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Editor's Letter

Cultural heritage is often seen as a profound and abstruse topic, difficult to appreciate and not all that relevant to most of us. But in truth, traditions are being established and perpetuated around us every day. As we go about our lives, we may not even notice the customs we are subconsciously taking part in, or the attachments we form to the places and things that give us our identity.

In this issue of BeMUSE, we encourage our readers to take a closer look at the heritage we frequently take for granted. For example, the Singapore Botanic Gardens, a historically significant and lushly beautiful landmark, is a site many Singaporeans pass by without a second thought. Yet the Gardens, the cradle of South-east Asia's rubber industry, are a worthy source of pride for our nation – a point acknowledged with its recent nomination to the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites and discussed in our article in this issue.

We also celebrate the horse with a special exhibition that showcases the noble animal's role as man's companion and colleague throughout the ages. Through a range of carefully curated philatelic materials, visitors can appreciate with new eyes the rich history and diversity of horses around the world.

As the June school holidays approach, well-travelled Singaporeans are likely to be planning their next exotic trips to far-flung destinations. But there are also delightful attractions closer to home. In Vietnam, Halong Bay's magnificent limestone landscape and awe-inspiring caves have earned it a place in one of the New 7 Wonders of Nature. They offer an eye-opening travel experience, as our writer describes in this issue. Over the next few months, children and adults alike can also enjoy a variety of programmes and exhibitions organised by museums and cultural centres right here in Singapore, including an engaging series of events on Malay heritage.

In short, there is no need to venture very far for a dose of culture or a lesson on tradition. Our own heritage is evolving all around us – let's take some time to appreciate it.

Thangamma Karthigesu
Editor-In-Chief

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LEE FOUNDATION ATRIUM



Year of the Horse

The Chinese zodiac is a cycle of twelve animals that repeats every twelve years. The Chinese zodiac is a cycle of twelve animals that repeats every twelve years. The Chinese zodiac is a cycle of twelve animals that repeats every twelve years.



Horse & Sports

Horse & Sports



HORSES FOR COURSES

STABLE

How we measure a horse's height
A horse is measured by back from the withers to the ground. Each hand is about 4.5cm wide, providing for about 14.5 hands in a standard metre.

General characteristics

A riding or racing horse has a well-proportioned build. It has a long upright neck with a mane of thick hair and a well-defined backbone between the ribs. At the tip of the curved mane is a tuft of hair.

Its legs are set evenly and when galloping the legs are free from the body. When galloping the tail is stiff and upright.

Horses reach their physical maturity at age five. On the average, most live for about 15 years but some live up to 40 years.



by Chua Mei Lin

Horses for Courses explores the history and development of horses, from the wild early years to the highly selective breeding of the present day. This exhibition celebrates the partnership between man and horse, in both work and play, within numerous cultures around the world.

A range of philatelic materials highlights the horse's role in agriculture, postal delivery, war, racing, and other areas. Horses have long been a reliable form of transportation and recreation for man. From myths and legends to art and hobby, Horses for Courses takes you on a journey that reveals the strength, speed and loyalty of this noble creature.

WAY BACK THEN

The horse species *Equus caballus*, is from the Equidae family. It is a mammal that can be traced back some 50 million years.

The early ancestors were the size of small dogs and lived in Europe and North America. Over millions of years, the horse became taller with longer legs. It evolved to have one main toe (hoof); its neck lengthened with a slight arch, and its teeth adapted to graze on grass, instead of chomping on leaves from plants.

During the Stone Age, horses were hunted for meat. In some parts of Europe, early depictions of horses were from cave paintings from this period. It's believed that wild horses roamed the plains of Asia and Europe about 30,000 years ago. But as the world changed, and as man began to encroach on their land, the number of wild horses started to dwindle. The only remaining wild horses today are the endangered Przewalski's horses, with only about 250 roaming wild in their native home in Mongolia.

HORSES FOR COURSES

/ art



32 USA



32 USA



PROGRESS AND CIVILISATION

About 4,500 years ago, man started to domesticate horses for transportation and to move heavy loads. Engravings, sculptures, and writings show that horses were used to draw chariots – especially for burials – in early civilisations in Mesopotamia, Egypt, China and India.

The Egyptians were renowned for their skill in crafting swift chariots to carry archers for warfare, for example. The terracotta steeds buried alongside the soldiers in Xi'an, China, are also a testament to their importance in Chinese warfare.

The Umayyads, circa 650 AD, used well-trained Arabian horses for numerous successful raids and battles that created a vast empire stretching from the Middle East to France. And around the 13th century, Mongols led by Genghis Khan conquered a great expanse of land across continental Asia, Middle East and Eastern Europe. The secret to the Mongols' success, it is said, was in using three to four horses in their battles and travels. As soon as one horse tired, another would take its place. In this manner, the Mongols' journeys and cavalry attacks were continuous.

Horses in the Americas disappeared with climatic changes but the Spaniards brought them back to North America during their conquests. Native Indians discovered the horse's usefulness and soon mastered the skill of horse-riding for herding and warfare. Wild horses in North America are not considered truly wild; they are feral. A long time ago, these horses were domesticated by man but they were either returned to the wild, or escaped to wander free.

RIDING INTO HISTORY

Ideas, language, culture, knowledge, and religion developed more efficiently in societies that harnessed horse power. In Central Asia, for instance, horses enabled the transmission of discoveries such as paper, iron, printing and gunpowder across great distances.

In medieval times, armoured knights often formed the main thrust of attack but this eventually gave way to an artillery offensive. Seafaring European nations spread their influence and power across different continents – aided by horses for inland conquests.

» Chua Mei Lin is Curator, Singapore Philatelic Museum

MAIL DELIVERY

Man relied on horsepower before the advent of motorised transportation. Letters and parcels were delivered by men on horses or in carriages. In the United States, the Pony Express (1860) was a relay system which spanned the distance from Missouri to California, over the Rocky Mountains. It took horseback riders about 10 days to cover a distance of over 3,000 km.



ACCESSORIES

Saddle

In early times, man rode on horses bareback, or with a piece of cloth or blanket. From around the 3rd century BC, leather saddles were introduced. With the use of stirrups, riders - especially warriors - were better able to keep their balance on a horse.

There are two main types of modern saddles. The Western has a high pommel in the front, which is useful for hanging a lariat - a rope in the form of a lasso. At the back is a large cantle for better seat support. These features provide the rider with more comfort, especially when herding cattle. The English saddle is less padded and generally lighter.

