared as woods from Johor.[2] Today, we often think of Woodlands as encompassing the towns of Marsiling, Woodlands and Admiralty. In the 19th and early-20th centuries, however, "Woodlands" referred only to a small area at the terminus of the Singapore-Kranji railway.[3] The earliest communities were mostly Chinese and Malay, living in villages such as Kampong Marsiling, Kampong Mandai Kechil, Kampong Woodlands and Kampong Lorong Fatimah.[4] Former Marsiling residents like Sandy Ong and Sajimon bin Haji Shukor recall that many of these communities grew vegetables or fished for a living.[5] Ramachandran Ramanathan, whose father worked in the Metal Box Company in Marsiling, recounts that employees of factories and the naval base also lived in the vicinity.[6]

Between the various kampongs were large plots of land housing commercial farms that required proper roads for the transportation of raw goods.[7] Thus, the Woodlands area developed alongside improvements to the transport system in Singapore. Charles Burton Buckley's *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore* records how Bukit Timah Road was extended northward to Kranji in 1845.[8] A section of this road was renamed Woodlands Road in 1929 to avoid duplication of numbers, as the road ran in both the municipal and rural areas. The new road allowed cars, buses, and trishaws to access the "frontier" of Singapore, and as Buckley noted, was "extensively used by the gambier and pepper cultivators… for conveying their wares to town, instead… of transporting them round by the Straits in large boats".[9]

North of Singapore, the Malay Peninsula was also a major producer and exporter of raw materials like tin, rubber, gambier and pepper, which were shipped internationally from the Singapore port. Furthermore, British influence over the peninsula and the establishment of the Federated Malay States in 1896 meant that economic ties were growing between Singapore and these states.[10] Hence, the government of the Straits Settlements hastened to shorten the journey between Singapore and Johor by building the Singapore-Kranji Railway in 1903.[11] Woodlands was the terminus for this railway, after which, passengers could transfer to a ferry at Woodlands Ferry Pier to reach Johor.[12] The blossoming town was described as "The Coming Brighton of Singapore" in a 1903 circular, to woo potential buyers for residential building sites along the coast.[13]

In the early 20th century, cross-straits congestion was already a problem. Just between 1910 and 1911, the amount of goods transported across the Straits increased from 19,278 tons to 30,142 tons.[14] With a "good number of natives [travelling] between Johor and Singapore every day", the government made plans for a causeway stretching across the Straits of Johore in 1919, to link the capital of the British Straits Settlements to the rest of Malaya.[15] When the Causeway opened in 1923, Woodlands was no longer a terminus, but a railway station en route to Johor Bahru.[16] Buses by the Green Bus Company, Singapore-Johore Express, and KL-Singapore Express also began operating as alternatives to the train.[17]

When the British Naval Base was constructed in Seletar in the late 1920s to early 1930s, more roads were built to link the base to Woodlands and the Causeway.[18] The land for the naval base had been acquired from rubber companies such as Bukit Sembawang, as well as smaller landowners.[19] Hailed as "one of [the] World's Biggest Engineering Projects", the base was meant to be an "effective part of the

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01 The Causeway at Woodlands, 2018
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

02 Woodlands Station, undated
Deli Maatschappij Collection, National Archives of the Netherlands/ Fotocollectie Deli Maatschappij, Public Domain

03 A train along the Causeway connecting Singapore and Johor, 1940s
Douglas Harold Ackland Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Empire's defence system in the Pacific".[20] However, the base was never employed fully during World War II, and had to be abandoned when the Japanese advanced across the Straits. The Causeway itself was a critical part of Singapore's defences and was partially destroyed by the British on 31 January 1942 in an attempt to slow down the Japanese. Nonetheless, after the 27th Australian Brigade – tasked to defend the area next to the Causeway – unilaterally retreated, the Japanese proceeded to capture the northern coast of Singapore by 10 February 1942.[21] After the Japanese surrender in 1945, the British replaced the Japanese timber bridge with Bailey bridge extensions on the Causeway and re-laid the train tracks.[22] As traffic volume picked up once more, the demolished parts beneath the Bailey bridges were also filled in as the Causeway resumed its former role.[23]

