+65

A Journal on Singapore's Post-Independence History and Society

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Balloting for flats in MacPherson under the "Home Ownership for the People" scheme
23 November 1965
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

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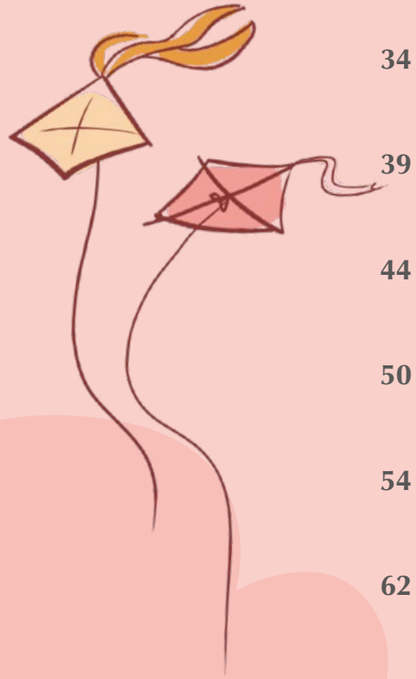


Foreword

Thank you for picking up this inaugural issue of *+65*, a new annual journal by the Founders' Memorial. The journal looks at Singapore's post-independence history and society, how this history is interpreted, represented and remembered, and the ethos of modern Singapore as shaped by its founding history. It will also explore the relationship between national policy and lived experiences through visual culture, artefacts from the National Collection and personal stories. Through these discoveries and reflections, we hope to present a cross-generational perspective and draw connections between Singapore's post-independence history and its present-day impact and relevance.

Each issue will take on a theme that explores a different facet of Singapore, post-independence. In this inaugural issue, we look at the idea of "home" and the many ways it can be understood – a physical space, a community, a nation, and even the emotions or ideals tied to this concept. The articles in this issue uncover how identity was shaped and negotiated through the introduction of national symbols, broadcasting and public housing, as well as through the lens of household items and films of the 1960s. They will also examine the impact of sweeping changes on the lives of ordinary people. We also journey to the present to look at how National Day songs, hawker culture and contemporary collections speak to present-day concerns and aspirations, and how we continue to reimagine what Singapore as home means today and for the future.

We would like to thank the following for their invaluable support in the making of *+65*: Madam Hoe Puay Choo and Professor Chua Beng Huat for generously sharing your stories with us, and all our contributors from the National Heritage Board and beyond for the rich perspectives on home that your articles have brought. We would also like to express our appreciation to all those who have lent your expertise, creativity and ideas to us in conceptualising *+65*.

We hope that you will enjoy reading *+65* and discovering more about this place we call home.

Founders' Memorial Curatorial Team

+65 is presented by the Founders' Memorial, an institution under the National Heritage Board. The Founders' Memorial aims to commemorate how independent Singapore came to be, encourage reflection on its founding values and inspire Singaporeans to commit themselves to contribute towards the nation's future. Opening in 2027, the Founders' Memorial will be an integrated gallery and gardens experience at the Bay East Garden. The Memorial is currently at its design and content development stage, and the public can look forward to opportunities to contribute towards the Memorial's stories, experiences and programmes in the coming years. More information on the Founders' Memorial is available at foundersmemorial.gov.sg. If you would like to be involved in future issues of +65, please contact us at Founders_Memorial@nhb.gov.sg.

National Loyalty Week, 1959:

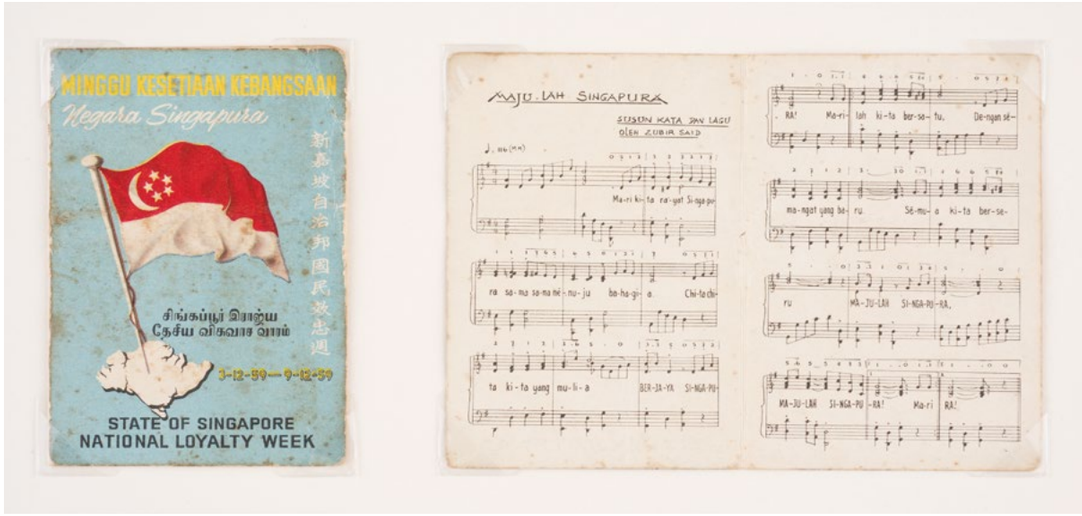
First Steps Towards Singapore's State Identity

by **Wong Lee Min**

Amid a slight drizzle, 20,000 students and teachers assembled at the Padang on the morning of 3 December 1959 to witness the installation of Singapore's first Malayan-born Yang di-Pertuan Negara (Head of State) Yusof bin Ishak, and the introduction of Singapore's national symbols, namely the state flag, anthem and crest. At the end of the ceremony, 30,000 balloons were released to the sky as the mass rally began its march to Kallang Park, while places of worship, factories and police stations, as well as all ships in the harbour, sounded their bells or sirens in salutation. This grand occasion, which took place exactly six months after Singapore attained full self-government, heralded the start of the National Loyalty Week that lasted until 9 December.[1]

Festivities held throughout the week included a two-hour fireworks display, several *Aneka Ragam Ra'ayat* concerts (People's Cultural Concerts) staged in multiple urban and rural locations, and a total of 721 activities such as exhibitions, concerts, sports and parades conducted by all 505 schools across the island.[2]

1



1
State of Singapore National Loyalty Week Card
1959
Paper
Gift of Ms Quek Yuen Yuan, Ana
2000-01194 and 2000-01195
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

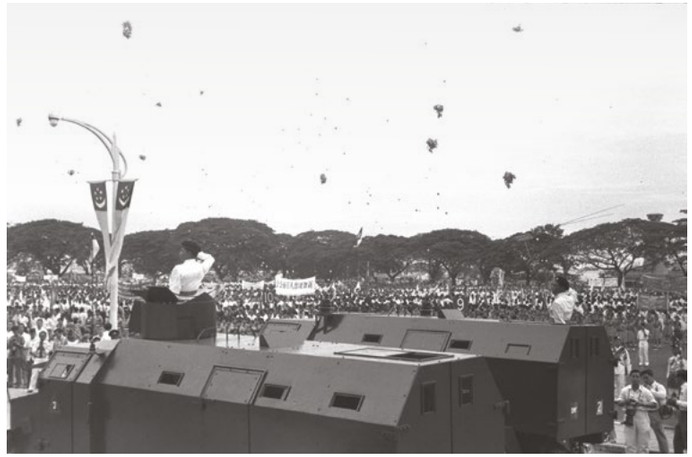
On display at the Home, Truly *exhibition, on until 29 August 2021 at the National Museum of Singapore*

A Flag Day was held on 5 December, during which around 2,250 volunteers went door to door to sell National Loyalty Week souvenir cards at the price of 10 cents.[3] The commemorative card, which is on show at the *Home, Truly* exhibition at the National Museum of Singapore, probably served to familiarise residents with the newly adopted national symbols. Its visually striking front cover features an oversized Singapore flag fluttering from a tall mast rooted to the small island of Singapore, its red and white colours standing out prominently in contrast to the pale blue background. Inside the card are the lyrics and score of the national anthem *Majulah Singapura*, while the state crest is reproduced on the back of the card. Proceeds collected from the sale of the cards as well as other activities during the week – a total of $36,824.40 – contributed towards the construction of the National Theatre. The building served as a memorial to celebrate Singapore's achievement of full internal self-government and to promote the formation of a Malayan culture.[4]

[1] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (SFP)*, "Cries of Merdeka at the Padang", 3 December 1959, 1; *SFP*, "20,000 to march to Kallang Park", 9 November 1959, 1. The national pledge was not introduced during the National Loyalty Week, but only later in 1966.
[2] *SFP*, "A big bang rounds off the day", 3 December 1959, 7; *The Straits Times (ST)*, "Loyalty Week events today", 9 December 1959, 4; *ST*, "Loyalty Week: see 'people's government at work'", 27 November 1959, 4.
[3] Letter to Organising Secretary, PAP, 26 November 1959, from S. T. Ratnam for PS (Culture); Letter from S.T. Ratnam, f. PS (Culture) to General Manager, Overseas Banking Corporation, 26 November 1959, in National Loyalty Week Celebrations: Sale of Cards, Souvenir etc., MC 311-59 Pt 4, National Archives of Singapore.

The National Loyalty Week was so named to underscore what the new People's Action Party (PAP) government felt was the most fundamental quality needed to unite the 1.5-million ethnically diverse population, more than half of which were immigrants,[5] in preparation for the state's push for independence through merger with Malaya. S. Rajaratnam, Singapore's first Minister for Culture, explained that the national symbols and the mobilisation of people from different backgrounds to celebrate National Loyalty Week were attempts "to create a Malayan consciousness [by] creating a feeling of identification with Singapore and its people".[6] That this loyalty to Singapore would not make one feel less "Malayan" was also highlighted by then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in his speech at the mass rally on 3 December 1959. He said, "[L]et us not forget that what we have always inculcated is a sense of belonging to Singapore, as part of a larger Malayan home".[7] Such efforts to integrate Singapore into a larger Malayan landscape and culture continued in the years leading up to merger in 1962 and beyond, until Singapore's separation from Malaysia in 1965.

2



2
March-past at the City Hall while balloons took to the sky during the launch of National Loyalty Week
3 December 1959
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

Wong Lee Min is Manager (Curatorial and Engagement) at the Founders' Memorial. Her reading interests lie very broadly in social and cultural aspects of Singapore and Southeast Asia, spanning from prehistoric times to the present.

[4] *ST*, "Loyalty—and week of joy for the people", 8 November 1959, 1; *ST*, "Bid to step up Theatre Fund", 9 February 1960, 4; *Singapore Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 13, Sitting No. 11, Col. 854-856, 16 November 1960; *ST*, "L-week joy brings $36,824 for theatre", 12 January 1960, 4.
[5] Lee Kuan Yew, "Text of Radio Singapore Talk by the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, on Thursday Night, December 3, 1959" (speech, Singapore, 3 December 1959), National Archives of Singapore, lky19591203b.
[6] *Singapore Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 11, Sitting No. 17, Col. 1095, 13 December 1959.
[7] Radio Singapore, "Installation of Yang di-Pertuan Negara (1)", audio, National Archives of Singapore, 3 December 1959, Acc. No.: 1998004031.

3

3
Representatives from the Federation of Girls' Clubs Singapore marching past the City Hall while the Yang di-Pertuan Negara Yusof Ishak returned their salute
3 December 1959
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

4

4
Yang di-Pertuan Negara Yusof Ishak delivering his address on the steps of the City Hall shortly after his installation
3 December 1959
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

Championing Women and the Poor: Pioneer Female Politician Madam Hoe Puay Choo

by **Adeline Chia**

1

Born in 1929 in Hui'an county of Fujian, China, Madam Hoe Puay Choo is a pioneering figure in politics and the women's movement in Singapore. A member of the People's Action Party (PAP) since 1955, she was elected into the City Council in 1957, at the age of 28, representing Kampong Glam. Two years later, she stood for the Legislative Assembly general elections and got elected, representing Bras Basah. She was also a member of the PAP Executive Council until she left the party in 1962.

During her time as a member of the Legislative Assembly, together with assemblywoman Madam Chan Choy Siong (Mrs Ong Pang Boon), she fought for the Women's Charter, which was drafted by Madam Kwa Geok Choo (Mrs Lee Kuan Yew) and later passed in 1961. The Charter offered protection for women and children, as well as banned polygamy for non-Muslim couples.

In 1962, dissatisfied with the terms of the referendum for merger to form Malaysia, she resigned from the PAP. After retiring from politics in 1963, she started businesses in metalwork and shipbuilding in the 1960s and 1970s. She still meets regularly with other pioneering members of the PAP in get-togethers of the Makan Club, whose members include Ong Pang Boon and Chan Chee Seng.

This is an edited version of an interview conducted in January 2021, in Mandarin, with the sprightly 92-year-old.

2

1
Madam Hoe Puay Choo, member of the People's Action Party (PAP) in the first Legislative Assembly representing Bras Basah
1950s
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

2
Madam Hoe Puay Choo speaking at the opening of Middle Road Community Centre
5 November 1960
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

Why did you move from China to Singapore at the age of seven?

My family was poor and bullied by others. We had a hard life, and one day, my mother, who cut wood, collapsed from ill health. At home, I asked her, "Don't we have an aunt in *selat po* (old name for Singapore)? Let's go look for her."

To pay for our way there, I sold my silver bracelet and my goat. I cried so much, especially because the goat refused to leave my side! For the boat fare, women paid half price, and children below a certain height went for free. When they were measuring, I crouched a little lower to seem shorter. I got on for free. My father couldn't come because we didn't have enough money.

In Singapore, what did you work as before you joined politics?

I was a washerwoman. I collected a monthly fee from different people, and washed their clothes at the public taps, where water was free. My mother sent the money back to China, to my family.

What made you join politics in Singapore?

I was bullied because I was poor. One day, my mother was working and her employer sent me to buy coffee. At the coffee shop, a young man, about 20 years old, hit my head with a metal can. I didn't know why he did it, except that perhaps I was poor and he felt he could bully me.

In 1955, (co-founder of the PAP) Lim Chin Siong came to Chinatown to give a talk. He spoke about ending injustice and poverty in society, and his words struck a deep chord in me. I immediately got a form to join the PAP as a member.