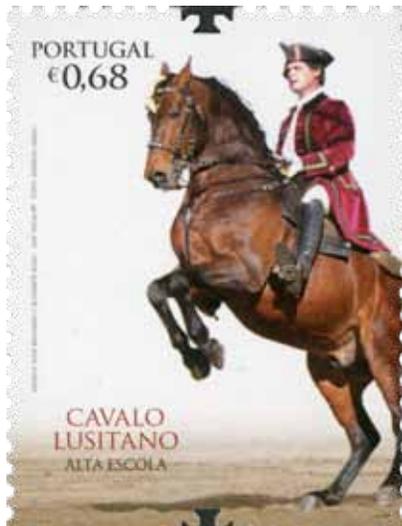
Horse shoes

Horse shoes are usually U-shaped and they are nailed to the horse's hooves to protect them from the hard ground. Most horses are checked by a farrier or horse shoe fitter every six to eight weeks to tidy the hooves.



HISTORY & CULTURE

Horses often connote honour, intelligence, bravery, and many artists have depicted these qualities in art. Here are some philatelic examples showing man and horse through history, art and culture.



AUSTRIA *Lipizzaner*

The Lipizzan is closely associated with the Spanish Riding School of Vienna in Austria. The horses are trained in the school to perform the elegant movements and jumps of classical dressage, including what is also known as “haute école”, or “high school” jumps. The ‘dancing’ Lipizzaner, a Spanish-Andalusian breed, can be traced back to the 7th century when Barb horses were brought into Spain by the Moors and crossed with native Spanish horses.



CHINA *Qi Jiguang*

Qi Jiguang was a Chinese military general and national hero during the Ming Dynasty of the 16th century. He was noted for his courage and leadership in the fight against Japanese pirates along the east coast of China, as well as his work on the Great Wall of China. Here, he is depicted riding his horse ready for battle.

CHINA *Chinese opera*

The use of symbolic representation is a primary feature in Chinese opera. In this picture, for example, the use of a fringed cane is to signify riding a horse.



HUNGARY *Arrival of the Hungarians*

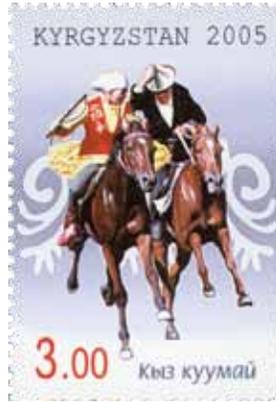
The painting by Árpád Feszty and other artists depicts the Arrival of the Hungarians (on horses) to the Carpathian Basin in 895. It was completed in 1894 to mark the 1,000th anniversary of the event. This cyclorama – a panoramic painting framed in a cylindrical platform – measures 115 metres by 15 metres and is housed in the National Historical Memorial Park in Ópusztaszer, Hungary.



JERSEY

The Black Horse of St. Ouen

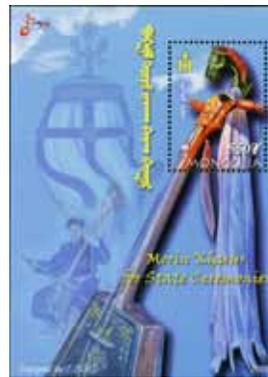
Long ago, Jersey was ruled by the French – much to the unhappiness of the islanders. One such person was Philippe de Carteret, the Seigneur of St. Ouen and a member of the island's most influential family. To prevent any problems, the French soldiers decided to kidnap him. Philippe tried to escape on his black horse, and raced toward his manor across a deep wide ditch. His horse jumped and cleared it and returned Philippe to his home safely. But his faithful horse soon collapsed and died. To honour his horse, Philippe had the animal buried in his garden.



KYRGYZSTAN

“Kyz Koomay”

The stamp depicts a popular game in Kyrgyzstan, where a young man has to try and overtake a young woman – while both of them are on horseback. The woman usually rides a faster horse and starts about ten seconds ahead of the man. If he catches her, he is rewarded with a kiss. If he does not, the woman can then whip him.



MONGOLIA

Morin Khuur

The Morin Khuur is a horse head-shaped fiddle. It has two strings and is played with a bow usually strung with horsehair. Traditional folk songs are often accompanied by the wistful resonance of the instrument, which is said to mimic a horse's neigh or the wind whistling across the Mongolian plains.

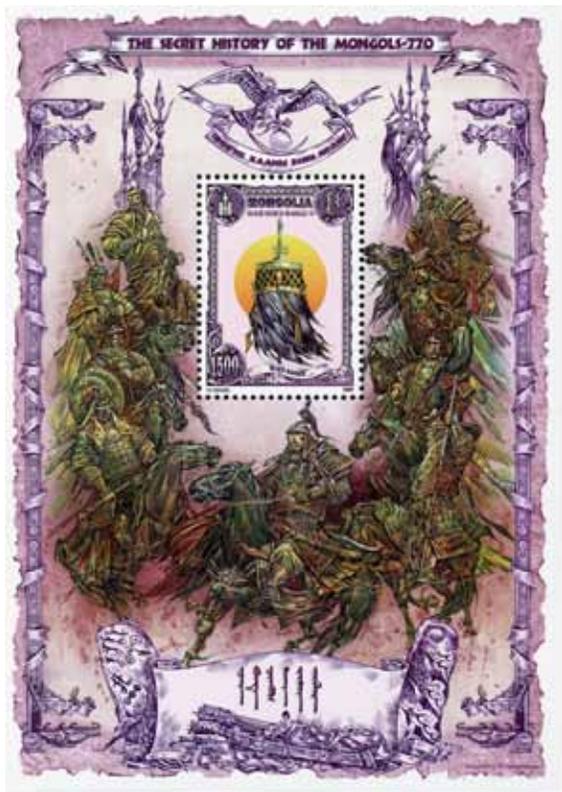


KYRGYZSTAN

“Kok-Boru”

[Blue Wolf]

This game involves two teams on horseback trying to carry a goat or calf carcass into their opponents' zone.



MONGOLIA

The Secret History of the Mongols

It is generally agreed that the Uyghur-scripted literature, “The Secret History of the Mongols”, was produced around the 13th century after Genghis Khan's death. Even though it is a compilation of folklore and myth, the 12 chapters serve as a significant reference to the history, culture, and genealogy of the Mongol Empire.

The people of Mongolia are fond of horse racing, wrestling and archery, often known as the “three games of men”. Horses feature prominently in their lives. Horses and riders were decorated in colourful silks and ribbons during the races, which cover distances from 15 to 30 km.



POLAND

Knight Tournament

The first modern knight tournament was held in Poland in 1977. Participants dressed as knights arrived from all over Europe to compete in medieval games, as depicted in these stamps.



SINGAPORE

Kuda Kepang

Kuda Kepang or Kuda Lumping is a type of dance that originated from Java, in which the dancer dons a colorful horse costume. The dance is said to be a re-enactment of battles against the Dutch, but these days it is performed more for entertainment or celebrations. Another version of this dance induces a trance on the dancer, who then mimics the behaviour of horses.