By the 1950s, life in Woodlands had become deeply intertwined with Johor. When there was a bottleneck on the Johor side of the Causeway, the traffic jam would last for hours, stretching all the way to Woodlands Town.[24] On Saturdays, hordes of customers from the Johor side would descend on a street-side market along Woodlands Road, to look for "anything from matches to textiles".[25] Likewise, families living in Woodlands would also travel to Johor for shopping, entertainment, and even education. According to Ramachandran, going to Johor was "…closer than going to town. It was just a drive across that Causeway. At that time, [we] didn't need passports."[26]

In 1963, Singapore and the Malay Peninsula merged to form Malaysia, but this political union lasted only 23 months. The separation of Singapore from Malaysia in 1965 led to the opening of a new Immigrations and Customs Checkpoint in Woodlands on 1 July 1967, turning Woodlands into a true "border town".[27] Whereas people were free to move across the Causeway in the past, they now had to present their passports or identity cards to pass immigration control.[28] Many, in these early days, rushed to acquire the required travel documents.[29] Otherwise, it seemed that life in Woodlands did not change drastically. Ahmad bin Ismail, a former resident of Kampong Mandai Kechil, recalls that Malaysians and Singaporeans continued to live side by side in Woodlands. In fact, Ahmad's own wife was a Malaysian.[30] Moreover, border controls did not hinder the volume of people and goods passing across the Causeway. On the contrary, traffic volume increased between 1960 and 1980, necessitating repeated widening of the Causeway.[31]

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Though Woodlands was the first new town slated for development under the proposed Singapore Master Plan in 1956, slow uptake on housing units caused the work to be delayed until the 1970s.[32] While the majority of the early buildings were catered for the Royal Malayan Navy's (later Royal Malaysian Navy) employees to live in, the Housing & Development Board's (HDB) plans also accounted for increasing vehicular traffic between Singapore and Malaysia. The HDB's Woodlands Town Plan (1971-75) included new housing units, a town centre, an industrial estate, and other facilities like schools, post offices and ample parking spaces.[33] Part of the HDB's vision for Woodlands was to make it a "frontier trade centre", with street-side shops taking up permanent places in the town centre.[34]

Although the first batch of 1,300 HDB units was completed at the end of 1972, they were not expected to be as popular as other towns, "being more remote from the existing City Area and being hampered… by lack of basic facilities such as sewerage which themselves require time to implement".[35] Singaporeans living in the 1970s may recall Woodlands as a "ghost town", with the population creeping very slowly toward its initial estimate of 250,000.[36] Residents complained about the delay in building the town centre, which in turn affected the take-up of flats in the area.[37] As Woodlands resident Faridah recalls, there were few bus services, no Mass Rapid Transit (MRT), and taxis avoided passengers travelling to Woodlands as it was out of the way.[38] Residents had to rely on personal vehicles or make their way to the bus interchange to travel further across Singapore.[39] Ang Mong Seng, a former HDB Estate Officer in Woodlands, says that the HDB resorted to selling jumbo flats (created by combining two standard HDB units) to attract buyers for vacant units in Woodlands.[40] Nevertheless, living in Woodlands had its perks: Faridah points out that there used to be large open spaces for her children to play, while newspaper reports touted it as "one of the most picturesque of HDB estates".[41]

The first Woodlands Town Centre was built right beside the Causeway, catering to customers from both sides of the border.[42] Apart from shops, it also housed a bus interchange, a hawker centre-cum-market and a cinema.[43] Faridah remembers it as "the life of the neighbourhood", before shopping centres like Causeway Point appeared in the late 1990s.[44] The shops here drew crowds with cheap textiles, fruits and electronic goods, while the Oriental Emporium rivalled Orchard Road's Yaohan in terms of size and footfall.[45] During festive seasons, the tills rang all the more quickly, as the emporium stocked goods for Chinese New Year and Hari Raya.[46]

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04 An aerial photograph of the Causeway taken by the British Royal Air Force, 1950s
Collection held by the National Archives of Singapore, Crown copyright

05 Royal Malayan Navy at Woodlands, 1955
Collection held by the National Archives of Singapore, Crown copyright

In the 1990s, Woodlands gradually expanded towards the south-east and began to resemble other HDB towns, with an increased population and more amenities. However, it never lost its connection to the Singapore-Malaysia border. The 1997 Urban Redevelopment Authority's (URA) planning report on Woodlands delineated its boundaries with Bukit Timah Expressway to the west, Seletar Expressway to the south, Gambas Avenue and Woodlands Ave 8 to the east, and the Straits of Johore to the north, corresponding to what we know as Woodlands today. Unsurprisingly, the report highlighted traffic congestion at Woodlands Checkpoint and the Town Centre as one of the main weaknesses of the area.[47]