During the elections, what was your campaign message?

I didn't know much about politics, and (former Cabinet minister) Ong Pang Boon helped me a lot. I went on stage and I spoke in Hokkien. I said that the other parties were all made up of rich men who didn't know the difficulties of the common people. Vote for the PAP and we would change society.

3

3
Female members of the PAP making their way to attend the swearing-in of the Legislative Assembly at City Hall. They included (from right) Hoe Puay Choo, Sahorah Binte Ahmat and Chan Choy Siong, to be sworn in as assemblywomen for Bras Basah, Siglap and Delta respectively, as well as Oh Su Chen, who contested in Cairnhill.
5 June 1959
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

What made you contribute to setting up the Women's Charter?

I was working in the complaints desk in the Social Welfare Department. An 18-year-old girl came, looking very frightened. I call her a girl, because she was really innocent. Girls didn't go out of the house much and knew very little about the outside world. She had come to us because she had run away from her husband, and her friend brought her to us. The girl's mother married her off for a bride price of $2,000, but she said she didn't want to be married to that man. We put her up at the women's shelter.

The husband tracked her down, and came to my department with an old wedding invitation. He said that they were married in a proper banquet. His first wife also drank the younger girl's tea. So they were "legitimately" married.

The girl had to leave with him. She looked so frightened. There were no laws protecting her at all. That was when I felt we had to do something.

You fought to end polygamy and to ensure women were paid the same as men.

Some male members of the Legislative Assembly were against it. They asked, what about men who already had existing wives? We had a discussion. In the end, we compromised and said we wouldn't pursue such cases. The monogamy law would only be applied from the time it was passed.

Men's salaries were also higher than women's for the same type of work, which was unfair. Men say, "Women work more slowly. They care about their family and children, they can't concentrate at work. They get pregnant, they are weaker." I tell those men, "Go home and look at your mother, who was pregnant with you, took care of you and worked so hard for you. Is this what you would say to her?"

Any interesting memories from the time when you were in the City Council and Legislative Assembly?

A man wanted to be a sailor, but he had no money to apply for a passport, which cost $15. I lent him the money. When he got his salary, he paid me back. In general, I was always broke and borrowing money from my secretary. I'd borrow money at the end of the month and pay her back at the start of the month. I lent money to my constituents because I knew what it was like to be poor. I had been there before.

I made $500 a month as a Legislative Assembly member. 25 percent went to the party. I gave $150 to my parents and $50 to rent for the party branch. Whenever I got invited to ceremonies and occasions, I also had to give red packets. That was why I was always broke!

4

4
Madam Hoe Puay Choo unveiling a commemorative plaque at Middle Road Community Centre
5 November 1960
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

What made you leave politics?

I didn't agree with the terms of the merger referendum, which proposed three different kinds of merger with Malaysia. I felt that we should let the people decide whether or not they wanted to join Malaysia. So I resigned from the PAP.

What did you do after you retired from politics?

In the 1960s, I ran a metalwork company, and in the 1970s, I ran a shipbuilding business.

What do you wish for the current or future Singapore?

If you can do it financially, help others. Young people, Members of Parliament and politicians should help others. You will be happy and healthy. More emphasis can be placed on educating people to do more for society.

I hope we remember the importance of our Mother Tongue and master it.

Access the article in Mandarin via this URL:
使用此链接阅读华文文稿:

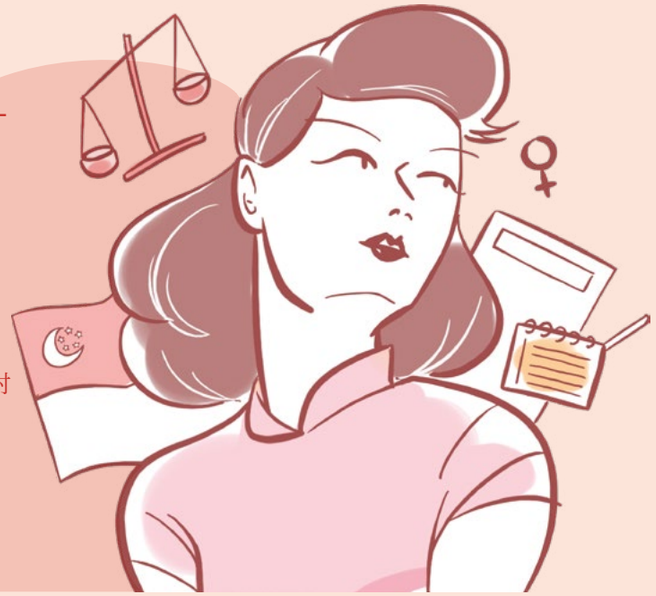
https://www.foundersmemorial.gov.sg/resources

Adeline Chia is an independent writer-editor in Singapore, covering art, culture and politics. She is also Reviews Editor of ArtReview Asia.

声援扶持妇女和贫困群体 ——

政界女先驱 何佩珠女士

Adeline Chia 撰写 | 林俊玉女士 华文校对



1

1929年出生于中国福建省惠安县的何佩珠女士是新加坡政坛和妇女运动的先驱人物。何女士1955年加入人民行动党，1957年，她代表甘榜格南区当选为市议会议员，年仅28岁。两年后，她又代表勿拉士峇沙区参加立法议会大选，并获选为议员。何女士也曾是人民行动党执行委员会的成员之一，直到1962年离开党为止。

在担任立法会议员期间，她与同为议员的陈翠娣女士（王邦文夫人）力争下，在1961年成功通过由柯玉珠女士（李光耀夫人）起草的妇女宪章。此宪章为保护妇女和儿童而设，并禁止非回教徒夫妇组织一夫多妻制的家庭。

1962年，何女士因不满新马合并公投的条件毅然辞去行动党议员的职务，并于1963年退出政坛。之后，她在20世纪60年代和70年代先后经营铁厂和造船业的生意。至今何女士仍定期与行动党其他早期党员会面，参加Makan 俱乐部的聚会。其俱乐部成员包括王邦文先生和陈志成先生。

此文章截取现年92岁仍精神矍铄的何女士的华语专访。

2

1
第一届立法议会勿拉士峇沙区人民行动党议员何佩珠女士
20世纪50年代
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

2
密驼路联络所开幕典礼何佩珠女士致辞
1960年11月5日
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

在7岁那年，您为何从中国移居新加坡？

因为家境贫寒，在家乡被人欺负，日子不好过。有一天，我的母亲去砍柴时，因为身体不适晕倒了。在家休养时，我问她：“我们不是有一位姑姑住在石叻坡（新加坡的旧名）吗？我们去找她吧。”

为了支付去新加坡的费用，我把我的银手环和羊卖掉了。我伤心流泪，因为那只羊不肯离开！当时的船票，女人只需要付半价，在一定身高以下的孩子是免费的。在量身高时，我驼着背，看起来矮一点，就不需要付船费了。父亲则因为钱不够而不能同行。

在新加坡，您从政之前以什么为生？

以前我曾经替好几家人洗涤衣服，每个月向他们领取洗衣费。在公共水龙头洗衣服，可以免费用水。母亲把我所赚的钱汇给在中国的家人。

什么原因促使您要参与政治？

因为贫穷所以我被人欺负。有一天，母亲上班时，她的雇主叫我去买咖啡。在咖啡店里，一个20来岁的年轻人用铁罐敲打我的头。我不知道他的动机，有可能是因为我穷，所以他觉得可以欺负我。

1955年，林清祥（人民行动党创始人之一）到牛车水演讲，倡议要完全改善社会不公平和贫穷的情况。我听了深受感动，就去领取参加行动党的表格。

大选期间，您的竞选宣言是什么？

我对政治的了解并不多，王邦文先生（前内阁部长）帮了我许多。上台时我用福建话演讲，批评其他政党的成员都是有钱人，不知道老百姓的疾苦。投票给人民行动党，我们就一定能改善社会。

3

3
人民行动党女党员抵达政府大厦参与立法议会就职典礼。（右起）何佩珠女士（勿拉士峇沙区议员），莎何拉女士（实乞纳区议员），陈翠嫦（例打区议员）和吴书珍女士（经禧区竞选代表）。
1959年6月5日
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

是什么经历激发您倡导妇女宪章的决心？

我在福利部的投诉部门工作时，有一个18岁的女孩被带过来，她看起来很害怕。我之所以说她是个女孩子，是因为她真的很单纯。以前的女孩子很少出门，对外面的世界了解不多。她来找我们是因为逃离了夫家，朋友带她来福利部寻求援助。女孩的母亲拿了男方2000元的聘金，可是女孩不想嫁给这个男人。我们就安排她住在少女收容所。

她的丈夫找到福利部来，带着传统的结婚请帖来到我的部门，说他们是正式摆酒席结婚的。他的大老婆也喝了女孩敬的茶，所以他们是“公认”结婚了。

女孩只好胆怯地跟着丈夫走。当时根本没有任何法律可以保护她。因此我觉得我们必须改善这种情况。

您为了废除一夫多妻制和争取妇女与男士同工同酬而奋斗。

有些男议员反对我的倡议。他们说，目前有些男人拥有几房妻室，应该怎么处理？经过讨论，最后妥协说不会追究，新的法律颁布后，才开始执行一夫一妻制。

男女同工但并不同酬，这是不公平的。有些男人说：“女人做事情比较慢。她们关心家庭和孩子，工作时还有所顾忌。怀孕时，身体也比较虚弱。”我对那些持有这种想法的男人说：“回家见一见你的妈妈。她十月怀胎，要照顾你，又要工作，这么辛苦。你会这么对她说吗？”

担任议员期间，可有任何让您印象深刻的回忆？

有一个男子想要当海员，但他却没有钱申请护照。当时申请护照的费用是15元。我把钱借给他。他领了薪水后，便还钱给我。当议员时，我一贫如洗，经常向我的书记借钱。我总是在月头还她钱，月尾又向她借。我之所以把钱借给我的选民是因为我自己也穷过，知道贫穷的滋味。

当议员时，我每月薪金500元。百分之25捐给行动党，150元给父母做家用，50元付支部办公室租金。每次受邀参加各项典礼和喜事，都要赠送红包，所以我总是入不敷出！

4

4
何佩珠女士主持密驼路联络所开幕典礼
1960年11月5日
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

什么原因让您离开政坛？

我不同意新马合并公投只提供三种不同合并方式的选项。我认为应该让人民决定要不要合并，所以我辞去行动党的职务。

在退出政坛后，您从事了什么行业？

上世纪60年代，我开了一家铁厂。到了70年代，我经营造船业生意。

对于现今或未来的新加坡，您有什么期望？

希望经济上有能力的人多帮助他人。年轻人、国会议员和政界人物都应该帮助其他人。如此一来，将活得又开心又健康。在教育方面，应该多注重鼓励人们为社会服务。

我盼望大家谨记母语的重要性，并把母语学好。

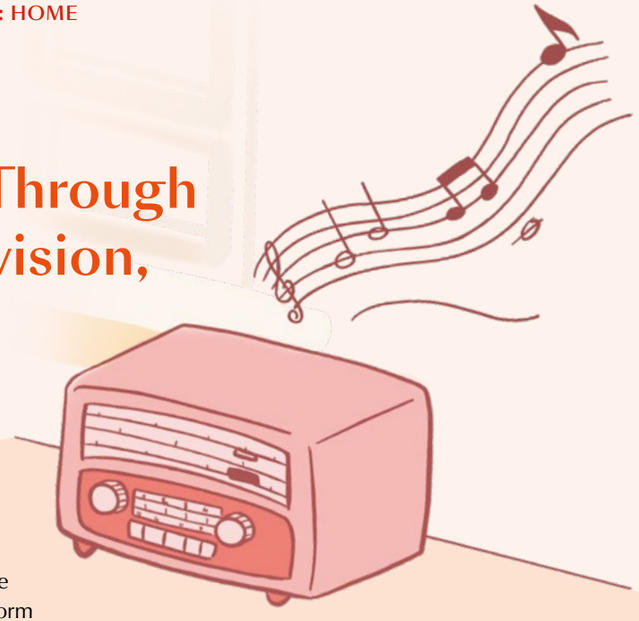
Adeline Chia是本地独立作者及编辑，写作领域包括艺术、文化与政治。她是ArtReview Asia刊物的评论编辑。

林俊玉 **Sharon Lim Choon Gek**，出生于1951年，1969年毕业于中华女子中学，2006年毕业于中国北京语言大学文学士。现为中华校友会学术股主任，负责出版会讯与校友会30周年纪念特刊主编。现任职于托管中心华文老师。

Broadcasting Singapore:

Shaping a Nation Through Radio and Television, 1950s–1970s

by **Andrea Kee**



As Singapore moved towards independence in the late 1950s, the nation's leaders saw the pressing need to form a new national identity that would unite Singaporeans in a rapidly changing world. Broadcasting on radio and television became an important channel to transmit national ideals and nation-building policies between the 1950s and 1970s. Radio and television broadcasts were also used to establish a sense of trust between the government and the people, and to emphasise the importance of multiracialism and unity. This article explores the ways in which radio and television were mobilised to shape the ideals of the fledgling nation, while creating a channel for people to contribute to nation-building.

1

1
National Panasonic transistor radio
1950s–1960s
Mixed media
1997-01967
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

2
14-inch white Telefunken television set
1970s
Mixed media
2014-00597
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

Building Communication and Trust

In 1959, Singapore attained full internal self-government and Lee Kuan Yew, the Secretary-General of the winning People's Action Party (PAP), was elected the first Prime Minister of Singapore. On 3 June, he delivered a rousing victory rally speech celebrating this "new chapter in the history of Singapore".[1] However, he also noted that the government would need the people's support in order to produce the desired political, social and economic changes.[2] One of the channels by which the young government sought support was radio and television.