PORTUGAL

Lusitano Horses

The Lusitano, named in 1966 after Portugal's ancient Roman name, is closely related to the Spanish Andalusian horse. Lusitanos have competed in the Olympics and World Equestrian Games. In early times, they were deployed for war but these days they only participate in bloodless bullfighting.



UKRAINE

Straw horse

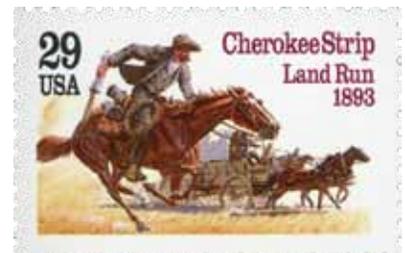
Located in a region blessed with rich 'black soil', Ukraine has abundant wheat. After the grain is removed, the straw is used to feed animals, for housing, and to make traditional handicrafts.



UNITED KINGDOM

All the Queen's Horses

To mark the British Horse Society's 50th anniversary, four stamps were issued that featured Queen Elizabeth II's ceremonial horses: two carriage horses from the Royal Mews, and two from the Household Cavalry.



UNITED STATES

Cherokee Strip Land Run

The Cherokee Strip was an 8 million-acre piece of land in Northwest Oklahoma. In the late 1830s, the government moved the Cherokee tribe to eastern Oklahoma, and the natives were given a passage, known as the Cherokee Strip, to the western hunting ground.

In the early 1880s, many cattle ranches were established in the area. It was during this period that the term "cowboy" was coined and that the expansion of the American West began. In 1893, by presidential order, the Cherokee Strip was opened for settlement. This resulted in the great land race, where more than 100,000 people rushed to lay claim on land.

PHOTOGRAPH OF DR. SUN YAT SEN, MADAM SOONG CHING LING AND UMEYA TOKU TAKEN ON 24 APRIL 1916

REPRODUCED BY SOONG CHING LING MEMORIAL RESIDENCE IN SHANGHAI FOR THE JOINT EXHIBITION

UMEYA SHOKICHI AND HIS WIFE RENDERED A LOT OF HELP TO DR. SUN AND MADAM SOONG DURING THEIR WEDDING PREPARATIONS. THEY ALSO PRESIDED OVER THE COUPLE'S WEDDING AT THEIR RESIDENCE IN TOKYO.





by Yap Soo Ei

Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall (SYS-NMH) is co-presenting an exhibition with Soong Ching Ling Memorial Residence in Shanghai titled *Love & Revolution: Madam Soong Ching Ling, Wife of Dr. Sun Yat Sen*. This special exhibition was launched on 7 March 2014 in conjunction with International Women's Week.

The exhibition provides insights into Dr. Sun's personal life with a special focus on his wife, Madam Soong Ching Ling. Madam Soong is regarded as a supporter of the Chinese democratic revolution and a champion for women's rights, welfare for children, nationalism and patriotism. The exhibition also highlights her efforts in championing Dr. Sun's causes after his death, and her achievements in the development of modern China.

Over 134 heritage objects ranging from photographs to personal belongings of Dr. Sun and Madam Soong are displayed in this special exhibition which showcases the life journey of Madam Soong from birth till old age. It will also highlight her experiences and involvement in the major milestones of the history of China.

LOVE & REVOLUTION

*Madam Soong Ching Ling,
Wife of Dr. Sun Yat Sen*

/ Community



ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

When we talk about Dr. Sun and his revolutionary activities, the first images that come to mind are of his comrades, such as Hu Han Min, Huang Xing and Liao Zhong Kai, and the uprisings that they staged to overthrow the Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1911) to establish a republican China. The attention given to these supporters however has perhaps overshadowed another important companion to Dr. Sun. This is none other than Madam Soong Ching Ling, the wife from Dr. Sun's second marriage, his close comrade-in-arms and capable assistant.

Madam Soong Ching Ling was born on 27 January 1893, to a Christian family in Shanghai. Her father, Soong Yaoru (also known as Charles Jones Soong), was a missionary and successful businessman. Besides being a friend and an avid supporter of Dr. Sun, he was also a teacher and mentor to Madam Soong. At a tender age of 14, Madam Soong was sent to the United States where she received her education. Upon graduating in 1913, she started to work with Dr. Sun as his secretary in Tokyo. Thus began the 70 years of self-sacrificing work she put in for China and her people.

On 25 October 1915, despite opposition from her parents, Madam Soong married Dr. Sun who was at the time exiled in Japan. With him, she embarked on an tireless campaign for a revolution to modernise China. Dr. Sun Yat Sen passed away in Beijing on 12 March 1925, entrusting Madam Soong to carry on his crusade. Thereafter, Madam Soong was away for four years, visiting the Soviet Union and Europe. The trip broadened her horizon as she learnt more about socialism, democracy and capitalism. She read up on Karl Marx's theories on society, economics and politics, and met supporters who were in exile in Europe to discuss about the issues faced by China, such as land inequality and poverty.

FACING PAGE:
MADAM SOONG CHING LING'S
TROUSSEAU

REPRODUCED BY SOONG CHING LING
MEMORIAL RESIDENCE IN SHANGHAI
FOR THE JOINT EXHIBITION

THIS OUTFIT WAS WORN BY SOONG
CHING LING'S MOTHER DURING
HER OWN WEDDING. IT WAS LATER
GIVEN TO MADAM SOONG AS HER
TROUSSEAU.

BELOW:
MODEL OF A TRAIN MANUFACTURED
IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

COLLECTION OF SUN YAT SEN
NANYANG MEMORIAL HALL

MADAM SOONG CHING LING
TRAVELLED IN A TRAIN SIMILAR TO
THIS WHEN SHE VISITED THE SOVIET
UNION IN 1927.





FACING PAGE:
FAMILY PHOTOGRAPH OF THE SOONG (1917)

REPRODUCED BY SOONG CHING LING
MEMORIAL RESIDENCE IN SHANGHAI FOR THE
JOINT EXHIBITION

THIS PHOTOGRAPH WAS TAKEN IN 1917 AT
SHANGHAI XIA FEI ROAD (NOW KNOWN AS
HUAI HAI ROAD), WHEN SOONG TSE VEN AND
SOONG MAY LING RETURNED TO CHINA FROM
THEIR STUDIES. IT IS BELIEVED TO BE THE ONLY
SOONG FAMILY PHOTOGRAPH IN EXISTENCE
TODAY.

(FRONT ROW) SOONG TSE AN; (SECOND ROW,
LEFT TO RIGHT) SOONG AI LING, SOONG TSE
VEN AND SOONG CHING LING; (BACK ROW,
LEFT TO RIGHT) SOONG TSE LIANG, CHARLES
SOONG, NI GUI ZHEN AND SOONG MAY LING.