To address these concerns, the HDB planned for the redevelopment of Woodlands into a regional hub that could function as the "Northern Gateway of Singapore".[48] Mirroring the activities of nearly a century ago, town planners improved the transportation network by extending the MRT line to the north with Marsiling, Woodlands and Admiralty stations built between 1993 and 1996, providing easy access to the city.[49] More notably, the new regional centre was built around Woodlands MRT station, providing businesses that spanned Johor and Singapore with a place to set up office.[50] A new shopping centre, Causeway Point, opened in 1998, and a one-stop civic centre, housing various public agencies, was built for the growing town.[51] Maps from the 1980s-90s show a drastic change in landscape: where once there were green spaces, rectangular buildings began to appear.[52] Around the same time, the Woodlands Checkpoint was also expanded to service the high volume of traffic. Unveiled in 1999, the new complex was designed to meet the heightened security environment, and is an unmistakable part of Woodlands' landscape today.[53]

The bus terminal also relocated to the new Woodlands regional centre, causing a significant drop in the number of people who frequented the old Town Centre next to the Checkpoint.[54] Businesses suffered as younger generations of residents headed to Causeway Point for their everyday needs. In 2017, to make way for the expansion of the Checkpoint, the old Woodlands Town Centre was finally closed, and shops relocated to the newly-built Marsiling Mall (near Woodlands Stadium).[55]

Though it may seem that the focus of Woodlands has shifted away from the border, future developments

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06 Shops at Woodlands, 1986
Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

07 Woodlands Regional Interchange at its opening, 1996
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

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08 Woodlands Checkpoint, 2018
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

09 Causeway Point shopping centre, 2018
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

suggest otherwise. Under the Remaking Our Heartland programme by the HDB, Woodlands is set to become the "star destination of the North" within the next five to ten years, as further improvements are made to ease traffic at the Causeway.[56] A new Johor Bahru-Singapore Rapid Transit System (RTS) link is planned to open in 2024 to reduce the travelling time between the two cities.[57] Residents and visitors can also look forward to a new nature corridor and a revamped seafront – the natural features of a "border town" fronting the Straits of Johore.[58] Perhaps, the century-old vision of Woodlands as the "Coming Brighton of Singapore" may yet become a reality.

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JURONG:
SECLUDED, STEREOTYPED, YET SCINTILLATING

Text by Dorcas Gan

01

Four years ago, I remember telling my family upon the release of the 'O' Level results that I was considering attending Jurong Junior College. My older sister's immediate response was: "Jurong? So far! Plus, you won't have anywhere to hang out after school." Indeed, her exclamation echoed many of the negative stereotypes that come to mind when one mentions Jurong, including "industrial", *"ulu"* (Malay for remote) and even "boring". Likewise, these were my initial impressions of Jurong, as I endured a daily 50-minute bus ride to my junior college, while watching the landscape change from the greenery of my home at Bukit Timah into the industrial surrounds of Corporation Road. Many of the mornings during my college days involved last minute adrenaline-filled sprints alongside fellow classmates to get to school before the 7.40am bell while we all grumbled about our long commutes.

01 Jurong Port and Shipyard, 2015
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

02 Photo of the author (front row, right) with her friends at the Jurong Junior College field, 2015
Image courtesy of Dorcas Gan

Another reason for my impression of Jurong as an undesirable place was its perceived lack of shopping and food outlets, as well as recreational facilities. It certainly did not help that Jurong was geographically far for non-west siders like me (although, in all fairness, Jurong is a huge place, and some parts are certainly more *ulu* than others). Ultimately, what tainted our impressions the most were our biased notions of Jurong, shaped by stories from our parents or grandparents of a difficult-to-access place with poor transportation links, and the descriptions of Jurong as a heavily industrialised area in our Social Studies textbooks.

Some time has passed since I have graduated, and in light of the recent redevelopment projects in Jurong, it is perhaps timely to re-examine these prevailing stereotypes of Jurong's identity and heritage as a secluded, dull and industrial place. This article will underscore that these stereotypes, whether fact or fiction, have contributed to Jurong's place identity and heritage. At the same time, it will also uncover some lesser known facts of Jurong's past that have been overshadowed by the story of Jurong's industrial development.