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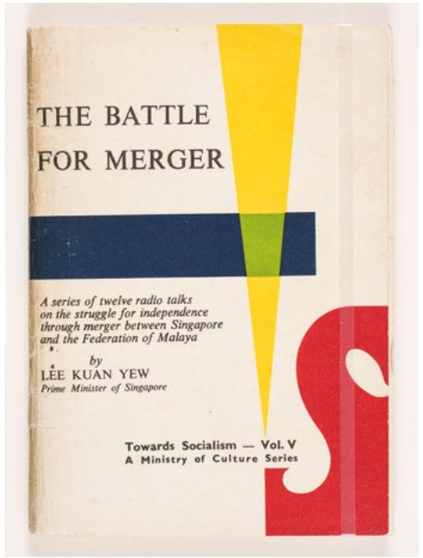


3
The Battle for Merger – a compilation of transcripts of Lee Kuan Yew's radio talks
1961
Paper
1995-00362
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

"The Battle for Merger" radio talks (1961)

With Singapore now a self-governing state, the Ministry of Culture absorbed the Singapore branch of Radio Malaya, a department previously within Singapore's colonial civil government, and renamed it Radio Singapura.[3] Subsequently, radio and television focused on communicating government messages to win "hearts and minds", particularly to guide the country towards merger with the Federation of Malaya.[4] Between 13 September and 9 October 1961, Lee broadcast "The Battle for Merger" radio talks, a series of 12 talks aimed at winning over undecided voters on the upcoming merger referendum.[5] As he persuaded people to vote for merger, he spoke candidly about the background of the PAP's united front and eventual split with the opposition.[6] The radio talks were well-received even months after they were first broadcast. In January 1962, a book compiling all 12 talks became a bestseller within a day of release.[7]

[1] Lee Kuan Yew, "Victory Rally at the Padang" (speech, Singapore, 3 June 1959), National Archives of Singapore, lky19590603.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Paulina Ng, "History of Radio and Broadcasting in Singapore: Its Formative Years" (bachelor's thesis, National University of Singapore, 1996), 41.
[4] "PAP's policy now national: Rajaratnam", *The Straits Times (ST)*, 15 June 1963, 22.
[5] Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (Singapore: Times Edition Pte Ltd, 1998), 393.
[6] Albert Lau, "The Battle for Merger—The Historical Context", in *The Battle For Merger* (Singapore: National Archives Singapore and Straits Times Press, 2014), xxii.
[7] "Book by Lee selling fast", *ST*, 26 January 1962, 11.

"The Crucial Years" broadcasts (1968)

In 1968, the British announced that it would withdraw all its troops from Singapore by 1971. During this uncertain time, politicians took to the airwaves to inform Singaporeans on what was to come and assuage their fears. From 22 March to 9 April 1968, Lee and other Cabinet ministers delivered a series of broadcasts titled "The Crucial Years", which laid out the government's plans for dealing with the impending economic fallout.[8] Lee's talk, which kickstarted the series, reminded citizens of the struggles they had overcome in the 1950s and 1960s and described the British military withdrawal as "the final chapter in the making of a nation".[9] Encouraging resilience in the people, he asked citizens: "Have we the will to be a nation? Have we the grit?"[10]

The broadcasts aimed to inspire trust in the people during a period of crisis, and rally them to work in tandem with the government.

4
Minister for Culture S. Rajaratnam appearing on television screens during the inauguration of Television Singapura's pilot service
1963
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

Promoting policies and influencing social behaviour

With independence also came the urgency to forge a national consciousness and the need to ensure that the people understood and supported new government policies. In 1965, Radio Singapura and Television Singapura merged into Radio and Television Singapore (RTS), a department within the Ministry of Culture. Forums, documentaries and panel discussions were produced to help communicate state initiatives to Singaporeans.[11] In the 1970s, RTS produced programmes, jingles, talk shows and more[12] to promote national campaigns such as "Keep Singapore Clean and Mosquito-Free" and "Family Planning".[13]

RTS also produced programmes to allay public fears related to new nation-building policies. When many parents expressed fear that National Service (NS) was akin to sending their

[8] *A Series of Ministerial Broadcasts Entitled "The Crucial Years"* (Singapore: Radio and Television Singapore, 1968).
[9-10] Ibid.
[11] Singapore, Ministry of Culture, *From Many Cultures One Voice: Television Singapore Tenth Anniversary, 1963-73 (Singapore: Ministry of Culture Broadcasting Division, 1973)*, 6; Eddie C. Y. Kuo and Peter S. J. Chen, *Communication Policy and Planning in Singapore* (London; Boston: K. Paul International in association with East-West Communication Institute, Honolulu, 1983), 77.
[12] Ministry of Communications and Information, "Towards A Clean And Green Singapore With Broadcasting", *National Archives of Singapore*, June 2018, https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/policy_history/card?id=9 (accessed 13 July 2020).
[13] Singapore, Ministry of Culture, *Articles on RTS* (Singapore: Ministry of Culture, 1969-1978), https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/government_records/record-details/c8c71a2f-dc5a-11e7-9cbe-0050568939ad (accessed 13 July 2020).

children off to war, the Ministry of Defence organised a television and radio campaign to explain the policy and provide a behind-the-scenes look at what life was like in army camps.[14] This sought to reassure the public on what NS truly entailed.

Fostering Multiracial Unity

Developing a Malayan consciousness

Staying united as one people regardless of race was one of the key messages Singapore's leaders wanted to transmit. After being absorbed by the Ministry of Culture in 1959, Radio Singapura revised its programmes to work towards developing a national Malayan culture. Between July and October 1957, S. Rajaratnam, then a writer and presenter for Radio Malaya, broadcast two radio plays, *A Nation in the Making* and *Looking Forward*.[15] They championed his views on the importance of non-communalism, multiracialism and forging a common Malayan identity.[16] In *A Nation in the Making*, one of Rajaratnam's characters espoused the importance of multiracial unity for Singapore's future: "Unless we, the various races who live in Malaya become one nation, one people – unless we become loyal Malayans, there can never be peace and progress in this lovely land of ours."[17]

Breaking down communal barriers

Under the Ministry of Culture, Radio Singapura devised the new tagline "From Many Cultures – One Voice" and its programmes were subsequently directed towards accommodating and unifying Singapore's different racial and cultural groups.[18] Radio was multilingual and gave "proportionate time and emphasis" to the four official languages, English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil; ministerial speeches, rallies, news and other programmes were also covered by all language sections.[19] The government also used subtler methods to encourage the formation of a Malayan identity. According to Lee Khoon Choy, then Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of Culture, vernacular channels were

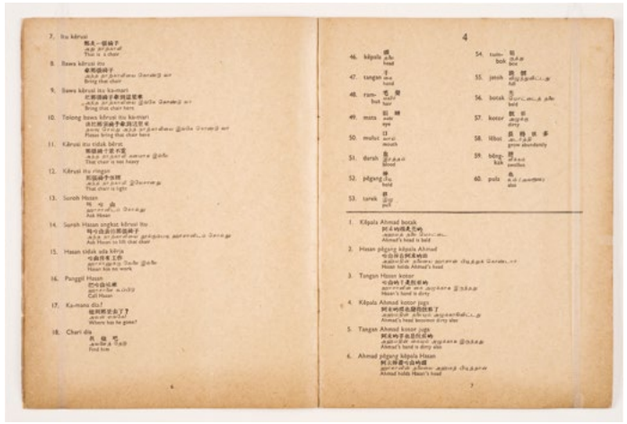
[14] *Singapore: The First Ten Years of Independence, 1965 to 1975* (Singapore: Joint publication by National Library Board and National Archives of Singapore, 2007), 86; Lucy Leong, "Interview with Leong, Lucy", Reel 5, by Patricia Lee, Oral History Centre, 7 August 2001, audio, 29:30.
[15] Irene Ng, "Introduction", in *The Short Stories and Radio Plays of S. Rajaratnam*, ed. Irene Ng (Singapore: Epigram Books, 2011), 61.
[16] S. Rajaratnam, "A Nation in the Making (Part V)", in *The Short Stories and Radio Plays of S. Rajaratnam*, 381-382.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ng, "History of Radio and Broadcasting in Singapore", 42.
[19] Ai Yen Chen, "The Mass Media, 1819-1980", in *A History of Singapore*, ed. Ernest C. T. Chew and Edwin Lee (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991), 306.

occasionally altered to play music from other language and cultural groups.[20] This aimed to expose audiences to a wider range of music, fostering a more diverse cultural appreciation among Singaporeans.

Cultural barriers within Singapore were further broken down through new multilingual entertainment programmes. On 4 June 1961, a variety show *Suara Budaya Singapura* (The Voice of Singapore Culture) was presented at the Victoria Theatre as a preview of Radio Singapura's fourth service, *Suara Singapura* (Voice of Singapore).[21] At this preview, ethnic arts groups were asked to perform segments from an art form outside of their culture. The radio programme, *Suara Singapura*, eventually ran every evening from 6 to 11pm and contained segments such as talks about other cultural art forms, including a Malay talk about Peking opera.[22] There were also news bulletins in English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil, with Malay providing "continuity links".[23] Many citizens responded to this policy of embracing the country's many cultures as one Malayan culture by organising cultural celebrations of their own. In September 1961, the Singapore Indian Association organised a "Cultural Night" featuring not only Indian performances, but also Malay dance forms and Chinese cultural showcases.[24]

After gaining full independence in 1965, the government emphasised that multiculturalism was paramount to the survival of the new nation.[25] As such, RTS retained the multilingual policy that guided Radio Singapura and Television Singapura, providing "constant exchanges of programmes between the four language streams" – including playing Malay folk songs in both Malay and English programmes, and providing subtitles in the four main languages.[26] This ensured that listeners and viewers from various language groups could access the diverse range of programmes and, more importantly, Singaporeans could develop an appreciation for other cultures.

[20] Lee Khoon Choy, "Interview with Lee Khoon Choy", Reel 44, by Audrey Lee-Koh Mei Chen (Mrs), Oral History Centre, 16 June 1981, audio, 30:42.
[21] "Multi-racial show with a difference", *ST*, 3 June 1961, 11.
[22] "Twin roads to be taken by 'Suara Singapura'", *ST*, 25 July 1961, 18.
[23] "New radio programme 'Suara Singapore' on Monday", *ST*, 22 July 1961, 4.
[24] "Association to hold a 'Cultural Night'", *The Singapore Free Press*, 15 September 1961, 21.
[25] *Singapore: The First Ten Years of Independence, 1965 to 1975*, 160.
[26] Singapore, Ministry of Culture, *From Many Cultures One Voice*, 7.



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5
Learn Malay with Radio Singapore booklet
1959-1960
Paper
2014-00618
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

Malay, the national language, was used to foster a common identity among Singaporeans. This multilingual booklet contains 16 Malay lessons that were broadcast in 1960.

6
An *Aneka Ragam Ra'ayat* show staged at the City Hall steps
5 June 1960
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

Aneka Ragam Ra'ayat or "People's Cultural Concerts" were free open-air concerts organised by the Ministry of Culture. They were the first public shows to feature cultural performances by different races, with the purpose of promoting cultural integration. Some of these shows were recorded and broadcast by Radio Singapura.

Conclusion

Since the 1960s and 1970s, broadcasting has seen many changes – the most drastic of which came with the expansion of the Internet in the 2000s. Despite these changes, it is still used by the government to reach out to citizens today – this is most recently seen in the televised press conferences and national addresses by ministers in light of the COVID-19 public health crisis. Furthermore, broadcasts continue to be multilingual. During Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's nationwide address announcing that Singapore was going into a "Circuit Breaker" period to contain the spread of COVID-19, he spoke in English, Malay and Chinese. In between the segments in different languages, he took a sip from a teacup – spawning jokes and memes about the magic teacup that grants the drinker the ability to speak in multiple languages.[27] Unity, trust, and multiracialism are ideals to which Singapore continues to aspire, and broadcasting continues to be a key channel through which these values are promoted.

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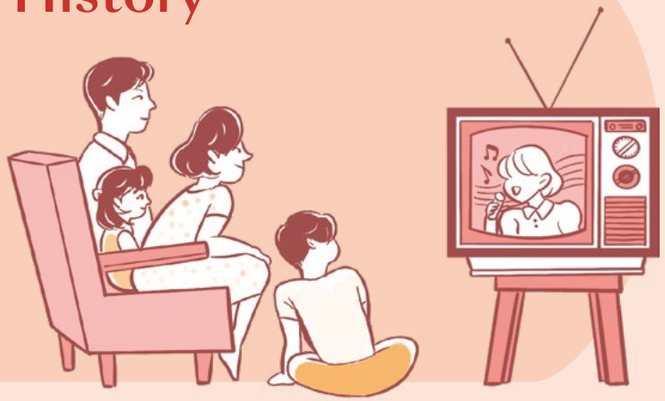
[27] Ilyas Sholihyn, "Of circuit breakers and tea cups: Memes from PM Lee's address about stricter Covid-19 measures", *AsiaOne*, https://www.asiaone.com/digital/circuit-breakers-and-tea-cups-memes-pm-lees-address-about-stricter-covid-19-measures (accessed 9 July 2020).

Sixties on Air:

How Television Made Waves in Singapore's History

by **Joy Ho**



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On 6pm on Friday, 15 February 1963, Television Singapura was officially inaugurated. This momentous occasion represented the start of a new era of entertainment, as well as a growing demand for consumer electronic goods. Aspirational lifestyle products were increasingly within the reach of the population, as there was an overall increase in employment and a rise in disposable income. As such, items such as the Setron television set (2015-00054) and Setron radio (2014-00598) gained huge popularity in homes.

Setron, or Singapore Electronics Limited, was the first television assembly plant not only in Singapore, but Southeast Asia. It was located at the former Tanglin Halt Industrial Estate, which was developed in the 1960s to house light and medium industries. Such industrial estates provided employment opportunities for Singaporeans, especially residents who lived in the new Housing and Development Board (HDB) estates nearby, creating tight clusters of employment and consumption. The development of HDB flats created both the demand for household electronic products as well as the workforce helping to manufacture such products. The employment generated income for more spending, including on electronic products such as television and radio sets.

1
Setron radio
Late 1960s – early 1970s
Mixed media
2014-00598
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

2
Setron television set
1960s-1970s
Mixed media
2015-00054
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

> "On the home front, changes came fast and furious. One indication of the pace of change was the improvement of our household appliances. Prominent among these advances must be the advent of the television. Increasing affluence also meant that more and more people were replacing their black-and-white television sets with coloured ones."