BELOW:
PASSPORT OF MADAM SOONG CHING LING
WHEN SHE WENT ABROAD FOR HER STUDIES
IN 1907 (33RD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
EMPEROR GUANGXU).

REPRODUCED BY SOONG CHING LING
MEMORIAL RESIDENCE IN SHANGHAI FOR THE
JOINT EXHIBITION

MADAM SOONG STUDIED ABROAD FROM 1907
TO 1913. THIS WAS HER PASSPORT ISSUED BY
THE GOVERNMENT OF CHINA IN SHANGHAI,
DATED 31 JULY 1907.

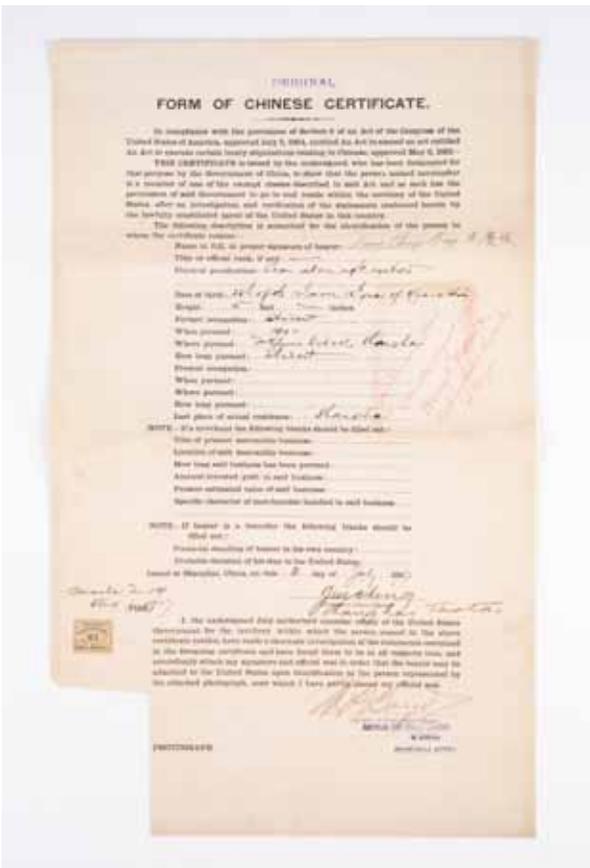
Madam Soong stressed the importance of having a unified China during the Japanese invasion and in the face of the social unrest that arose amongst its people. She also played an important role in unifying both the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), despite their differences.

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China on 1 October 1949, Madam Soong held several prominent positions in the new government, such as Vice-President of the Central People's Government. She travelled abroad and represented China at numerous international events. In her lifetime, Madam Soong also paid close attention to the welfare of women and children. For that, she enjoyed the love and esteem of the Chinese people and was revered by other Chinese communities around the world.

For her profound contributions, she was conferred the title of "Honorary President of the People's Republic of China" by the National People's Congress Standing Committee in 1981. She is the only person to ever hold this title and is regarded as one of the greatest Chinese women in the 20th century.

Madam Soong passed away on 29 May 1981 after losing her battle to coronary heart disease and chronic lymphocytic leukaemia in Beijing. She was 88 years old. ❀

» *Yap Soo Ei is Asst. Curator, Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall*





“Really?”

The Singapore Botanic Gardens, a UNESCO World Heritage Site?”

This incredulity is one of the common sentiments I hear expressed when I spread the good news about the Singapore Botanic Gardens being recently nominated as the nation’s first UNESCO World Heritage Site. Also: “Why the Botanic Gardens?”

Why, indeed? That’s exactly what the exhibition “More than a Garden” seeks to address. To understand the nomination, we first need to consider what the World Heritage List is really all about. To many, it is a prestigious compilation of the world’s greatest historical and cultural treasures marked for preservation for all the world to share forever. That it is. But there is also a greater story of humanity that unfolds through this collection of Sites, and each Site on the list is meant to reflect one or more aspects of this grand narrative.

At present, there are 981 World Heritage Sites dotted across the globe, in 160 member states. Of all the states that have ratified the 1972 UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, only 30 do not yet have a World Heritage Site to their name. Singapore is one of these, due in some part to its newness as a nation and its petite size.

But for a nation so new, Singapore’s Botanic Gardens has a relatively long history (it turns 155 in April this year). And for a nation so small (and highly urbanised, *and* densely populated), it occupies a fairly large plot of prime land. Viewed solely in terms of time and space, the Botanic Gardens is unique in Singapore’s context.

by Sarah Teo

more about
More than
a Garden

/ community





However, to rise to the status as a World Heritage Site, the site needs to possess more than local significance. So, of what value is our Gardens to the rest of the world?

First, the Gardens is the cradle of the rubber industry of Southeast Asia, which in turn has been the major source of natural rubber for the world since the 1920s - Southeast Asia accounts for 75% of all natural rubber produced in the world today. Versatile and useful, natural rubber moves people, literally. It is used in tyres - of planes, automobiles, motorcycles - and in shoe soles. Because it remains impermeable even though it is elastic, it is also used in latex gloves and contraceptives. There are also a myriad of other ways in which rubber is a part of our daily lives - even when we don't notice it - by providing a coating to many of our everyday items!

So you could say, perhaps, that the abundance of these items today around the world was due to the pioneering work done at the Singapore Botanic Gardens on the cusp of the 20th century. There, the First Director of the Gardens, Henry Nicholas Ridley, perfected the art of tapping latex from rubber trees.

Up until this time, rubber trees (in particular the *Hevea brasiliensis*, the most productive of all rubber tree species) were grown in Brazil, their native land. Ridley not only did scientific work on rubber, he also promoted it widely in Singapore and Malaya, which led to the rise of rubber plantations in Southeast Asia.

Using a series of panels, *More than a Garden* follows this exceptional story of rubber, and celebrates all things rubber.

Due to the work done at the Gardens, rubber became a vital part of our economy, and this is exemplified in the lives of four of Singapore's rubber pioneers - Tan Chay Yan, Tan Kah Kee, Lim Nee Soon and Lee Kong Chian - whose stories are featured in the exhibition.

It was not just the rubber plant that was experimented on in the Botanic Gardens.