Jurong's Location: For Better or for Worse?

The geographical location of Jurong is undoubtedly far from the hustle and bustle of the city area. However, it is this relative isolation that has defined some of its most significant historical developments. For example, prior to the Japanese Occupation, there existed a 101 Special Training School (STS) on the island of Tanjong Balai (presently subsumed by Jurong Port).[1] Set up by Special Operations Executives from Britain in 1941, its aim was to create underground armed resistance in anticipation of a Japanese invasion of Malaya.[2] The school was originally slated to be on Pulau Ubin, but the island was deemed unsuitable due to its lack of freshwater supplies, thick foliage, and risk of malaria.[3] Instead, Tanjong Balai was chosen for its limited accessibility; it was only accessible via boat or by a road obscured by plantations. Furthermore, the small islands of mangroves and jungles surrounding the area provided both the perfect cover and ideal training ground.[4]

Similarly, Jurong's isolated location has also contributed to its industrial heritage. Dr Goh Keng Swee, Jurong's industrial pioneer and then Minister

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03 The house that was used as the 101 Special Training School in Tanjong Balai, 1955
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

04 An aerial view of Jurong Industrial Estate under development, 1960s
David Ng Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

05 Factories at the former locations of swamps, 1960s
Image courtesy of JTC

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06 A man carrying pails containing rubber latex collected from rubber trees, 1900s
Lim Kheng Chye Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

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of Finance, found many of the attributes which made Jurong *ulu* to be attractive for industrial development. For instance, its south-west location, though far off from today's city centre, was relatively close to the Singapore Harbour (located at Keppel). At the same time, Jurong's low population density meant that developments would not disrupt too many existing settlers, and they could be relocated more easily.[5] For example, farmers could be resettled to Lim Chu Kang, just north of Jurong.[6] Jurong's location therefore proved to be one of the winning attributes in making it the industrial backbone of Singapore, despite many finding it hard to fathom the thought of a successful industrial estate in Singapore at that time. Dr Goh shared:

> There was scepticism. First, it was a very new thing and we did not know much about it... People were saying we hadn't got it – no cheap labour, no markets, no skills, no know-how.[7]

Additionally, Jurong's remote location has uniquely shaped the social memory, experiences and community of those who resided in Jurong prior to its development into an industrial estate. Due to its distance from town, many facilities and amenities were not accessible to those residing in Jurong. This situation prompted residents to chip in and support each other when infrastructure and public services did not meet their needs.

For instance, Tan Kim Wah, the owner of a former provision shop at the 15th milestone of Jurong Road, recalls receiving letters on behalf of other residents when door-to-door postage was not yet available in Jurong:

> In a rural area like ours, postal services were unheard of. Letters were sent to our provision shop. My, my, so many of them sent letters to my shop. The workers who lived in the vicinity would send their letters here. Then, when they came to my shop, I would hand them the letters. We were called Chop Eng Tai. On the letter, if they wrote Chop Eng Tai, Jurong, the post office would know the address. There was no need to write the shop number. When the postman saw the words, "41, 15 milestone Jurong", he would post the mail to my shop.[8]

During the period of industrialisation, when Jurong remained an isolated nascent town lacking amenities and entertainment, communities came together to support each other. This fostered deep bonds as Karen Lee, who worked at the Singapore Woollen Spinning Mill in Jurong, recounts:

> When we stayed in the company hostel, we were very close… I can [still] remember those people now, even those who came from Malaysia. I

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> learned the Malay language [as] we worked in the factories, and [my Malay colleagues] liked to invite [us] to their weddings, whether their relatives or whoever, they will invite you.[9]

More Than Just Concrete and Steel

Beyond Jurong's *ulu* stereotype also lies a commonly held notion that Jurong's heritage is tied primarily to its miracle-like industrial story. This story is one that has often been repeated in textbooks as a moment of triumph – of how Jurong beat the odds to morph from swampland to industrial estate, to become the island's economic backbone during the early years of Singapore's independence. Yet while Jurong's industrial transformation and achievement is certainly one to be proud of, it only encapsulates one facet of Jurong's history.