Tan Kok Yang, *From the Blue Windows: Recollections of Life in Queenstown, Singapore, in the 1960s and 1970s* (Singapore: Ridge Books, 2013), 147

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4

Besides being an important marker of Singapore's shift to industrialisation, the rise of television and radio sets also signalled changes in consumption. Although we recognise them as everyday household items now, television and radio sets were once regarded as luxury goods. They could be seen to embody the aspirations of Singaporeans when they moved from vernacular housing into high-rise HDB flats, being status symbols for families who could afford them. Shown on pages 20 to 21 are a Setron television set and a radio of unique designs that are housed within our National Collection. The television set is encased in a teak cabinet with shutters, and the radio's space-helmet-shaped design was unlike most radio sets that were rectangular. This feature was likely to have been influenced by the Space Age design trend of the 1960s and 1970s, a time of space exploration and technological advancements. Given their stylish designs, these items were likely positioned as luxury products that would appeal to homeowners with a higher disposable income, thus showing a connection between Singapore's housing history and economic growth.

3-5
Workers at the factory of Setron Ltd at Tanglin Halt, on the day of its official opening
28 April 1966
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

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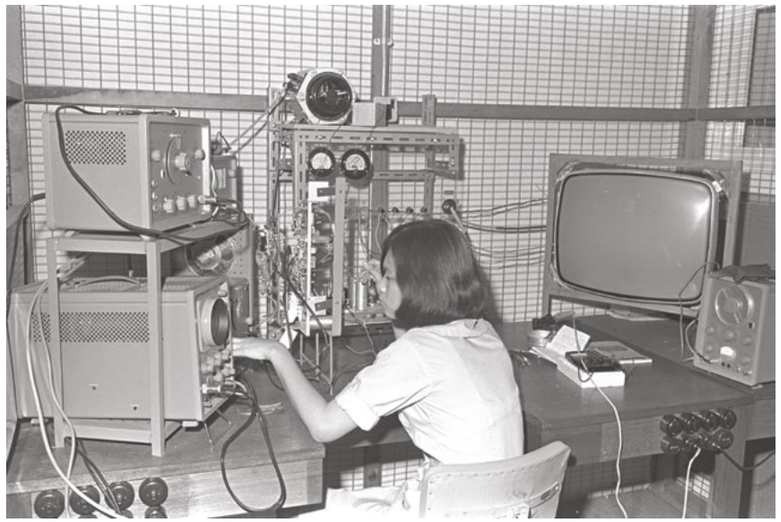

Five Years to House a Nation:

Achieving the HDB's Five-Year Plan, 1960–1965

by **Karen Ho**

When Singapore attained self-government in 1959, the newly installed People's Action Party (PAP) government inherited multiple challenges, a long-standing one being the shortage of public housing. Previously, the Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) under the British colonial leadership had barely managed to address the issue, due to factors such as the flats' high building costs and their unsuitability for locals' needs.[1] The PAP, on the other hand, saw the urgent need to create a viable public housing plan. Informal housing settlements such as villages and slums were seen as cramped and unsanitary, and there were concerns with fire safety and crime.[2] Moreover, the area around the Singapore River needed an overhaul in order to maximise its economic potential and the city's development. This entailed relocating those who lived there, which was approximately a quarter of the total population.[3]

Hence, the Housing and Development Board (HDB) was set up in 1960 with the aim of solving the public housing issue in 10 years. It was estimated that Singapore needed 147,000 new homes from 1961 to 1970, and the government aimed to build 51,031 housing units by 1965.[4] There was strong political motivation to accomplish this ambitious plan – it would produce tangible results, impacting families first-hand and visibly altering the city skyline. The changes would remind the public that the PAP could be trusted to address the people's needs and improve the city.[5]

[1] Alan Choe, "Interview with Choe, Alan Fook Cheong", Reel 7, by Soh Eng Khim, Oral History Centre, 1 August 1997, audio, 30:22; Tan Kim Chia, "Public housing in Singapore 1947-70 (the work of SIT and the HDB)" (PhD diss., National University of Singapore, 1973), 11, 23-28; Loh Kah Seng, *Squatters into Citizens: The 1961 Bukit Ho Swee Fire and the Making of Modern Singapore* (Singapore: NUS Press Pte Ltd, 2013), 10-11.
[2] Chionh Chye Khye and Louisa-May Khoo, "Home, Community, Identity: Singapore's Public Housing Story", in *Challenges and Reforms in Urban Governance: Insights from the development experience of China and Singapore* (Singapore: Centre for Liveable Cities, 2016), 189; Yeo Hsuyin, "Queenstown: A History of Singapore's New Town" (bachelor's thesis, National University of Singapore, 1994), 2.
[3] Housing and Development Board (hereafter "HDB"), *First Decade in Public Housing: 1960-1969* (Singapore: HDB, 1970), 59.

HDB surpassed its five-year target and built 54,430 flats by 1965 – more than twice the number SIT had completed in 32 years.[6] This article explores some of the initial challenges HDB faced and the spirit and attitudes that HDB's leaders had to embody in order to surmount these obstacles.

Bold Changes for a Bold Vision

To solve the overcrowding issue and make way for development in the city centre, HDB aimed to build as many flats as quickly as possible. However, it faced multiple challenges. Upon becoming HDB's Chairman in 1960, witnessing a mass exodus of expatriates following the PAP's takeover, and dismissing unqualified workers who had received their positions through nepotism, Lim Kim San was faced with a Board that was understaffed and demoralised, riddled with bureaucratic inefficiency and ill-equipped for the tasks ahead.[8] HDB also had to keep building costs low and flats affordable for the public to avoid straining public expenditure.[9] Finally, it had to overcome strong public resistance to resettlement, which had hindered the public housing project since SIT's days.[10]

Lim, together with Howe Yoon Chong as Chief Executive Officer and Teh Cheang Wan as Chief Architect, became known to practice the mantra "talk less, do more" as they cleared the backlog in flat applications, prioritising lower-income families.[11] Organisationally, Lim's staunch adherence to specific principles and standards resulted in a culture shift within HDB and the companies it contracted.

> **"Then I found out there were 40 or 50 [officers] who were not qualified to be in there. [...] I said, 'All right, pay them off straight away and tell them, go home.' That was how I started the Housing Board."**
>
> Former HDB Chairman, Lim Kim San, in an oral history recording by the National Archives of Singapore[7]

[4] HDB, *First Decade in Public Housing*, 8; HDB, *Annual Report 1965* (Singapore: HDB, 1965), 10.
[5] Chua Beng-Huat, *Political Legitimacy and Housing: Stakeholding in Singapore* (London: Routledge, 1997), 1, 139; Choe, interview, Reel 7; People's Action Party, *The Tasks Ahead: P.A.P.'s Five-Year Plan, 1959-1964*, Part 2 (Singapore: Petir, 1959), 31.
[6] HDB, *Annual Report 1965*, 10.
[7] Lim Kim San, "Interview with Lim Kim San", Reel 10, by Lily Tan (Mrs), Oral History Centre, 29 March 1985, audio, 30:47.
[8] Lim, interview, Reel 10; HDB, *Annual Report 1960* (Singapore: HDB, 1963), 6-7; Asad-ul Iqbal Latif, *Lim Kim San: A Builder of Singapore* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), 58.
[9] Lim Kim San, "Interview with Lim Kim San", Reel 11, by Lily Tan (Mrs), Oral History Centre, 29 March 1985, audio, 30:37.
[10] Loh, *Squatters into Citizens*, 82-84; HDB, *Annual Report 1961* (Singapore: HDB, 1961), 4.
[11] Warren Fernandez, *Our Homes: 50 Years of Housing a Nation* (Singapore: Straits Times Press, 2011), 47; HDB, *Annual Report 1965*, 12; Liu Thai Ker, "Overview", in *Housing a Nation: 25 Years of Public Housing in Singapore*, Aline K. Wong and Stephen H. K. Yeh eds. (Singapore: Maruzen Asia, 1985), 3.

1
Built From The Ground Up, A Layer At A Time
1970
Loke Hong Seng
Paper
Edition No.: 6/15
Image Size: 35.0 x 57.0 cm
2016-00738
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

2
Former HDB Chairman Lim Kim San visiting areas affected by floods
28 February 1963
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

1

Tearing Down to Build Anew

Time was of the essence for HDB, and under Lim, red tape within the organisation was greatly reduced. Leaders discussed matters with their staff face-to-face. Lim met his department heads regularly and informally and made decisions on the spot. Inefficient committees formed under SIT were removed. With increased efficiency and reduced red tape, staff morale and confidence grew, and employees became motivated to voice ideas.[12]

In terms of manpower, HDB needed more qualified workers quickly. Lim removed HDB's prerequisite of requiring 10 years' experience before joining as an architect; instead, young recruits were hired and observed before being offered a longer contract. To train staff, HDB issued overseas scholarships and designed its own courses, which included on-the-job training and night classes.[13] Recruits of the Works Brigade – formed in 1959 for unemployed youths – also received training in construction work and helped HDB in building projects. These efforts also generated employment and increased the employability of young Singaporeans.[14] Later, clear guidelines were created to ensure that HDB could maintain high standards despite employing less experienced personnel.[15]

2

[12] Lim, interview, Reel 10; HDB, *Annual Report 1960*, 7-8.
[13] Lim, interview, Reel 10; HDB, *Annual Report 1961*, 6-7; Latif, *Lim Kim San*, 66.
[14] Lee Kuan Yew, "Speech by Mr. Lee Kuan Yew at a Rally at the Esplanade, Penang, on 20th April, 1964" (speech, Singapore, 20 April 1964), National Archives of Singapore, lky19640420; Lim Kim San, "Interview with Lim Kim San", Reel 13, by Lily Tan (Mrs), Oral History Centre, 3 April 1985, audio, 29:34.
[15] Liu Thai Ker, "Interview with Liu Thai Ker", Reel 15, by Irene Quah (Mrs), Oral History Centre, 22 January 1997, audio, 30:19; Liu Thai Ker, "Interview with Liu Thai Ker", Reel 12, by Irene Quah (Mrs), Oral History Centre, 24 June 1996, audio, 30:36.

Unique Solutions for Unique Challenges

Often, HDB had to find solutions by taking matters into their own hands and being willing to trial and error. For instance, since local earthwork contractors' work processes took too long, the Board decided to do the job itself. It also tried its hand at levelling hills and reclaiming land.[16] In general, HDB's leaders had no choice but to be bold and experimental, coming up with innovative solutions through the years, such as ways to improve lift safety, detect urine in lifts and introduce waterproof bathroom floors in flats.[17] Lim suggested that the youth and inexperience of the early leadership contributed to HDB's success. In an interview, he mused, "On reflection, I think it is a case of 'fools rushing in where angels fear to tread.' But when you are young, you feel everything is possible."[18]

To ensure fair pricing, HDB had to monitor companies closely, insisting on open, free competition when construction companies colluded to artificially inflate prices. Furthermore, when the price of building materials rose, HDB took quarrying into its own hands, thus signalling that it was not at the mercy of its contractors. The Board insisted on fair processes and Lim made contractors redo substandard work. On HDB's end, if officers delayed payment, contractors could inform Lim directly. Lim also expressly rejected gifts to avoid being expected to return favours.[19] These measures further inconvenienced companies that attempted to cut corners, forcing everyone to follow procedures honestly and fairly.

Adapting to Meet Residents' Needs

Resettling was difficult and uncomfortable for residents, who had to change their lifestyles. They had to start paying rent and utility bills, adapt to a smaller space, and find work rather than rear animals or grow crops for sustenance.[20]

3

3
Villagers moving to HDB flats
1963
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

[16] Lim, interview, Reel 10; Lim Kim San, "Interview with Lim Kim San", Reel 12, by Lily Tan (Mrs), Oral History Centre, 3 April 1985, audio, 29:39.
[17] Liu Thai Ker, "Interview with Liu Thai Ker", Reel 21, by Irene Quah (Mrs), Oral History Centre, 14 May 1998, audio, 30:20.
[18] Melanie Chew, *Leaders of Singapore* (Singapore: Resource Press, 1996), 163.
[19] Lim, interview, Reel 10; Lim, interview, Reel 13.

To facilitate residents' transition, HDB considered their concerns and amended policies where possible. For example, the Head of the Resettlement Department, Lim Hoon Yong, realised villagers had trouble forking out the expenses needed for the move as they were only compensated after relocating. HDB changed its policy to pay compensation upfront, which helped HDB gain residents' trust. In 1968, amendments to the Central Provident Fund (CPF) Act allowed CPF savings to be used to purchase a flat.[21] HDB also helped residents maintain their livelihoods. While SIT flats were far away from work opportunities, HDB created avenues for work near homes instead. Neighbourhood shops and markets provided both amenities and jobs, and industrial opportunities were set up near big estates.

HDB's architects and planners also designed estates with residents' needs and preferences in mind. SIT's former designs better suited the British lifestyle and climate, emphasising small neighbourhoods and privacy. In contrast, HDB incorporated communal spaces in their estates to preserve a sense of community. Living spaces were designed for the tropical climate, encouraging air flow and facing away from the sun. Subsequent policies that encouraged precincts to develop unique building designs, undulating terrain and other special features also helped residents cultivate a sense of comfort, identity and belonging within their neighbourhoods.[22]

4
Balloting for flats in MacPherson under the "Home Ownership for the People" scheme
23 November 1965
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

4

[20] Latif, *Lim Kim San*, 79; Loh, *Squatters into Citizens*, 82.
[21] Chionh and Khoo, "Home, Community, Identity", 195; Fernandez, *Our Homes*, 62-63.
[22] Latif, *Lim Kim San*, 86; Lim, interview, Reel 12; Liu, interview, Reel 21.
[23] Choe, interview, Reel 7; Lim, interview, Reel 13; HDB, *First Decade in Public Housing*, 6.
[24] Chua, *Political Legitimacy and Housing*, 68.