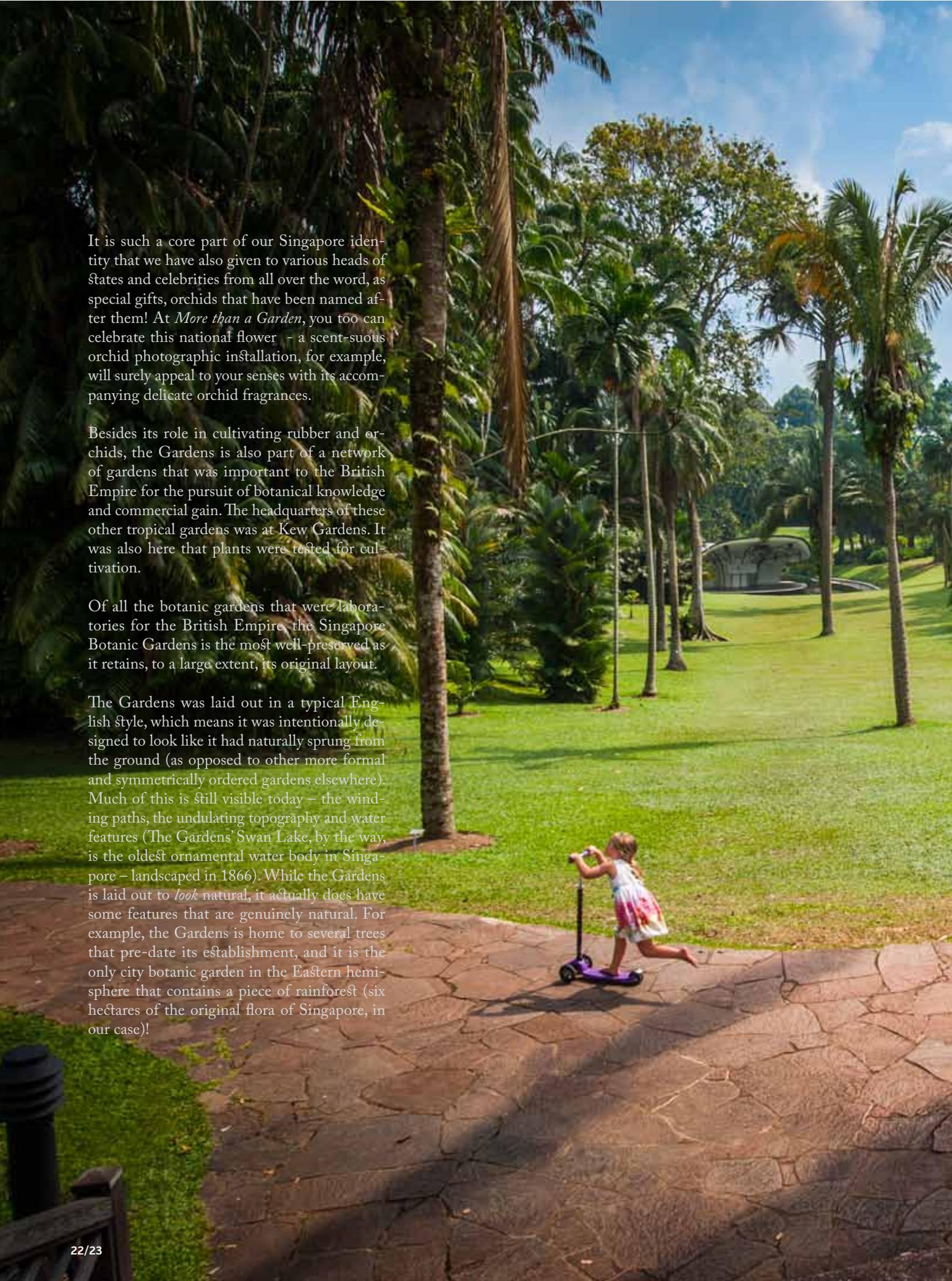
The orchid, too, bloomed into fame, for it was from here that the commercial orchid breeding industry in Singapore and Southeast Asia began. And today, the Gardens is one of the top orchid research centres in the world.

It is such a core part of our Singapore identity that we have also given to various heads of states and celebrities from all over the world, as special gifts, orchids that have been named after them! At *More than a Garden*, you too can celebrate this national flower – a scent-suous orchid photographic installation, for example, will surely appeal to your senses with its accompanying delicate orchid fragrances.

Besides its role in cultivating rubber and orchids, the Gardens is also part of a network of gardens that was important to the British Empire for the pursuit of botanical knowledge and commercial gain. The headquarters of these other tropical gardens was at Kew Gardens. It was also here that plants were tested for cultivation.

Of all the botanic gardens that were laboratories for the British Empire, the Singapore Botanic Gardens is the most well-preserved as it retains, to a large extent, its original layout.

The Gardens was laid out in a typical English style, which means it was intentionally designed to look like it had naturally sprung from the ground (as opposed to other more formal and symmetrically ordered gardens elsewhere). Much of this is still visible today – the winding paths, the undulating topography and water features (The Gardens' Swan Lake, by the way, is the oldest ornamental water body in Singapore – landscaped in 1866). While the Gardens is laid out to *look* natural, it actually does have some features that are genuinely natural. For example, the Gardens is home to several trees that pre-date its establishment, and it is the only city botanic garden in the Eastern hemisphere that contains a piece of rainforest (six hectares of the original flora of Singapore, in our case)!





The Gardens also contains 13 conserved buildings and structures, some of which have been used for various special occasions. Burkill Hall, the oldest building in the Gardens, was where Ridley resided; and Holttum Hall, the newly converted Heritage Museum, was where orchid research was first carried out in the Gardens.

Despite its nomination as a World Heritage Site to be shared with the world, the Botanic Gardens is still very much Singapore's garden. The roots of the greening movement in Singapore can be traced back there. As early as the 1880s, it housed a nursery that grew trees that were later transplanted to roads around Singapore!

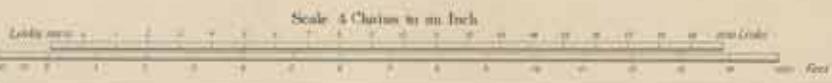
It also played a significant role in the fostering of racial harmony. It was the first site chosen for the *Aneka Ragam Ra'ayat* (Malay for 'People's Variety Show') in 1959, where Chinese, Malays, and Indians took the stage together for the first time and performed a variety of cultural items. Audience members of different races enjoyed the Chinese songs, the Indian dance, and some even learnt how to play the angklung!

During the launch of the show, our prime minister at the time, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, explained why the Gardens was chosen as the series' first venue: *"It is fitting that the first of these concerts should be held in the Botanic Gardens, for, in a way, this beautiful place symbolises what we all want. Not only are beautiful things grown here, but some of the shrubs, flowers and trees are foreign importations which have taken root in [our] soil... Here, under open skies, Malays, Chinese, Indians, will, I hope, discover the materials for a national art and national culture."*





PLAN
 OF THE
BOTANICAL GARDENS
 SINGAPORE



For all the big-picture history the Gardens possesses, it's also a place close to the heart of many Singaporeans.

Over the past few months, as I ploughed through old news about the Gardens, and collected various memories, I've found that there are so many stories (some quite amusing) that make the Gardens truly more than a garden to many.