For instance, in the early 1800s, Jurong's expansive land was dominated by gambier plantations. Many incoming Chinese settlers cleared the existing

07 Mangrove swamps and forested areas in Jurong, undated
Image courtesy of JTC

08 Prawn farming, 1962
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

09 Prawn farmers, 1960s
Primary Production Department Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

swamps and forests for the production of gambier in hopes of obtaining riches.[10] By 1855, there were more than 40 gambier clearings containing over 600,000 gambier trees in the Jurong area.[11] The legacy of gambier in Jurong can be seen in the naming of the former Peng Kang district, which is derived from the Hokkien term for boiling gambier leaves.[12] Presently, roads such as Peng Kang Avenue, Peng Kang Hill, and the upcoming Peng Kang Hill Mass Rapid Transport (MRT) station, serve as reminders of Jurong's past as a vast gambier plantation.[13]

However, with the decline of the gambier industry in the 1800s, a new crop came to the forefront – rubber. Although the first rubber seeds arrived in Singapore in 1877, commercial interest in the rubber crop only began during the early 1900s when the automobile industry boom brought about a related increase in the demand for rubber.[14] One such rubber planter was Chew Boon Lay, who had a plantation at the 13.5 milestone of Jurong Road. His plantation was so expansive that the area, as well as Boon Lay Avenue, was named after him.[15] Today, other landmarks have also taken on his name, including Boon Lay MRT station, Boon Lay Shopping Centre, Boon Lay Secondary School and Boon Lay Garden Primary School.[16]

Apart from having a close connection with agriculture, Jurong has also had a deep connection with water. From the early 1900s until its development as an industrial estate, Jurong had a thriving prawning and fishing industry. Its huge mangrove forest was conducive to the prawning industry since prawn ponds were usually installed in muddy swamps. By the 1950s, official estimates stated that around 1,000 acres of prawn ponds existed island-wide, half of which were situated in the Jurong Road area. In fact, Jurong's ponds became one of the most productive in Singapore, with a yield of up to 900 kilograms of prawns per acre.[17]

On the fringes of such mangrove forests were also thriving fishing settlements, most prominently in Tuas. Fishermen here were known for their *menuas* ("to haul fishing nets" in Malay) method which entailed floating coconut fronds and branches with nets hanging underneath, usually in shady areas, to attract fish.[18] In fact, the naming of Tuas actually reflects the legacy of this method, as tuas is the root word of menuas.[19] Presently, Jurong's connection with the fishing and prawning industry can be glimpsed through Jurong Fishing Port, opened in 1969, which remains a prime location for people and restaurant owners to get their hands on fresh and quality seafood produce.[20]

Aside from supporting trades through its natural landscape, Jurong has also long played an important part in Singapore's military defence and history. Besides the 101 STS, Jurong also features greatly in the process of training National Servicemen to become combat-ready.

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10 Training session at SAFTI, Pasir Laba Camp, 1971
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

11 A view of recent developments in Jurong around the MRT station, 2018
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

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For example, the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute (SAFTI) was opened in 1966 at Pasir Laba as a formal institution to train local military leaders.[21] Elevated terrains like Peng Kang Hill, FOFO Hill and Good Morning Hill have also featured as part of the training regimen of soldiers, teaching them endurance and perseverance. As Brigadier-General Leong Yue Kheong remembers of the 1970s:

> There were many ways to go up Peng Kang Hill… I remembered we had to go up Peng Kang Hill three times in one morning. And three times meant three different ways: running up, on all fours, and then duck walk… Peng Kang Hill was a rite of passage for Officer Cadet School (OCS) and School of Infantry Section Leader (SISL) trainees.[22]

At present, the Army Museum of Singapore located at Jurong Road is a further testament to Jurong's military significance. Opened in 2007, the 40th year of National Service, the museum tells visitors about the development of the Singapore Army and pays tribute to the contributions of past servicemen.[23]

Jury's Out

Four years have passed since I left junior college, Jurong has slowly but surely revamped its image. For instance, Big Box, which touts itself as an Ikea-like home appliance store, was opened in late 2014.[24] Its opening drew in large crowds, but Big Box's (and by extension, Jurong's) reputation as a hip and "happening" place was truly elevated in 2017, when a joint venture with Zepp Hall

Network to create a concert space right at Big Box was announced.[25] Since then, Zepp@BigBox has played host to numerous concerts, including popular Japanese band RADWIMPS and well-known American band Fall Out Boy.[26] Plans to develop Jurong Lake district into a business district were also unveiled in 2017.[27]