5

Conclusion

By the time Singapore gained independence in 1965, overcrowding and unemployment were being tackled, and a sense of national consciousness was forming. Beyond simply building a record number of flats, HDB supported the PAP's efforts to build a national identity and develop Singapore economically. The public housing project and Home Ownership Scheme brought about greater social and political stability, and Singapore's urban centre finally stood a chance at renewal.[23] Undoubtedly, adjusting to public housing was tough for new residents, but public perception towards relocation gradually improved.[24] Eventually, the population enjoyed the benefits of a developed, economically thriving and politically stable society, where a vast majority of the nation could afford a safe and clean home.

5
Block 82 Commonwealth Close, built in 1963
2013
Darren Soh
Paper
Edition No.: 10/10
2020-00243
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

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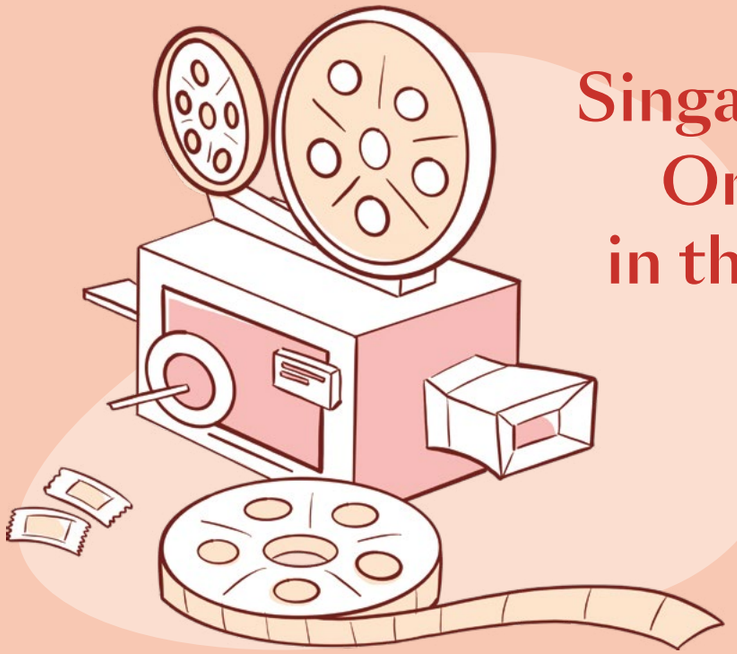


Singapore Onscreen in the 1960s

by **Nasri Shah**

A staple of pre- and post-independence life in Singapore, cinema-going was a go-to leisure activity. In the early 1950s, there were more than 30 cinemas, and at least half of the local population went to the movies in Singapore at least once a month.[1] Between the late 1940s and 1960s, there were original, locally produced films shot by regional production companies with offices in Singapore, including the studios for the Shaw Brothers' Malay film production outfit at 8 Jalan Ampas in present-day Balestier.

The post-war films offered an insight into how people thought of Singapore's rapid development at that time. In various films from the 1950s and 1960s, filmmakers attempted to register the impact of economic and urban developments on people's lived experiences. New high-rise flats, a common feature now, were depicted as jarring and alienating at the time.

1

[1] Timothy Barnard, "Decolonization and the nation in Malay film, 1955–1965", *South East Asia Research* 17, no. 1 (2009): 65–86.

2

1
Poster for *Seniman Bujang Lapok*
(The Three Worn Out Actor Bachelors)
1961
Paper
Collection of the Malay Heritage Centre,
National Heritage Board
© The Shaw Organisation Pte Ltd

2
Blocks 81 and 82 MacPherson Lane, built in 1968
2014
Darren Soh
Paper
Edition No.: 10/10
2020-00246
Collection of the National Museum of
Singapore, National Heritage Board

In 1968's *Kaseh Ibu* (A Mother's Love), a widow named Hasnah wanders from her kampung to a new block of residential flats – located along Jalan Balam in Macpherson – to sell kueh (traditional Malay snacks). As she moves from flat to flat, however, Hasnah is constantly rebuffed. This sequence captures one of the first signature Housing and Development Board (HDB) blocks, characterised by identical units organised along a corridor. What appears as a slice of nostalgia for present-day viewers, however, is an architectural shock to Hasnah, who navigates a series of dizzying corridors and stairways that contrast with the kampung setting of her adulthood.

3

3
Photograph of Nordin Ahmad (left) and Latifah Omar (centre), director and star of *Kaseh Ibu* with famed film director B. N. Rao
1960s
Paper
2005-01069
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

4
Relocation
1970
Loke Hong Seng
Paper
Edition No.: 2/15
Image Size: 43.0 x 43.0 cm
2016-00735
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

The contrast between rural and urban settings was a recurring theme in other Malay films, particularly during the early 1960s, when Singapore's public housing project went into full swing after HDB was set up in 1960. These films registered the loss of the kampung and earlier settlements to towering concrete structures as not only an architectural loss, but a moral one. This rural-urban duality plays out in 1963's *Darah Ku* (My Blood), via the story of two brothers who were brought up in a kampung. The elder, Osman, is a promising yet mistreated boxer who lives in the shadow of the younger brother, Hussein, who is favoured by the father. After Hussein leaves his kampung home and moves to the city, however, his pleasure-seeking and materialistic ways, showcased through vignettes of visits to various urban spaces such as pawnshops and nightclubs, eventually lead to a destructive rift within the family. This is contrasted with Osman, whose devotion to his parents and his childhood home in the kampung is maintained even in his adulthood. As with several other films that take the rural and urban as a source of tension, this rift is only soothed through an eventual recognition of shared values across both settings. Hussein, upon realising his mistakes, returns to his kampung home to seek forgiveness, and is later joined by his urbanite love interest Faridah.

While the dichotomy between kampung and apartment life provides dramatic contrasts on film, in reality, HDB blocks may not after all be completely sterile spaces, devoid of human interaction. Pockets of communal spaces have found their way into high-rise flats, including stone chess tables in void decks, bulletin boards in lift corridors or digital screens in elevators and neighbours' mobile app chat groups. One wonders if Hasnah, selling kueh from home to home, might feel any different now.

Nasri Shah is Curator at the Malay Heritage Centre. His past projects include *Mereka Utusan* (2016) and *Women in Action* (2018), which have focused on histories of the Malay publishing industry and women's rights movement respectively.

4

Straight Talking:

Sociologist and Educator Professor Chua Beng Huat

by **Adeline Chia**

1

Could you tell us about your childhood in Bukit Ho Swee, and what daily life was like?

I attended two primary schools: Kai Kok Primary School, a kampung-funded Chinese school a few minutes' walk from my house, and Pearl's Hill Primary School, an English-speaking school in Chinatown. I did the morning session at one and the afternoon session at the other.

We had one of the largest houses in the kampung, at the junction of Bukit Ho Swee and Beo Lane. The single-storey house had wooden panel walls and a very high attap roof, and was well maintained. Part of the house was initially rented to a provision shop owner. When he gave up the business, my mother took over and ran it as one of our family businesses; my father had other businesses.

The place to hang out in the kampung was the local kopitiam, which was across the road from our house. Unemployed men of all ages would spend their days idling there, swapping fantastic stories and rumours. There were a few literate men who would read the newspaper items out loud for the others, who would chime in with their opinions.

How was your family affected by the fire in 1961?

The fire was a great financial loss to my family. We lost the house, the provision shop and a storeroom worth of flour, which my father traded in.

After the fire, we first moved to Upper Thomson Road, what is now Shunfu estate, where an uncle had a spare attap house, then to a Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) flat at Dorset Road. However, my mother would not live away from the Bukit Ho Swee area, so when she spotted a vacant SIT flat in Boon Tiong Road, she applied for it and we moved back to the old neighbourhood.

My family moved from a large house that comfortably accommodated a family of eight children to a three-bedroom flat! Fortunately, soon after, my elder siblings married and moved into flats of their own. My parents lived the rest of their lives in Boon Tiong Road, where my mother was relocated one final time when the flat went en bloc and was demolished. She moved into a new high-rise building some 50 metres away.

2

3

1
Bukit Ho Swee
c.1947
Courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

2-3
Bukit Ho Swee fire
25 May 1961
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

It was uncommon for people of your generation to have done their tertiary education abroad. How do you think your education impacted or changed the way you saw Singapore?

Yes, it was uncommon for my generation to go to university abroad. In Bukit Ho Swee, I only know of two other boys who went to university, and they went to the then University of Singapore.

Acadia University was formative for me intellectually. This was the late 1960s, a time of the Vietnam War, of the civil rights movement in the United States and of student revolution. The present feminist, environmental, and human rights movements all began then. As an undergraduate in chemistry and biology, I was nevertheless involved in "radical" student activities on campus, including organising free tuition for children of poor black communities. It was during this period that I began to understand the damage of colonialism and the politics of decolonisation. After completing my undergraduate science degree, I switched to environmental studies and then to postgraduate studies in sociology.

I still believe in Singapore's early socialism, or at least social democracy. Generally, I am not inclined to measure the very short political history of Singapore as a postwar,

postcolonial nation-state against the long political historical developments and achievements of the West. I am more inclined to take on the messiness of local politics and try to understand it from the inside and if necessary, develop locally relevant concepts.

You mentioned that, following the Bukit Ho Swee fire, your mother wanted to continue living in the area. How has Singaporeans' relationship with space, and even their concept of the nation, evolved through the generations?

The Bukit Ho Swee fire has a historic and symbolic place in the total urbanisation of Singapore. It was on the fire site that the first major Housing and Development Board (HDB) estate was built. After that, the old landscape of Singapore, which was a small colonial city centre fringed by villages, progressively gave way to high-rise HDB estates and new towns. The ground/earth became foreign to all, especially children. Living in mid-air and confined to the interior of the flats became the way of life. This is why there is the mythologisation of the kampung spirit.

One of the most consequential changes to spatial perception for Singaporeans who grew up in colonial and early independence days is the progressive erasure of the spaces in which they grew up. All the schools that I attended are gone, and all the places I have lived in have been demolished and rebuilt. The physical environment is no longer recognisable, except for the conserved shophouse areas and the streets they are on.

4
Aftermath of the Bukit Ho Swee fire
28 May 1961
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

5
Work in progress at Bukit Ho Swee
1962
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

6
Bukit Ho Swee Estate
1965
Housing and Development Board Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

4

5

Spatial recognition is now formalised by street names for a highly literate citizenry, instead of informal markers along the way for many who were illiterate. Districts, which used to be known by vernacular names in different languages, were differentiated, bearing symbolic meanings to locals.

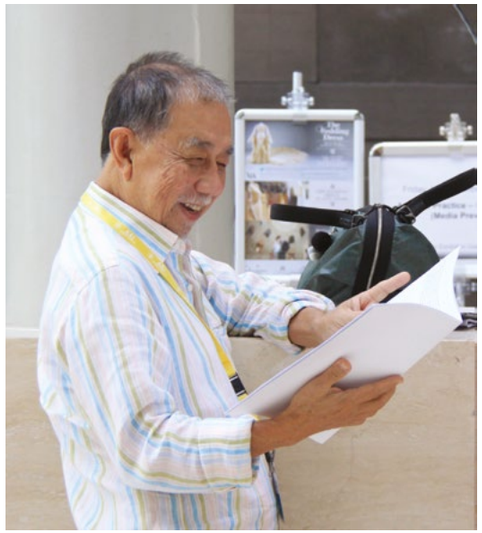
There used to be reasons to go to different places for different needs or sights. Now, most of Singapore is covered with relatively homogenous public housing estates, and there is no reason for someone living in Ang Mo Kio to go to Tampines for "touristy" reasons; it is the same there as it is here! (In Gertrude Stein's line: There is no there there when you get there!)

Given that more than 80 percent of the population live in relatively similar public housing flats and all estates are similarly serviced with transportation hubs, cooked food centres and malls, and with the profits that can be made from the resale market, there is now little attachment to residential place. Place is now largely evaluated in terms of convenience and available amenities.

6

One of the terms used to describe the younger generation is "woke". They want to have deeper and more honest conversations about issues such as race, religion and class. Do you think this may lead to broader, substantive changes in how our society dialogues about these issues?

It is good to have broader and deeper discussion on all so-called "sensitive" issues. Take the case of class. Frank discussions have led to far greater awareness and conscience about poverty and the need to ameliorate the conditions of the poor, including the Ministry of Education introducing and expanding early childhood education for low-income families in public schools.



If you weren't an academic, what other profession might you have taken up?

I would probably join the family business and work with my brothers.

There's a Facebook page called, "If I weren't Christian, Chua Beng Huat would be my God". How does it feel to be a legend?

There is no better satisfaction for a teacher than the appreciation of one's students.

You have a broad spectrum of interests, and your Wikipedia page mentions that since the 1990s you have been interested in Cultural Studies. You even edited a book on the Hallyu Wave. What are you consuming right now, in terms of film, art and books?

I am something of a TV junkie and still watch TV when it is no longer fashionable to watch programmes on the clumsy machine. I watch lots of dramas but never binge watch because watching each episode as it is scheduled is a way of passing time. So, I turned this into research on pop culture. In addition to the Hallyu book, I have published *Structure, Audience and Soft Power in East Asian Pop Culture* (2012, Hong Kong University Press).

I am never without a novel. I have been reading lots of local literature published by Epigram. I also go to art galleries frequently and watch movies very regularly.

Engendering Inter-Generational Conversations Through the Student Archivist Project 2020

by **Wong Lee Min**

How were you impacted by major housing- or industrialisation-related events and policies from the 1950s to 1970s? This was the question participants of the Student Archivist Project 2020 asked their senior interviewees and it generated rich inter-generational dialogue. Student interviewers came away with more knowledge on Singapore's history as shared by first-hand witnesses and gained a deeper respect for the values exhibited by the older generation. Likewise, senior interviewees appreciated the opportunity to share their life experiences and were heartened by the youths' interest in their stories.

The Student Archivist Project, presented by the National Museum of Singapore and Founders' Memorial, trains secondary and tertiary students in oral history interview techniques and introduces them to relevant historical content, before sending them out to conduct interviews with senior interviewees. First launched in 2017 by the National Museum of Singapore to collect wartime stories for the special exhibition *Witness to War: Remembering 1942*, the award-winning Student Archivist Project aims to help youths connect with Singapore history by participating in its research, documentation and presentation,

and to encourage meaningful conversations across generations.[1] The second run of the project in 2020 focused on developments in the areas of housing and industrialisation during the period surrounding Singapore's independence. Interviews can be conducted in English, Mandarin, Chinese dialects, Malay or Tamil, and submitted in audio or video format. Stories collected may be featured in future exhibitions or programmes by the National Museum of Singapore or Founders' Memorial.