Countless pre-wedding photographs have been shot there (perhaps taken in the hope that their marriages will last as long as the Gardens have?), and the swans have been fed by many a passer-by – one of them was actually my friend who *almost* fed the swan her finger too. For years, the Gardens has also been a place of refuge from urban life (or for teenagers who wanted to run away from home, or just escape school for a bit), and so much more.

All these reasons make the Gardens so unique – it is international in significance, but very much local in flavour. It is a place of the awesome and the ordinary, the unique and the ubiquitous... It is indeed a garden for Singapore, and for the world. ❀

*Sarah Teo is Asst Manager/Policy & Education,
Preservation of Sites & Monuments*





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WHAT'S ON

APRIL-JUNE 2014

// ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

Lacquer Across Asia Now till 29 June 2014

Explore the art of lacquer from China and mainland Southeast Asia. A prized commodity traded and presented to dignitaries, lacquer is a precious material that signifies wealth and social standing. Different decorative techniques and styles were created in response to local needs and tastes. Chinese lacquer fashioned for literati and the imperial court, as well as Burmese and Thai examples made for Buddhist merit-making rituals, illustrate the wide variety.

Beginning of the Becoming: Batak Sculpture From Northern Sumatra Now till 1 June 2014

This exhibition explores the extraordinary sculptures of the Batak peoples of northern Sumatra. The Batak live in the mountain heartlands centred around Lake Toba, a striking environment that nurtured an intriguing culture rooted in ancient Southeast Asian traditions. The show asserts a rightful place for Batak sculpture in the global artistic canon. Over 80 works in wood, stone, and bronze have been lent by the Mandala Foundation, 20 of which have been donated to the Asian Civilisations Museum.

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// INDIAN HERITAGE CENTRE

Street Cred, Photography Workshop in Little India 11 & 18 January 2014 9am - 1pm Temporium, Little India

Be enthralled by the pulse and vibrancy of the urban landscape and people of Little India! Delve into the 'poetics of the everyday' as you wander through the alleys and discover the fundamentals of street photography. Take great shots by learning how to position yourself, use light and anticipate action. This is your chance to capture the festivities at Little India while its streets transform to celebrate the harvest festival, Pongal. Some of your pictures may even be featured in the galleries of the Indian Heritage Centre!

// MALAY HERITAGE CENTRE

Of Sound and Sight: Music & Wayang Kulit 5, 12, 19, 26 June 2014 Muzik Gallery/Bangsawan & Filem Gallery

Watch the Malay Heritage Centre's permanent galleries come alive with live performances of traditional music and enjoy making your own wayang kulit (shadow puppet) characters. Journey with historical figures through interactive tours of the exhibition and learn more about the history of Kampong Gelam and the Malay communities in Singapore.

Registration is required. Please call 6391 0450 or email your contact details to NHB_MHC_Programmes@nhb.gov.sg

Let's Play! 3, 7, 10, 14, 17, 21, 24, 28 June 2014 10.00am & 3.00pm Admission to workshop is free

Come and learn more about traditional Malay games at the Malay Heritage Centre! Learn skills you will need to play capteh, main lereng (wheel spinning), congkak (a traditional Malay board game), batu serembat (five stones) and many more. Participants at this 45-minute

workshop will also get the chance to unleash their creativity by inventing new and fun games with found items they find!

Walk-ins are welcome. Registration is required for group bookings. Call 6391 0450 or visit www.malayheritage.org.sg

Neighbourhood Sketches Last Fridays and Saturdays of the month Now until 23 August 2014 8.30pm to 9.30pm Bussorah Mall, Kampong Gelam

Set along the vibrant esplanade of Bussorah Street, visitors will get a chance to sample the rich Malay culture presented in the style of street performances. From martial arts to songs of worship, Neighbourhood Sketches will have something for every type of culture vulture. All performances will be held at Bussorah esplanade on every last Friday and Saturday of the month from 24 January 2014 to 23 August 2014. The dates and timing of Neighbourhood Sketches will be published on MHC's website and may be subjected to change.

Please call 6391 0450 or email nhb_mhc_programmes@nhb.gov.sg.

Laaobe: Warisan & Budaya Bawean di Singapura/Changing Times: Baweanese Heritage & Culture in Singapore Now until - 3 August 2014 Malay Heritage Centre, Gallery 2 Tuesday - Sunday, 10am to 6pm Free Admission

In partnership with Persatuan Bawean Singapura [Singapore Baweanese Association], *Laaobe* highlights the Baweanese community in Singapore whose forefathers hailed from Pulau Bawean, off the northern coasts of Java and Madura. Here, they are more familiarly known as Orang Boyan ["Bawean people", although boyan is a mispronunciation of Bawean]. The exhibition presents the history and development of the local Baweanese community. A key highlight is the *ponthuk* - an early form of communal housing that functioned as the core social institution that has come to characterise Baweanese culture and values.

Berita Harian Writing Workshop 14 June 2014

This one-of-a-kind workshop introduces students to the world of journalism. Facilitated by seasoned journalists from Berita Harian, participants will get a chance to become journalists for the day as they learn how to write news as well as how to

speak to people to get the most out of an interview. If you've ever dreamt of being a journalist, this one-day workshop is definitely for you.

Registration is required. Please call 6391 0450 or email your contact details to NHB_MHC_Programmes@nhb.gov.sg

Bustan Lecture 14 June 2014

Want to get a broader perspective on the role of literature throughout Malay history? This bilingual series focuses on the literary heritage of the Malays by examining the value of literature in the context of nation building and the construction of a Malay identity. This series will also feature 2 forums on Singapore *sastera*, or literature.

Registration is required. Please call 6391 0450 or email your contact details to NHB_MHC_Programmes@nhb.gov.sg

ter-ba-BOM! Children's Season 2014 Every Saturday, 1 - 30 June 2014

ter-ba-BOM! returns with an exciting new Heritage Hunt around Kampong Gelam! This year, participants will take on the role of Singapore's early traders as they ply their wares in hopes for a brighter future. Learn what products they brought with them to Singapore in the early years, and how they made their profits through wit, creativity and sheer hard work. Come join us and see how you too can be a successful tradesman!

Registration is required. Please call 6391 0450 or email your contact details to NHB_MHC_Programmes@nhb.gov.sg

24-Hour Playwriting Competition 21 - 22 June 2014

This June, MHC will be hosting the TheatreWorks 24-Hour Playwriting Competition 2014. Held on 21 and 22 June, this year's competition takes on the historical Istana Kampong Gelam with its galleries and artefacts that are sure to inspire aspiring writers.

Registration is required. Please call 6391 0450 or email your contact details to NHB_MHC_Programmes@nhb.gov.sg

// NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE

Genesis 26 Apr to 27 Jul 2014 10am - 6pm, daily Exhibition Gallery 2, Basement Free admission

Showcasing 245 black and white images of our planet by world renowned photographer, Sebastião Salgado, *Genesis* is a culmination of Salgado's photographic works taken at over 30 different destinations from 2004 to 2011. Dramatic, moving and grand, Salgado's photographs present powerful images of our fragile planet and the intricate association between Man, animal and the environment that we all have a duty to protect.