Additionally, Jurong has begun to shed its isolated reality. Plans for a new MRT line known as the Jurong Region Line, were unveiled to the public in 2018.[28] Slated to begin construction in 2026, the line will link Jurong East MRT station with Choa Chu Kang MRT station and introduce new stops in the Jurong area, including one near the former Jurong Junior College. In June 2017, four new stops on the East-West line were also opened in the Tuas area to increase its accessibility.[29]

With these new and upcoming developments, is it still fair to stereotype Jurong as *ulu*, industrial and boring? Certainly, part of what makes Jurong unique is precisely this remote trait, for it has shaped the heritage and social memories of Jurong. However, it seems that Jurong is no longer as isolated or dull as it is conventionally branded. Undoubtedly, a deeper look into Jurong's heritage unveils a place that is defined not only by its isolated and industrial character, but also by its strong connection to agriculture and the sea. All of these are integral parts of Jurong's heritage that should be recognised and celebrated.

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ORCHARD:
SINGAPORE'S MOST DESIRABLE PRECINCT

Text by Alex Chan Hui Yang

01

In 2012, the International Presence Survey named Orchard Road the "Most Beautiful Avenue of the World".[1] While not everyone might agree with the survey results, most would acknowledge that Orchard possesses a certain charm. Part of Orchard's beauty comes from its eclectic mix of old and new buildings that have come together in a somewhat piecemeal manner over the course of its nearly 200-year existence. Orchard's built landscape is a reflection of its rich heritage, showcasing its evolution from an agricultural centre into a residential precinct popular with the upper class during the 19th and 20th centuries. Today, the iconic stretch is known both locally and internationally as a retail and entertainment haven.[2] With trendy malls like ION Orchard and 313@ Somerset, Orchard has drawn comparisons to other world famous shopping streets like Tokyo's Ginza, New York's Fifth Avenue and Paris' Champs-Elysées.[3] Regarding Orchard's significance to the average Singaporean, prominent local columnist Sylvia Toh once remarked:

> When I step out on weekends, I don't want to go downstairs of my block or round the corner from my house… I want to go out. And, say what you will, out is Orchard Road.[4]

01 Orchard Road, 2018
Image courtesy of National Heritage Board

Long before Orchard became synonymous with "going out," its early 19th century incarnation was merely an unnamed road in a valley that connected the main commercial town centre around the Singapore River to the Tanglin area.[5] Orchard's topography and fertile soils made it well suited for agricultural activity. This attracted various fruit and spice growers to the area, shaping its early heritage as a major production site of gambier, spices and fruits.[6] Even before the arrival of the British in Singapore, Chinese planters had already been cultivating gambier in the area.[7] However, as gambier production was a resource-intensive industry that quickly exhausted the land, the Chinese planters had to continually shift further inland.[8]

By the time the Europeans began to move into the Orchard area during the 1830s to 1840s, the Chinese planters had already left.[9] Some of the earliest European settlers here include Thomas Oxley, William Napier and William Cuppage, whom many of the roads in present-day Orchard were named after. Many of these Europeans established plantations on both sides of the main road to grow nutmeg, a lucrative crop imported from the Moluccas that yielded two separate spices. It seems that the land, which had been cleared and vacated by the Chinese, was particularly ideal for nutmeg production.[10] It was these nutmeg orchards that likely inspired the name of Orchard Road, which appears in the 1846 map of Singapore by John Turnbull Thomson.[11] Unfortunately, the period of nutmeg plantations was short-lived, as a disease caused by a beetle species wiped out all the nutmeg trees in the area by the 1850s.[12]

With the decline of these orchards, several owners were forced to sell off their estates. Charles Carnie of the Cairnhill orchard was one such owner who had to sell his land and return to Scotland in 1859.[13] A number of owners who remained converted their plantations into fruit orchards. This included the planter William Cuppage who started growing Mangosteen trees in his backyard. The area itself was quiet and tranquil, and its suburbia-like status made it popular among the upper class elites in Singapore at that time.[14] Furthermore, Orchard was far enough from the pollution of the town centre, but near enough not to inconvenience its

02

03

02 A gambier plantation, 1900s
Image courtesy of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

03 A painting of nutmeg fruits showing the seed and red pulp called mace, c. 1810
Image courtesy of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

residents. From the 1860s onwards, many rich European merchant families and individual capitalists bought land in the area to build their bungalows.[15] Estate names like Eskbank Cottage, and Ladyhill likely reflect their owners' desires to recreate a European countryside atmosphere.[16] By the 1880s, many commercial trading houses and banks also bought land in the area to build private estates for their senior managers.[17] Small shophouses and Cold Storage, a deli specialising in frozen meats, were established in the area, catering primarily to the wealthy residents.[18]