Student Archivist Project Interviews in *Home, Truly*

Two video interviews conducted under the Student Archivist Project 2020 are featured in the National Museum of Singapore's special exhibition titled *Home, Truly: Growing Up with Singapore, 1950s to the Present*, which runs until 29 August 2021.

In her interview with Secondary One students from Woodlands Ring Secondary School, 56-year-old Madam Zubaidah Binte Abdul Rahim recounted the leisurely days she spent as a child in a kampung at Amber Road before moving to a cramped one-room flat in Geylang Bahru, where she had to complete her homework along the corridor. She missed the kampung spirit of neighbourliness and her family did not feel as safe in their Housing and Development Board (HDB) estate – her parents made sure to accompany her whenever she went to the playground nearby. Her student interviewer, Kate Thanthar Myat Noe Oo, felt that Madam Zubaidah was "incredibly brave" and "really admire[d] how she managed to adapt to the grave changes that she had to experience at such a young age".

Another interviewee, 68-year-old Madam Chiau Fong Faa, reminisced about the wonderful camaraderie she enjoyed with her colleagues at Starlight Timber Products Co. Ltd. in Jurong Industrial Estate. She recalled with trepidation two industrial accidents: one in which her colleague's fingers were chopped off and another in which her colleague was scalded waist-down after falling into a tank of boiling water. Her account about finding work to support her family and subsequently resigning to take care of her children reflects the balance many women had to strike between their traditional domestic roles and newfound work commitments. For interviewer Fabregas Zamantha Mutuc, 20, Madam Chiau's interview "brought [her] into a timeframe and period of life [she] never got to experience", and left her with a "desire to find out more about Singapore's rich history through the eyes of its people".

1

1
Interviewee Madam Zubaidah shared about the adaptations she had to make after moving from a kampung at Amber Road to a one-room HDB flat in Geylang Bahru

2
Madam Chiau and her colleagues in the electronics company she joined after leaving her first job at the plywood factory

[1] For more information on the background and methodology of the project that won the 2019 International Council of Museums (ICOM) Committee for Education and Cultural Action (CECA) Best Practice Award, see Wong Hong Suen, "Student Archivist Project", in *Best Practice 8: A Tool to Improve Museum Education Internationally*, ed. Cinzia Angelini (ICOM-CECA, 2020), 92-102, http://network.icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/minisites/ceca/Publications/Best_Practice/best_practice_8_book_aout2019.pdf.

2

3

3
Illustration by Glenda Chia, based on her interview with Madam Tay Kim Choo Casey Andrea

Zines Inspired by the Student Archivist Project Interviews

The Student Archivist Project 2020 included a collaboration with Nanyang Technological University's (NTU's) School of Art, Design and Media where participating Year One students drew inspiration from the oral history interview to design a zine. The zine featured here by Glenda Chia is based on the story of her 59-year-old interviewee, Madam Tay Kim Choo Casey Andrea, who moved from a shophouse along Jalan Sultan to a two-bedroom flat in Jalan Batu in the mid-1960s. 22-year-old Gwenyth Leong's zine on page 42 captures sentiments people had when they had to relocate to Marine Parade, the first HDB estate constructed on reclaimed land in Singapore. Her interviewee, 81-year-old Mr Tan Wu Cheng, was one of the first residents of Marine Parade and has lived there for over 40 years since 1974.

4
Illustration by Gwenyth Leong, based on her interview with Mr Tan Wu Cheng

“I realise that there are a lot of stories to be told, but they are never heard unless the right question is asked...”

NTU undergraduate Chelsea Teo Qi En, 22, on her interview with her maternal grandmother Madam Chua Lee Kiow, 78

Reflections on the Project

Reflections penned by students at the end of the project reveal that they gained a better understanding of the methodology and value of oral history through their hands-on experience of conducting an interview. For 15-year-old Daniel Tan Yi Jie from Raffles Institution who interviewed 81-year-old economics professor and former civil servant Dr Lee Soo Ann, the values exemplified by Singapore's founding leaders in Singapore's history of industrialisation were his takeaways from the project. In Daniel's words, "Just like them, I was placed in an unfamiliar situation with many daunting challenges, and had to put in hard work to solve various problems and persevere through times where there was frustratingly little progress made."

A particularly heart-warming aspect of the Student Archivist Project is its potential to draw together participants of different generations. NTU undergraduate Renee Wong Tong Ling, 22, felt that the interview enabled her to relate better to her 76-year-old grandmother, and was delighted to notice her grandmother enjoying reliving old memories and laughing throughout the interview. Indeed, the interview transcripts capture a sense of pride and contentment among interviewees for being able to tell the younger generation what they know.

Professor Paul Thomson, a pioneer in oral history research methodology, observes that:

> **Oral history is a history built around people. [...] It allows heroes not just from the leaders, but from the unknown majority of the people. [...] It helps the less privileged, and especially the old, towards dignity and self-confidence. It makes for contact – and thence understanding – between social classes, and between generations.[2]**

This inspiring assessment of the power of oral history holds true in the Student Archivist Project, and we hope that each run of the project contributes towards bridging generational gaps as well as brings about a better appreciation of the enriching stories and experiences of ordinary people.

“After this interview, I see you not only as my grandma, but I see that child in you and I felt like I've held hands with that child.”

NTU undergraduate Renee Wong Tong Ling, on her interview with her grandmother Madam Yuen Lai Ying

For more information on the 2021 edition of the Student Archivist Project, please contact the National Museum of Singapore at nhb_nm_schools@nhb.gov.sg.

[2] Paul Thomson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 2nd edition, cited in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 28.

"A Place That Will Stay Within Me":

National Day Songs and the Construction of Emotional Rootedness

by **Benjamin Goh**

Some of my fondest memories from secondary school are of singing National Day songs at the finale of our National Day celebrations. Students would join teachers on stage, loudly singing Kit Chan's *Home* (1998) and Tanya Chua's *Where I Belong* (2001) with pride. At those moments, these songs made me feel proud to be Singaporean. Why did these National Day songs have such a powerful emotional effect? One reason could be that both songs were composed in the late 1990s to early 2000s, a time when the Singapore government was looking at new ways of cultivating emotional rootedness to the country amid the forces of globalisation. The government even formed a special committee in 1997, called the Singapore 21 Committee, to consult Singaporeans on how to make the country "our best home".[1] The National Day songs that were penned in subsequent years reflected the findings of this committee. This article explores the connection between Singapore 21 and the emotive lyrics of National Day songs written in the late 1990s to early 2000s, and how this idea of home – as warm, endearing, familiar and rooted in kinship and shared experiences – was constructed through these songs.

[1] Goh Chok Tong, "Speech by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong at the Launch of the Singapore 21 Vision on Saturday, 24 April 1999, at Ngee Ann City Civic Plaza, at 6:00 p.m." (speech, Singapore, 24 April 1999), National Archives of Singapore, 1999042405.

A Singing Nation Sings National Day Songs

Social scientist Professor Lily Kong has suggested that National Day songs constituted one arm of nation-building "aimed at encouraging Singaporeans to celebrate a particular desired version of the nation and to develop a strong national identity".[2] Indeed, before Singapore 21, there was already a state-led drive to promote a singing nation in the late 1980s, aimed at fostering a sense of unity and belonging. In 1988, the government launched *Sing Singapore* to promote community singing as a way of life. In his message for the *Sing Singapore* (1988) songbook, which contained the lyrics and scores of the songs featured in the campaign, Dr Yeo Ning Hong, then Minister for Communications and Information, wrote that singing "will bring back shared memories of good times and hard times, of times which remind us of who we are, where we came from, what we did, and where we are going".[3]

Group singing was encouraged in schools to develop a sense of identity and connectedness, and to create a common experience and a reminder of a common history. As Evelyn Ong, a former History teacher at Temasek Junior College, recounted in 1987, community singing was done "once every three weeks, [with] popular songs in English and Mandarin [being] enthusiastically sung to exercise vocal chords, relieve stress and promote group-spirit".[4] From singing in school to singing as a nation, these experiences served to bring Singaporeans together and develop rootedness to the nation.

1
Crowds of people participating in the official launch of *Sing Singapore* 1988. The show was the start of a seven-month-long drive to promote community singing as a way of life.
30 January 1988
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

[2] Lily Kong, "Music and Cultural Politics: Ideology and Resistance in Singapore", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 20, no. 4 (1995): 450.
[3] Yeo Ning Hong in Lily Kong, "Music and Cultural Politics", 451.
[4] Evelyn Ong and Rahil Ismail, *Temasek Junior College: Our Will To Blaze* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 1987), 112-113.

2

2
Close-up of "Singapore 21: Together, We Make The Difference" books displayed during launch of Singapore 21 Vision at Ngee Ann City Civic Plaza
24 April 1999
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

Singapore 21 and the Search for Rootedness

The late 1990s in Singapore saw some anxiety about the rootedness of Singaporeans. In his National Day Rally speech in 1996, then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong highlighted the trend of Singaporeans emigrating because of the high cost of living, high property prices and academic stress.[5] This trend was also captured by the Scenario Planning Office of the Public Service in their development of National Scenarios – exercises where possible futures for Singapore were mapped out. One scenario was "Hotel Singapore", where Singaporeans stayed as long as the country was doing well, and left when it was not. This reflected the government's fear that globalisation could reduce the emotional rootedness of Singaporeans to Singapore.[6]

In 1997, Goh announced the formation of Singapore 21, a consultative exercise to develop a vision for Singapore as being "a Home for a People, not a hotel […] not houses of bricks and mortar, but homes with hearts and dreams".[7] A committee was convened to gather views, consulting around 6,000 Singaporeans. Its report, produced two years later in 1999, found that "the Singaporeans who participated in the Singapore 21 discussions [did] not want just a house. They want[ed] a home".[8] From the report, the "best home" for Singaporeans was not merely a physical one, but was also one built around friends, families and common experiences. In the Singapore 21 debate in Parliament in 1999, Bernard Chen, then Member of Parliament for West Coast, summarised these sentiments as:

> **"A home is where you have a family, living happily together. You have relatives and friends [whom] you can turn to in times of happiness which you share and when in difficulties, you can help each other out."[9]**

[5] Goh Chok Tong, "Social Stratification and Commitment: National Day Rally Speech at the Kallang Theatre on 18 August 1996", in *National Day Rally Speeches: 50 Years of Nationhood in Singapore, 1966-2015*, ed. National Archives of Singapore (Singapore: National Archives of Singapore, 2017), 331.
[6] Adrian W. J. Kuah, "Foresight and Policy: Thinking about Singapore's Future(s)", *Social Space* (2013), 106.
[7] *Singapore Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 67, Sitting No. 5, Col. 405, 410-411, 5 June 1997.
[8] Goh, "Speech by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong at the Launch of the Singapore 21 Vision".
[9] *Singapore Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 70, Sitting No. 13, Col. 1506, 5 May 1999.
[10] Ibid.

National Day Songs and Their Effects

In the five years after Singapore 21 was first announced, National Day songs reflected this vision of Singapore – sometimes very literally. In *Together* (1999), sung by Evelyn Tan and Dreamz FM, the chorus begins with "Together we make a difference", echoing the title of the Singapore 21 report, "Together, We Make the Difference".[10]

Other National Day songs such as *Home* and *Where I Belong* can be interpreted as encapsulating the "Singapore heartbeat", defined by the Chair of the Singapore 21 Committee, then Education Minister Teo Chee Hean, as "Singaporeans […] feel[ing] passionately that Singapore is where we belong, where our roots are and where our future lies".[11] Dr Sydney Tan, who produced *Home*, reflected:

> **"While the first [NDP songs] touched on nation-building, this one touched on something else: belonging. 'This is home, truly.' And perhaps that was something that was beginning to happen in the '90s: people began to think about 'quitters' and 'stayers', and *Home* helped people express that this is the place where I belong. A place of belonging."[12]**

In an oral history interview, Professor Bernard Tan, who chaired the organising committee of the 1998 *Sing Singapore* campaign, said that the song *Home* came about during a trying period in Singapore, following the Asian financial crisis and SilkAir crash of 1997. He said: "Around '98, when this very sad year for Singapore came about, we [could not] have a song [that was] very 'rah-rah' because it [did] not fit the national mood."[13] In a period of anxiety, the song that connected with Singaporeans

[11] *Singapore Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 70, Sitting No 12, Col 1354, 4 May 1999.
[12] Karen Gwee, "Dick Lee, Kit Chan and Dr. Sydney Tan tell the story of Singapore's most beloved song 'Home'", *Hear 65*, last updated 22 October 2020, https://hear65.bandwagon.asia/articles/interview-home-dick-lee-kit-chan-sydney-tan.
[13] Bernard Tan, "Interview with Tan, Bernard Tiong Gie (Prof)", Reel 25, by Teo Kian Giap, Oral History Centre, 7 March 2018, audio, 30:11.

3

was one that spoke of kinship, companionship and love. Home was "where [they] won't be alone", because "home's about its people too".[14] Similarly in *Where I Belong*, home is not a physical space but rather "a place where I'll be safe and warm", with "friends and families by my side".[15]

These songs were popular among Singaporeans. In an oral history interview, Lam Mee Lian, who worked on Arts Education and Outreach at the National Arts Council from 1999 to 2003, recalled that when she was promoting these songs in schools, "a lot of people [were] able to sing *Home*".[16] Associate Professors of Visual and Performing Arts at the National Institute of Education, Eugene Dairianathan and Lum Chee Hoo, remarked that "every student in every primary and secondary school […] [sings] these songs at some point in time during their school day; either in school assembly time or during their music classes particularly in the period approaching August 9".[17] Kit Chan also commented that she enjoys singing *Home:* "Every time I sing it, as long as it's a Singapore crowd, they are going to sing it. Cannot stop them."[18]

3
Kit Chan singing *Home* at the 2004 National Day Parade
9 August 2004
Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

[14] Kit Chan, "Home", Track 3 on *My August 9th / 50 Wonderful Years (2016 Edition)*, Warner Music Singapore, 2016, digital album.
[15] Tanya Chua, "Where I Belong", Track 7 on *My August 9th / 50 Wonderful Years (2016 Edition)*, Warner Music Singapore, 2016, digital album.
[16] Lam Mee Lian, "Interview with Lam Mee Lian", Reel 7, by Michele Lim, Oral History Centre, 14 July 2010, audio, 53:10.
[17] Eugene Dairianathan and Chee-Hoo Lum, "Soundscapes of a Nation(alism): Perspectives from Singapore", in *Patriotism and Nationalism in Music Education*, ed. David G. Hebert and Alexandra Kertz-Welzel (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 114.
[18] Gwee, "Dick Lee, Kit Chan and Dr. Sydney Tan".