We: Defining Stories

27 Apr to 31 Aug 2014
10am – 6pm, daily
Exhibition Gallery 1, Basement
Free admission

We: Defining Stories presents a series of photojournalistic images of the iconic moments in Singapore's post-war years from the 1950s till 2013. A collaboration with The Straits Times, the exhibition is an opportunity for everyone to revisit some of the more significant events in our nation's history, and reflect upon our own experiences that were borne out of these moments. Come and discover how your stories have defined Singapore's present, and how they continue to define our future.

PLAY @ National Museum of Singapore

National Museum of Singapore
Opens 24 May 2014
10am – 6pm, daily
Free admission

The National Museum of Singapore kicks off the school holidays with the opening of PLAY@NMS, the first dedicated area for young children to take their first steps towards museum-going with interactive exhibits and special activities that encourage learning through play. Inspired by the Museum's collection, your young ones will have the opportunity to express themselves through the various curated programmes that will stimulate their curious minds and tap their creativity.

Children's Season 2014

Masak Masak: My Childhood

24 May to 3 Aug 2014
10am – 6pm, daily
Free admission

Children's Season at the National Museum of Singapore is back! Titled Masak Masak, the special exhibition centres around the theme, "My Childhood" and features familiar playgrounds and larger-than-life board games of yesteryear, interactive installations including new works by local and international contemporary artists such as Justin Lee, Anastasia Elias and Guixot De 8, engaging performances and a curated film screening. Suitable for ages three to seven.

// THE PERANAKAN MUSEUM

Auspicious Designs: Batik for Peranakan Altars

Now till 28 December 2014

Colourful and imaginative, batik altar cloths blend traditions and influences, showing how Peranakans adapted and improvised. Called *tok wi*, altar cloths decorate the fronts of Peranakan altars during important ceremonies, and reflect the strong ritual elements of Chinese Peranakan life in Southeast Asia.

Straits Family Sunday

Sunday, 8 June 2014, 1pm-5pm

Join us on the second Sunday of every month for this drop-in programme. Craft something to take home with you based on the museum's collection, or go on a special, themed tour of the galleries. Dress up with the whole family in a batik shirt or sarong kebaya. See the handling collection up close or relax with a good book in our reading corner. Enjoy a fun-filled Sunday for the whole family at the Peranakan Museum.

// SINGAPORE PHILATELIC MUSEUM

Spice Is Nice

Until 1 August 2014

Touch, feel and smell spices that are commonly used in Singapore such as pepper, cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg. Did you know that some of these spices were once worth their weight in gold? This interactive exhibition traces the voyages of discovery, the history of the spice trade and its impact on Singapore, traditional cures and flavours of regional cuisine.

The Spice Trail

Tuesday, 3 June 2014
Wednesday, 18 Jun 10am – 12pm

Want to know even more about spices and how they can be used? Sign up for a walking tour to Fort Canning Park to see the different spice plants there and create your very own special spice craft. Put on comfortable walking shoes, a cap, and bring along a water-bottle. \$15.00 per child. 7 - 12 years old.

Spicy Saturday

Saturday, 21 June 2014

After visiting the "Spice Is Nice" exhibition, go on a walk to Fort Canning Garden to learn about the origin and uses of spices. Complete a special origami spice frame to take home. Great for parent and child bonding! For details, contact Laura at Tel: 6513 7348 or email Laura_Tan@nhb.gov.sg

Seeing is Believing: Unusual Stamps Exhibition

Until 1 January 2015

Have you seen stamps that are made of materials other than paper? Come and view a display of unusual stamps from the museum's permanent collection from Singapore and overseas. Discover quirky features on these little treasures that tickle your five senses of sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch.

Horses for Courses

Until 26 August 2014

Horses for Courses explores the history and development of horses from the wild early years to the highly selective breeds of today. The horse's path parallels human civilisation, marking the evolution of both through time.

With domestication, horses have partnered man in numerous cultures around the world for work and play. The horse's role is reflected in its importance in early construction, agriculture, transportation, war, competition; and later, mainly for sports and recreation. Harnessing the horse's strength, letters and parcels were delivered by men on horseback or in drawn carriages.

The League Against Evil: A DC Super Heroes Exhibition

5 June – 31 August 2014

See the first and only DC Super Heroes exhibition in Asia to commemorate the milestone Birthday of Batman 75th Anniversary. The exhibition showcases stamps from Singapore Philatelic Museum's permanent collection, Singapore Post MyStamps and the stamp artworks, as well as original comic artworks and collectibles on loan from collectors. This exhibition is held in conjunction with Warner Brothers' celebration of the 75th anniversary of DC Comics Super Hero Batman.

Night At The Museum

Thursday,
5 Jun, 6pm – Friday, 6 Jun, 9am
Thursday,
12 Jun, 6pm – Friday, 13 Jun, 9am

Check-in at the Singapore Philatelic Museum for a night of discovery, games and craft. Participants will get to meet new friends, learn to work together as a team, find out about the "King of Hobbies", and have the rare opportunity to sleep among stamps! Dinner, supper and breakfast will be provided. Items to bring include: a sleeping bag, jacket, pyjamas, a fresh change of clothing and toiletries. \$90.00 per child. 7- 12 years old.

// SUN YAT SEN NANYANG MEMORIAL HALL

Dumpling Festival

1 June 2014

The Dumpling Festival, also known as the Dragon Boat Festival, is an important Chinese festival originated from China which SYSNMH seeks to share the joy with the community at large. The Dumpling Festival is believed to be associated with Qu Yuan, a patriotic poet and statesman of the Chu Kingdom during the Warring States Period. He committed suicide by drowning himself in the Mi Luo River on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month as a way to prove his loyalty to the King. The local people threw rice dumplings into the river to prevent the fishes from eating the body of Qu Yuan. Subsequently, it became a tradition to have rice dumpling during the festival.