Despite its predominantly European character, wealthy individuals from other communities also aspired to live in the Orchard area from the 1900s onwards. One such businessman, the prominent Gujarati merchant Rajabali Jumabhoy, bought an estate in the Scotts Road area in 1927. Jumabhoy recalls that as his financial position improved, he wanted to move to Orchard, because of its "fashionable locality".[19] Eu Tong Sen, Lim Boon Keng and several other prominent Chinese *taukehs* (Chinese businessmen) also moved there, with many of their estates concentrated around the Cairnhill area.[20] Throughout the first half of the 20th century, Orchard would be known as a residential precinct sought after by the island's upper classes for its quiet environment and prestige.

In 1942, when the Japanese forces invaded Singapore, they seized many houses and buildings in the Orchard area, including schools like Anglo-Chinese and Singapore Chinese Girls' School. This was likely due to Orchard's central location on the island.[21] The propaganda department and Kempeitai (Japanese military police) set up offices in the area, while Cold Storage was repurposed as a military unit.[22] One survivor, Tan Sock Kern, recalled how her family home in Cairnhill was seized by the Japanese and converted into a comfort house:

> Our two houses became the headquarters for comfort houses. You know the whole row of houses… opposite where I was living. They were turned into comfort homes, that means [there were] prostitutes.[23]

Many who lived in the Orchard area were forced to flee Singapore, and those who remained lived in fear. Lim Kim San recounted his fear of being captured by the Kempeitai during the Japanese Occupation: "When you are outside [and] you hear footsteps, then you get frightened. Then you know they are looking [for you]."[24] When the Occupation finally came to an end in 1945, residents began moving back to their old houses, and began the process of rebuilding their lives and their neighbourhoods.[25]

The years from the 1950s to the 1970s were a time of transformation for the precinct. Orchard was slowly turning into the bustling retail landscape of today. Previously, High Street was considered the main retail and shopping hub of Singapore. Locals would flock to High Street in search of fabrics from stores like Metro and Aurora, especially because the majority wore made-to-measure clothes.[26] However, businessman Tang Choon Keng believed in the

04

04 Houses along Scotts Road, 1919
Lee Kip Lin Collection, Image courtesy of the National Library Board, Singapore

development potential of the Orchard area.[27] Tang first opened a curio store along River Valley Road in the 1930s and eventually expanded into the Orchard area, setting up the area's first department store, C. K. Tang, in 1958. The store was located at the junction of Scotts Road and Orchard Road, opposite a cemetery that was at the site of Ngee Ann City. Despite the misgivings of others about the location, Tang recounted how he stood by his decision:

> People used to tell me this is not a nice place to start a business. Why buy such a deserted place, and one in front of the graveyard? I would tell them, "One day this place will boom".[28]

Tang recognised that expatriates living in the Tanglin area had to pass by his store when travelling from their homes to the town centre, which meant an increase in potential customers.[29] There, he sold a variety of products ranging from Chinese carpets to ceramics and other curios. The store quickly became a success, allowing the company to expand rapidly over the next few decades.[30] C. K. Tang's success demonstrated the viability of Orchard as a retail stretch, and prompted subsequent entrepreneurs to invest in the area.[31]

Besides major developers like Tang, smaller entrepreneurs also began to see the business potential of Orchard. In the 1960s, fashion entrepreneur

05

06

05 Interior of C. K. Tang, 1960s
Tangs Collection, Image courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

06 The former C. K. Tang department store shortly before it was demolished to complete Tang Plaza (partially constructed on the left), early 1980s
Image courtesy of C. K. Tang Ltd

Eunice Wong and her daughter Phila Mae Wong decided to expand their businesses into the Orchard area. As fashion icons of the city, they sought to make Orchard the new fashion centre of Singapore. Drawing inspiration from the fashion capitals of London and Paris, the pair opened a number of ready-made and custom-tailored shops, as well as lifestyle stores through the 1960s.[32]