Conclusion: A Place That Stays Within Us

In 2020, home has taken on new meaning, with terms like "work from home" and "home-based learning" entering common parlance. During the Circuit Breaker period in 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Singaporeans sang *Home* from their windows to demonstrate their support for frontline and migrant workers.[19] Seeing my neighbours waving their lights from the windows and singing in unison with my family, I have never felt more at home – not just because of where I was physically, but a stronger emotional rootedness that came from connections with fellow Singaporeans.

This sense of rootedness can traverse great distances. As Ng Chu Ting, a Singaporean living in London, shares in a video interview presented in the *Home, Truly* exhibition at the National Museum of Singapore, in a section that showcases various individuals' reflections on Singapore as home, it is important that "your home and your cultural identity is attached to you and not a physical space".[20] Even when abroad, Singaporeans may remain rooted to their "home" because home is no longer merely a physical place, but an emotion, an experience and its people.

In 1997, Singaporeans were anxious about the implications of globalisation – were Singaporeans emotionally rooted enough? Would we be a nation of stayers or a nation of quitters? In 2020, Singaporeans proudly sang in one voice – "This is home, truly / Where I know I must be". Home has become "a place that will stay within [us]".

Benjamin Goh is a third-year history undergraduate at Yale-NUS College. His research centres on Singapore history, with special interests in the history of education as well as social and cultural history in post-independence Singapore.

[19] Jean Lau, "Sing along to Home on Saturday to thank front-line, migrant workers", *The Straits Times*, 28 April 2020, https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/sing-along-to-home-tomorrow-to-thank-front-line-migrant-workers.
[20] Video Reflection of Ng Chu Ting, *Home, Truly: Growing Up with Singapore, 1950s to the Present*, National Museum of Singapore, Singapore.

@ Home, Truly *is the digital companion to the National Museum of Singapore exhibition,* Home, Truly: Growing Up with Singapore, 1950s to the Present, *presented in collaboration with* The Straits Times. *The online-exclusive series showcases illustrations by local artists, photographs, National Collection artefacts, games, and more. Chapter 1, "A March in August", explores National Day Parades through the years and includes a quiz on National Day songs. Scan the QR code below to access @* Home, Truly.

https://go.gov.sg/at-home-truly

Evolution of Hawker Culture:

Uncovering Meanings of Home

by **Ng Mei Jia**

1

1
Hawkers selling a variety of dishes from their mobile stalls
1971
Paul Piollet Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

2
Hawkers like Yogi Chandra and his mother, Madam Malawathi, who run Rajarani Thosai at Tampines Round Market & Food Centre, play a central role in building a thriving hawker culture

An integral part of everyday life in Singapore, hawker culture shapes our notions of home and belonging. Hawker culture involves hawkers, the people who carry on the culinary practices passed down through generations, diners who eat and mingle at hawker centres, and the food that reflects the living heritage of the diverse communities in Singapore. In a coup for local heritage enthusiasts, Singapore's hawker culture was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity on 16 December 2020, recognising the efforts by hawkers, relevant agencies and Singaporeans to safeguard this important aspect of our heritage and to ensure its transmission for future generations. Being included in this UNESCO list puts local hawker culture on the same list of significant cultural practices such as angklung music from Indonesia and yoga in India.

"It's something that I look forward to whenever I return home from a work trip. It's the familiar feeling of home – the noise, smell, tastes can never be replicated elsewhere."

Ivan Teo, in a pledge of support for hawker culture in Singapore's UNESCO nomination in 2020

"The reason why I wanted to continue this family business is because I wanted to [continue] the family's legacy. We've been around since the 1960s, and I'm the third generation now. Our family is always looking into new ways to excite our customers without losing touch of our traditional roots."

Afiq Rezza Bin Norrezat, who runs a mee rebus stall at Ang Mo Kio Central Food Centre

The history of hawker culture began with street hawking, a trade rooted in Singapore's colonial past. Migrants from parts of Southern China, India and the Malay Archipelago came to Singapore looking for work, and many were attracted to the profession as there were few entry prerequisites.[1] There was also a demand for cheap street food.

The street foods served mostly derived from the versions found in the hawkers' countries of origin. One well-known example is Hainanese chicken rice, adapted from the Hainanese Wenchang chicken dish.[2] But local hawkers also started to blend former and new cultures in their offerings.[3] Through mixing ingredients and cooking techniques, they developed dishes that bridged old and new identities, enabling the hawkers – and, by extension, the migrant community at that time – to cultivate a new sense of home in an unfamiliar environment.

2

[1] Andrew Tam, "Singapore Hawker Centers: Origins, Identity, Authenticity, and Distinction", *Gastronomica* 17, no. 1 (2017): 44–55.
[2] Suchitthra Vasu, "Hainanese Chicken Rice", *Singapore Infopedia* (National Library Board, n.d.), https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_910_2005-01-11.html.
[3] Davis, Kathy, Halleh Ghorashi, Peer Smets, and Melanie Eijberts, eds., "Introduction", in *Contested Belonging: Spaces, Practices, Biographies*, first edition (United Kingdom; North America: Emerald Publishing, 2018), 1–15.

> “The roti prata served up in Singapore is quite different from that served in India. Local Indian Muslims have modified the bread, traditionally made with wholewheat flour, to create a lighter, flaky bread fried on a griddle, served with a curry or dalcha (lentil-based gravy) dip.”

Lily Kong, *Singapore Hawker Centres: People, Places, Food* (Singapore: National Environment Agency, 2007), 115.

3

> “My father cycled from his kampung house in the Bedok corner area all the way to Tanjong Katong Girls’ School even before I was born in 1956. He [would] deliver those triangle packs of Magnolia fresh milk to households along the way.”

Lim Low Kee Sally, as part of the National Museum of Singapore’s *Home, Truly* open call in 2020

4

3
Image from Lim Low Kee Sally, as part of the National Museum of Singapore’s *Home, Truly* open call in 2020

4
Public health and sanitation problems led to the construction of hawker centres such as Newton Food Centre, one of the earliest hawker centres in Singapore 1980
Singapore Tourist Promotion Board Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

> “Growing up, [the hawker centre] was an outlet to meet the thousands of neighbours from the apartments around us. It was often a pleasant feeling to be able to share tables with strangers when the place was crowded, and possibly strike up a conversation over a hearty meal.”

Klinsen Soh, in a pledge of support for hawker culture in Singapore’s UNESCO nomination

Hawker centres, where people from different walks of life congregate, also played an essential role in cultivating a sense of home. In the past, itinerant hawkers travelled around looking for customers or parked themselves in busy areas. In the 1970s and 1980s, because of urbanisation, sanitary concerns and road congestion, the government introduced hawker centres so that these hawkers had a permanent space for their stalls. Now a familiar landmark in Singapore, hawker centres have become community dining rooms that allow people to mingle and bond over food.

In this way, hawker centres can be read as an extension of home, as well as a place that provides affordable meals and the opportunity to dine with family and friends. Interactions within the space, encouraged by table-sharing etiquette, also potentially lead to embracing cultural similarities and differences among different groups of people.

Ng Mei Jia is a project officer (Intangible Cultural Heritage) at the Heritage and Research Division, National Heritage Board. She is interested in the study of religion and the politics of belonging.

Collecting Contemporary Singapore:

Documenting Home in the Time of COVID-19

by **Daniel Tham** and
Wong Hong Suen

At the National Museum of Singapore, we aim to tell compelling stories of the people and events that have shaped Singapore's identity. Increasingly, we recognise the importance of documenting and collecting history as it is made. This is why we launched a new initiative, *Collecting Contemporary Singapore*, which focuses on collecting artefacts, and the stories behind them, while they are still fresh and available. This allows us to engage our audiences more immediately on current themes and events, and prepares us to present this history to future generations.

Collecting Contemporary Singapore kicked off with a collection drive around the subject of the COVID-19 pandemic. The programme had two components: a community open call and a commission of seven local photographers and filmmakers.

Launched on 22 May 2020, the open call invited the public to contribute their objects and related stories and photos that best represented their experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, and what home meant to them during this time. Of the over 200 submissions received, many were digital images, including hand-drawn artworks that provided a precious first-person insight into life during this period. Several photos, as well as objects such as hand-sewn masks by a great-grandmother for her children and grandchildren, are on display in the National Museum of Singapore's ongoing exhibition *Home, Truly: Growing Up with Singapore, 1950s to the Present*, running until 29 August 2021.

1

Schools also contacted us asking to be involved in the collection of COVID-19-related material. For example, Catholic High's Head of History and Social Studies Kenneth Koh said the institution wanted to "contribute to the nation's larger efforts at capturing our COVID-19 stories". Through engagement with the school, we encouraged students to think biographically about objects, and to consider their role in documenting and preserving history. We were most encouraged by Mr Koh's feedback that the engagement sessions enabled him to gain fresh insights on crafting history lessons using objects as focal points.

Apart from the open call, the museum also commissioned five local photographers and two filmmakers to document the lived experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. The decision to send a group of photographers out into the community at the start of the "Circuit Breaker" period – when the weekly average of new COVID-19 cases hovered at close to 50 and when there was a real risk of an infection cluster emerging from the project – was not an easy one. But we went ahead anyway, because we felt it was essential to capture the diverse experiences of the pandemic as they were unfolding in Singapore, and to fill the gaps not covered by press photography.

2

3

1
Indoor Waterplay
2020
Image by Tan Siew Lay

2
SG United embroidery
April 2020
Gift of Alyssa Lim Shuyun

3
Sketch journal
April 2020
Gift of Priscilla Ng

1-3 were submissions received for the National Museum of Singapore's *Collecting Contemporary Singapore: Documenting COVID-19 in Singapore* open call

4
Portrait of Abu Bakar Bin Omar, Postman at Singapore Post
30 April 2020
Bob Lee, from his *Unsung Heroes* series

5
Nuraisha Hassan (right) and her husband Zulkiflee Mohamad (left) having their nightly congregational *terawih* prayers with their family at home
18 May 2020
Zakaria Zainal, from his *A Reclusive Ramadan* series

6
A COVID-19 patient draws open the privacy curtain shielding his cubicle at Singapore Expo
30 April 2020
Edwin Koo, from his *Foreign Worker Housing* series

4


5


6


On 18 April 2020, after multiple discussions with authorities that involved submitting detailed itineraries of each photographer, the project finally began. Each photographer produced at least three photo stories. The stories included the visually thematic (e.g., Brian Teo's *Mask Up*) and biographical (e.g., Bob Lee's portrait series *Unsung Heroes*). Some series captured the experiences of different communities in Singapore (e.g., Zakaria Zainal's *A Reclusive Ramadan*, How Hwee Young's *Transit Point @ Margaret Drive*), including the perspective of migrant workers (e.g., Edwin Koo's *Foreign Worker Housing*).

A selection of the commissioned photographs can be seen in the National Museum of Singapore's ongoing exhibition *Picturing the Pandemic: A Visual Record of COVID-19 in Singapore* running until 29 August 2021.

Life in Lockdown and Beyond

+65 speaks to two photographers commissioned by the National Museum of Singapore to capture stories related to the COVID-19 public health crisis: Brian Teo, 21, the youngest of the commissioned photographers, and How Hwee Young, whose career spans 20 years.

Tell us what subject matter you chose to focus on and why.

Brian:
I focused on the changes in the daily interactions between people. COVID-19 is affecting Singapore not just on a societal scale, but also at the level of individuals. Through my documentation, I want to share my thoughts on how COVID-19 impacted me, and hopefully the work will resonate with people.

It was especially poignant to return to my alma maters, Clementi Primary School and Commonwealth Secondary School. Shooting there brought back fond memories of school life, but I was also aware that the experiences of the current batch of students will perhaps be forever changed by COVID-19.

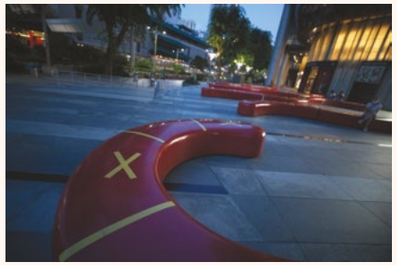
7


8


7-9
Scenes at Commonwealth Secondary School (7-8) and Clementi Primary School (9)
June 2020
Brian Teo, from his *A School's Response to COVID-19* series

9


10 

11 

Hwee Young:
My focus was on the changes to the landscape of Singapore and people's lives due to the Circuit Breaker measures. I was especially captivated by the surreal quality of the empty spaces in the city. I also wanted to document the impact of the measures on certain groups of people, such as the health workers in Singapore General Hospital and Bright Vision Hospital and the homeless people sheltered in Transit Point @ Margaret Drive. I also photographed para-athletes who worked with the public health restrictions while they continued to train and live their lives to the fullest.

10-11
Punggol Waterway Point shopping mall (10) and outside Ion Orchard shopping mall (11)
May 2020
How Hwee Young, from her *Spaces* series

12
Former national para-athlete Aishah Samad exercising at home
5 June 2020
How Hwee Young, from her *Para-athletes* series

12 

13 

14 

15 

13-15
11-year old Tay Kailin during the Circuit Breaker
April–May 2020
Brian Teo, from his *A Child's Home Based Learning Experience* series

In capturing these subjects or scenes of Singapore during COVID-19, what were you trying to communicate?

Brian:
My stories try to capture the new normal of life during the pandemic. My series, *A Child's Home-Based Learning Experience*, documents my godsister's experience with lessons being shifted online and having no physical interaction with her friends and teachers.