Other fashion entrepreneurs who invested in the Orchard area include Jacob Choong and his wife, Siauw Mie Sioe. In 1958, the couple set up Glamourette, Singapore's first multi-brand designer boutique, located between C. K. Tang and Cold Storage.[33] The boutique brought in many new fashion trends from Europe and America during the 1960s.[34] It also organised numerous fashion shows, featuring avant-garde couture pieces from abroad.[35] These small-time fashion boutiques and entrepreneurs paved the way for more fashion stores and even major labels to open along the road. As new boutiques and lifestyle stores like Antoinette, and Buttons & Bows opened along the stretch, Orchard increasingly became known for carrying the latest fashions from abroad.[36]

Alongside retail, new food, entertainment and lifestyle offerings also proliferated in the 1960s and 1970s, with many young Singaporeans seeing Orchard Road as a "trendy" place to hang out at.[37] Recounting their memories of the area, Tan Wee Him recalls being drawn to the affordable milkshakes sold at the Magnolia Milk Bar, while Christopher Tan reminisces about the food sold at Glutton's Square, an open-air hawker centre.[38] Cinemas like Lido were equipped with air-conditioning and screened the latest Hollywood blockbusters.[39] By the late 1960s, crowds of both tourists and locals were drawn to Orchard Road for its food, retail and entertainment options.[40]

As annual tourist visitor numbers reached more than 90,000 in the 1960s, the Singapore government sought to capitalise on this by redeveloping the land in the precinct. The government planned to develop Orchard as a tourist belt, tearing down many of the older two-storey shophouses from the early 20th century to make way for new multistorey hotels and malls.[41] Consequently, more and more hotels were built in the area, as hotel developers sought to capitalise on the tourism boom. The government approved of plans by developers to build four luxury hotels in the 1960s. One such project, the Ming Court Hotel (Orchard Parade Hotel today) was the government's first foray into the hotel business, for which it collaborated with Goodwood Park Hotel, and Town and City Properties.[42] Completed at the cost of $20 million in 1970, the hotel

07

07 Magnolia Snack Bar and Cold Storage, 1973
Lee Kip Lin Collection, Image courtesy of Urban Redevelopment Authority

was designed to replicate the splendour of the Ming Dynasty, especially though its internal furnishings.[43]

As Orchard cemented its status as a tourist belt and retail haven during the mid-1970s, its desirability drastically increased in the eyes of land developers and investors. Businessmen like Chee Guan Chye, then managing director of the group responsible for Tanglin Shopping Centre, saw Orchard as the new locus of retail on the island. Speaking to the *The Straits Times*, Chee argued that malls in the Orchard area would be in a prime position to capture the tourist market, especially with over 15 hotels within walking distance of each other.[44]

These developments foreshadowed the mid-1970s building boom in Orchard, when property developers competed to build larger and swankier malls.[45] One of these developers, the Development Bank of Singapore, set out to build the multistorey mall Plaza Singapura at Dhoby Ghaut. Officially opened in 1974, it was the largest shopping centre in Singapore of the time.[46] Other developers like Far East Organization similarly embarked on a rapid program of expansion in the 1970s and 1980s, building Lucky Plaza, Far East Plaza and Claymore Plaza, among others.[47] This building boom continued until the 2000s, with the opening of even larger malls like ION Orchard and 313@Orchard.

Today, Nutmeg and Mace, a permanent artwork situated outside the ION Orchard building, is one of the few reminders left of the area's past agricultural heritage.[48] New challengers to Orchard's status as a retail haven have also appeared in recent years, in the form of the Marina Bay area, as well as various malls in the heartlands.[49] In response, the government has developed a blueprint to revitalise the precinct over the next 15 to 20 years, with experimental ideas such as turning the area into a car-free zone.[50]

08

Despite decreasing consumer traffic in recent years, real estate in Orchard remains attractive to business and property owners, a trend that has withstood the test of time. Not unlike the past, Orchard continues to be the precinct that offers unrivalled access to the main shopping hub of the city, as well as the Central Business District.[51] The recent launch of the New Futura condominium in March 2018 fetched a five-year record high price of $3,200 per square foot, reflecting this continuing demand.[52] Major retail brands like Uniqlo, Don Don Donki and Apple have all chosen to open flagship stores along this stretch in the past two years.[53] It seems then, that Orchard remains, in the words of two writers in *The Straits Times*, "the street that draws the top names in retail and F&B offerings".[54] For the foreseeable future, it appears that Orchard's past and future is tied to its status as Singapore's most desirable precinct.

09

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08 Orchard Road with Tang Plaza on the left, early 1980s
Image courtesy of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

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