Circuit Breaker may have been a gloomy period, but I hope to spread positivity with *A School's Response to COVID-19*, which looks at how students and staff adapted to public health measures in schools. These situations reflect the struggles that we face as a nation but also the sense of unity in the face of this global crisis.

Hwee Young:
Though I had been away for a long time, Singapore has always been where my family is and where I feel safe and loved. Documenting the various quiet and empty spaces was a way for me to reconnect with the city and get to know my home again.

What touched me most, though, was the resilience I saw in my human subjects. The stoicism of the frontline health workers, the positivity of the para-athletes and the warmth of volunteers and residents at the homeless shelters – these all contributed to a sense of coming together as a people. For example, the opening of the homeless shelter, Transit Point @ Margaret Drive, was expedited to house people in difficulty. These included those who were stranded in Singapore due to Malaysia's movement control measure, or those rendered homeless when they lost their jobs. A community of volunteers and social workers came together to help, and the sentiment I felt among the residents was of hope and calm rather than despair. Though their stay was transitory, the feeling of "home" and community was palpable.

16

17

16-17
Selections from How Hwee Young's
Transit Point @ Margaret Drive series
15 May 2020

Both photographers chose to focus on documenting changes – in the landscape, people's lives and how they interacted with one another. However, in choosing to also capture what spoke to them as "home", Brian and Hwee Young have given us a glimpse of what is core to Singapore and its people: the qualities that prevail in crisis mode. As mentioned in their interviews, these include adaptability, hope, steadfastness and stoicism.

This commission, along with the open call, are first steps that the National Museum of Singapore has made in *Collecting Contemporary Singapore*. In these efforts, we have challenged ourselves to broaden our horizons and quicken our steps in collecting what will be of historical significance to the nation.

It is impossible to see what the future holds in terms of collecting. However, we are certain it will involve greater partnership with local communities and deeper engagement with issues of our day that will impact our future, such as sustainability and climate change. One theme, science and technology, has already been earmarked for the museum's collecting focus in 2021. We are excited to be actively engaging the present to shape future narratives and perspectives of our journey as a nation.

Daniel Tham is Senior Curator at the National Museum of Singapore.
Wong Hong Suen is Senior Deputy Project Director (Curatorial, Partnerships & Engagement) at the Founders' Memorial. She was formerly Deputy Director (Curatorial and Programmes) at the National Museum of Singapore from 2016-2020.

18

19

20

21

18-20
Selections from Brian Teo's
Mask Up series
February–June 2020

21
A recovered COVID-19 patient
is cheered by medical staff after
being discharged from Bright Vision
Hospital
10 June 2020
How Hwee Young, from her
Bright Vision Hospital series

All images are courtesy of the
National Museum of Singapore,
National Heritage Board

Different Ways of Coming Home

by **Adeline Chia**

1

What makes Singapore home to its people? Is it the foundational early years of the nation's hard-won independence? Memories of the hard times the nation has weathered together? Collective experiences like National Service? Hawker food? The thought-provoking exhibition, *Home, Truly: Growing Up with Singapore, 1950s to the Present*, at the National Museum of Singapore, explores these touch points about national identity and more, prompting viewers to ponder continuities and changes in the ways we think of Singapore as home.

Organised thematically rather than chronologically, the show does not aim to prescribe a fixed narrative to the question of what gives Singaporeans a sense of belonging. Instead, the historical milestones covered are entry points into a larger discussion about national identity. The five sections of the exhibition are themed around the metaphor of building of a house/home. *Laying the Foundations* covers the early nation-building policies in areas like health and defence; *Moving In* delves into the commonalities of Singapore life, such as school experiences and hawker food; *Living Together* is about how

Singaporeans negotiate the challenges of living in a shared space; *Open Doors* looks at Singapore's immigrant and multicultural heritage; and finally, *Sturdy Through Storms* explores the disasters that have rocked the nation and brought it together.

2

3

1-2
Home, Truly: Growing Up with Singapore, 1950s to the Present runs at the National Museum of Singapore until 29 August 2021. Images courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

3
Block 9 Selegie Road, built in 1963
2018
Darren Soh
Paper
Edition No.: 10/10
2020-00232
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

The exhibits build a rich, multi-sensory and generally feel-good picture of the highs and lows of Singapore's post-independence history. They comprise a mix of artefacts from the museum's collection, as well as photographs from *The Straits Times*, which celebrated its 175th anniversary in 2020 and is a collaborating partner of the exhibition. Objects to look out for include campaign flyers from the two biggest contenders in the crucial 1959 election, the People's Action Party and Singapore People's Alliance, the year in which Singapore achieved full internal self-governance; posters of state-run campaigns over the years, including the National Courtesy Campaign and Speak Mandarin Campaign; as well as the pleasingly symmetrical prints of iconic Housing and Development Board flats and estates by Singaporean photographer Darren Soh, known for his pictures of local architecture.

Photographs from the newspaper archives dating back to the 1950s, some of them exhibited for the first time, also tell compelling stories of national celebrations and crises, bringing a smile to the face or a lump to the throat. Singapore winning the Malaysia Cup in 1994, with a triumphant Fandi Ahmad holding the trophy, is an example of a happy touchstone; while the poignant ones include the collective mourning of the victims of the SilkAir MI 185 crash in 1997, seen in the symbolic burial ceremony in South Sumatra's provincial capital Palembang, near where the plane fell.

Personal reflection and sharing are encouraged in the exhibition in various ways. First, there are interactive multiple-choice questions found at different stations within the exhibition, which invite visitors to respond to the exhibition's content by tapping on the options with a pen issued to all visitors (a touch-mediated solution during the COVID-19 pandemic). At the exhibition's concluding section, visitors can pen down their thoughts, and their reflections can be scanned and projected onto a screen.

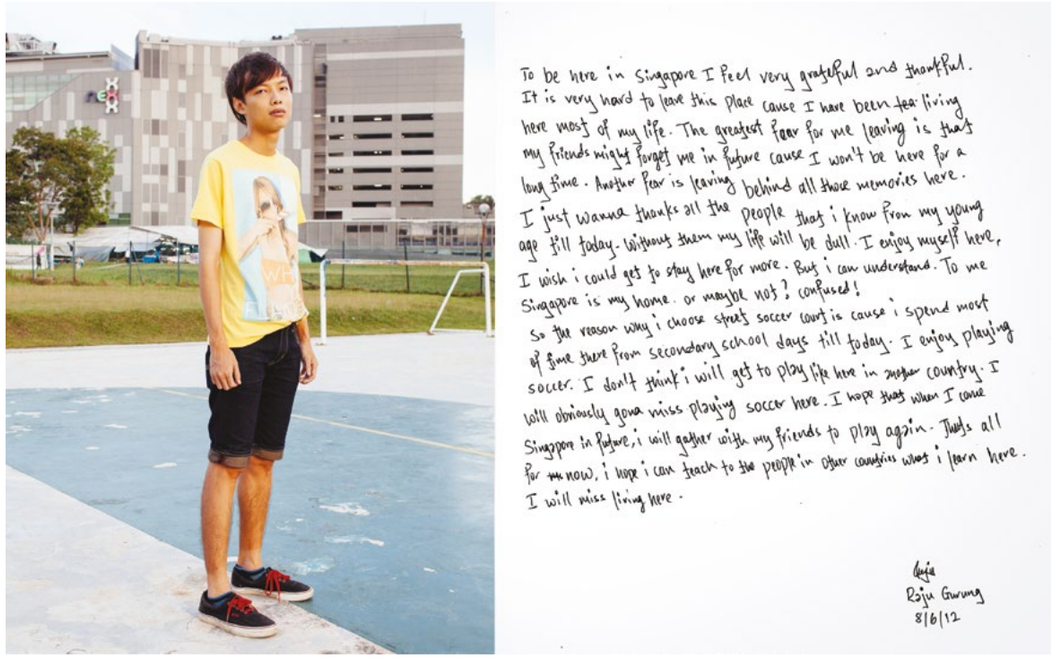
Personally, my experience of the exhibition contained reminiscence and a sense of discovery. As with many viewers, certain artefacts evoked a strong sense of nostalgia. For example, a box of metallic *kuti-kuti* – traditional toys used in games where players try to flip flat pieces of plastic over their opponents' –

made me wonder where my mother's set went. I used to take out the set of brightly coloured plastic animals and lay all of them out on the floor, more in admiration than for play. Together with Liang Wern Fook's *xinyao* songs wafting from a nearby "radio" in the background, the toys brought me straight back to my childhood.

What was more unexpected was how the exhibition provided an expansive view of collective identity, including the voices of people who may not hold Singaporean citizenship, such as migrant workers and the children of Nepalese Gurkha officers stationed here, but have called Singapore home at some point of their lives. Surprisingly touching were the postcards written by the Gurkha children, who came with their soldier fathers as dependants, enrolled in local schools and had to leave Singapore after their fathers' service here was completed. Their handwritten postcards were paired with photographs of them at places meaningful to them, such as a playground, a beach or a HDB corridor. Raju Gurung, pictured standing in a street soccer court with NEX mall in the background, provides a candid summary of his conflicted feelings: "I enjoy myself here, I wish I could get to stay here for more (sic). But I can understand. To me, Singapore is my home. Or maybe not? Confused!"

4
Postcards from Singapore
Courtesy of Zakaria Zainal

4



To be here in Singapore I feel very grateful and thankful. It is very hard to leave this place cause I have been living here most of my life. The greatest fear for me leaving is that my friends might forget me in future cause I won't be here for a long time. Another fear is leaving behind all those memories here. I just wanna thanks all the people that i know from my young age till today. Without them my life will be dull. I enjoy myself here, I wish i could get to stay here for more. But i can understand. To me Singapore is my home. or maybe not? confused!
So the reason why i choose street soccer court is cause i spend most of time there from secondary school days till today. I enjoy playing soccer. I don't think i will get to play life here in other country. I will obviously gona miss playing soccer here. I hope that when I come Singapore in future, i will gather with my friends to play again. That's all for me now, i hope i can teach to the people in other countries what i learn here. I will miss living here.

Love
Raju Gurung
8/6/12

5

6

5-6
Pictures from the wedding of former national athlete C. Kunalan and his wife, Chong Yoong Yin
17 April 1966
Images courtesy of C. Kunalan and Chong Yoong Yin

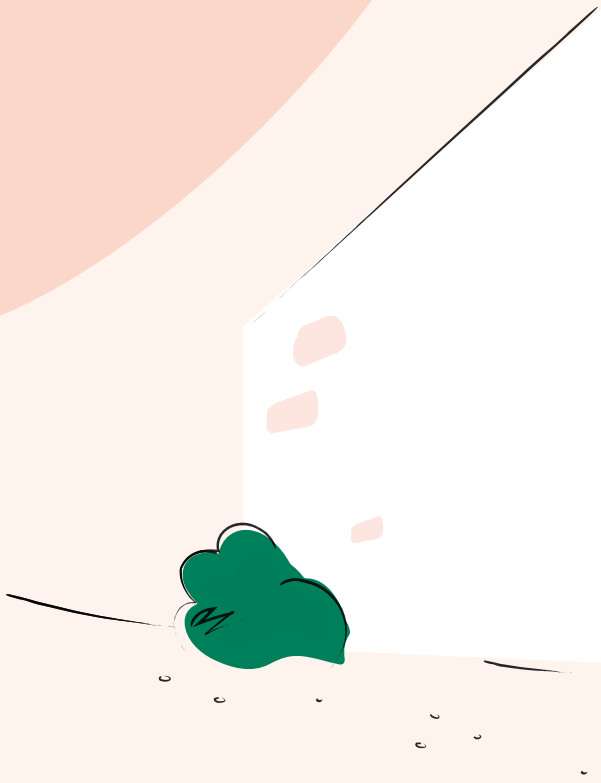
For the digital experience of the exhibition, go to https://www.roots.gov.sg/home-truly, where you can follow the illustrated story of a young girl and her grandfather as they explore themes relating to Singapore as home.

The museum is also running an ongoing roster of programmes in conjunction with the exhibition. Visit https://www.nhb.gov.sg/nationalmuseum for more information.

The exhibition's willingness to tackle more challenging material can also be seen in its nods to racially sensitive topics in the *Living Together* section, that, despite the brevity of coverage, gives further food for thought. Singapore athlete C. Kunalan's reminiscences about his parents' objections to his Chinese girlfriend and later, wife, were darkly humorous ("My mother said… 'If you go out with that Chinese girl today, you don't come back.' … So I went upstairs, took my birth certificate, and left"); while the couple's experience of being escorted by a Malay policeman after curfew hours during the racial riots of 1964 points to a more optimistic view of the trust and care that cuts across race in Singapore, even in the midst of a violent clash between the communities. The exhibition text notes, "The journey towards building understanding, trust and respect through close communication and bonds between the different communities continues today." Indeed, there are signs that a younger and more "woke" generation is asking for franker discussions and debate about race, religion and sexuality, and these uncomfortable conversations, which might have been seen by the older generation as obstacles to the formation of a cohesive national identity, might actually be crucial to forging a more inclusive and diverse Singapore.

Ultimately, what the exhibition shows consistently is that considering the past illuminates the present. The section on the SARS outbreak in 2003, for example, is an uncanny echo of the current pandemic, with certain recurrent imagery in the exhibits: temperature-taking and health workers in protective gear, for example. Artefact-wise, the personal thermometer and notebook recording the personal temperatures regularly, used by staff of the Heritage Conservation Centre of the National Heritage Board, are low-tech versions of what is utilised now during the COVID-19 public health crisis. Besides the sense of fear and panic, there are also more positive aspects of the Singaporean spirit: volunteerism, solidarity, resilience, and a sense of keeping calm and carrying on – which brings me to my favourite exhibits of the exhibition, a pair of customised masks worn by a couple on their wedding during Phase 2 of Singapore's public health measures. The groom wore a simple white one and the bride wore one made of a lacy material, the latter especially joyful in its unusual combination of medical necessity and femininity. Pandemic or not, love, and life, go on.

Home, Truly runs at the National Museum of Singapore until 29 August 2021.



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