Children's Season 2014 Open House

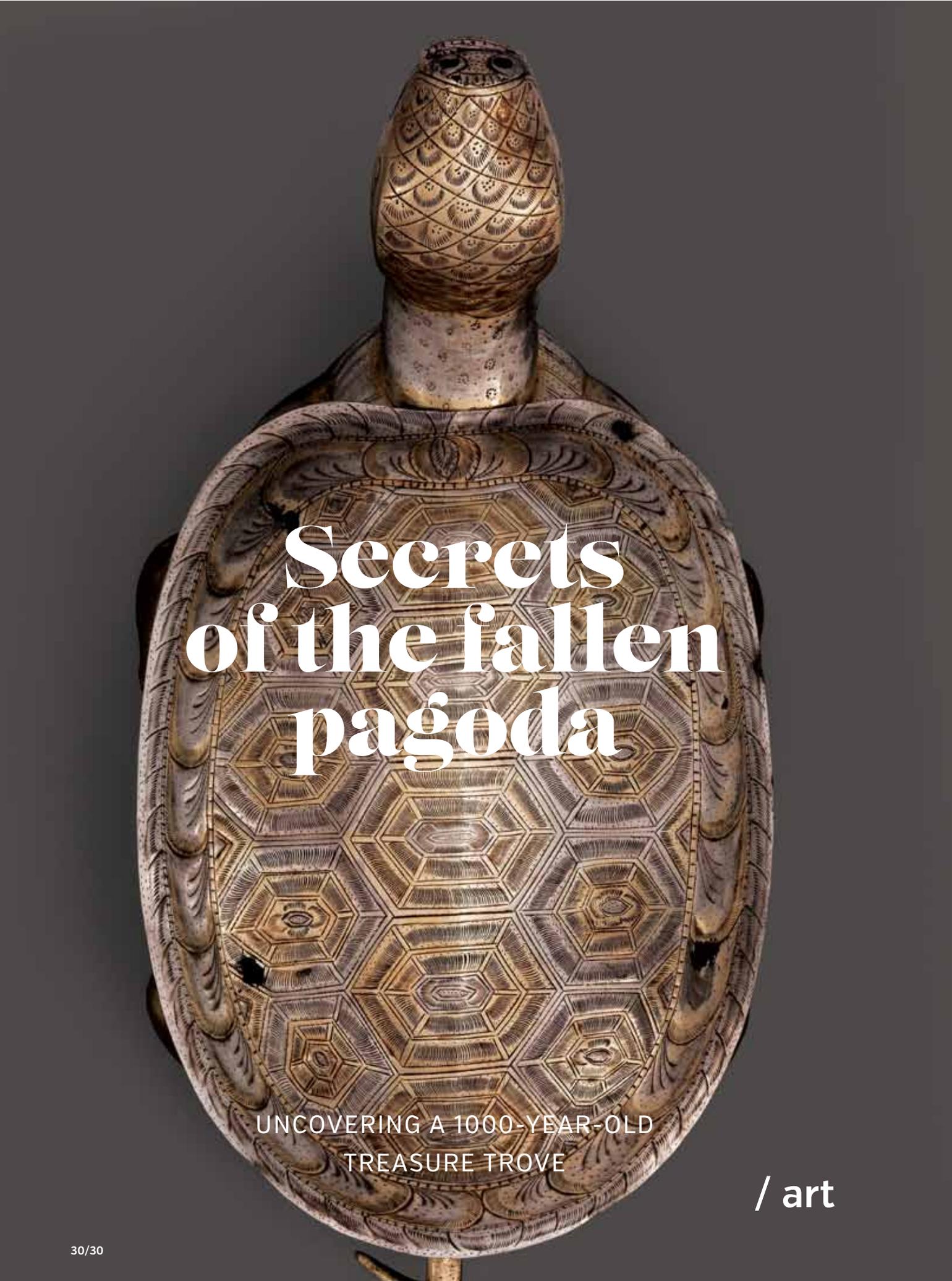
31 May and 1 June 2014

Children's Season usually takes place between May to June every year where students get to know more about Dr. Sun Yat Sen through a series of fun-filled activities such as storytelling, drama, participate in workshops, quizzes, guided tours, outdoor carnivals and more. Parents are welcome to join in our guided tours for the special exhibition or participate in the "Balestier Heritage & Food Trail" to explore the Balestier precinct where the Memorial Hall is located. Come join us and have a fun-filled weekend at the Memorial Hall!

Love and Revolution: Dr. Sun Yat Sen & Madam Soong Ching Ling

Tuesday – Sunday,
Now till 7 September 2014
10am – 5pm

"Love and Revolution" exhibition marks the first collaboration among the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall and Soong Ching Ling Memorial Residence in Shanghai, Soong Ching Ling Mausoleum of the PRC and Shanghai Archives Centre. Unlike our previous temporary exhibitions which focused on the revolutionary lives of Dr. Sun Yat Sen and his supporters, this exhibition will provide insights into Dr. Sun's wife, Madam Soong Ching Ling and her efforts in championing Dr. Sun's causes after his death.



Secrets of the fallen pagoda

UNCOVERING A 1000-YEAR-OLD
TREASURE TROVE

/ art

by Kan Shuyi

The Discovery

Shining their torches into the dark depths, the archaeologists were astonished to see gleaming articles of gold and silver packed into a stone chamber. It was April 3, 1987, and this was their first sight of the crypt beneath the Famen Temple pagoda, which had been built in the early 17th century. Structurally weakened by earthquake tremors and age, the pagoda had collapsed after a period of heavy rainfall on August 24, 1981. Local authorities had decided to rebuild the pagoda after its dramatic fall, leading to a full-scale excavation of the site – and one of China’s major archaeological discoveries of the twentieth century.

Not one, but three chambers containing a rich variety of items were discovered in the underground complex. The subterranean structure, which included a flight of stairs and a corridor leading to the three successive rooms, measured 21.1 metres in its entire length and 2 to 2.55 metres in width. This was the largest Tang pagoda crypt found to date and contained hundreds of objects, which included gold and silver utensils, precious ceramics, rare Islamic glassware, silk textiles, and stone carvings. But most significant among the finds was the finger bone relic of the Buddha. In fact four finger bone relics were recovered, one in each of the three chambers and the fourth in a tiny squarish compartment hidden beneath the rear chamber.

This fourth relic is purported to be the genuine one, referred to in Chinese sources as the *zhen shen* (“true body” relic) and the *ling gu* (灵骨, “spirit bone”), while the other three relics found in the three main chambers are described as *ying gu* (影骨, “shadow bone”). Two of these *ying gu* were made of jade and the third of bone, and they may have served as decoys to protect the true relic during religious persecutions in the mid-ninth century.

The Famen Temple was one of four Buddhist sites in China reputed to house the fingerbone relic of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni. The other three were Puguangwangsi in Sizhou, Jiangsu province; Mount Wutai in Daizhou, Shanxi province; and Wutai in Mount Zhongnan, Shaanxi province. Traces of the relics at these other locations have, however, loſt over time.¹

FACING PAGE:
TURTLE-SHAPED
CONTAINER,
PROBABLY USED FOR THE
STORAGE OF TEA POWDER
BY 874
PARTLY GILDED SILVER,
13 x 15 x 28.3 CM
FAMEN TEMPLE MUSEUM

Images courtesy of Shaanxi Cultural Heritage
Promotion Center and Famen Temple Museum

The Famen Temple

Famensi (法门寺), also known as Famen Temple or Famen Monastery, is situated approximately 110 km west of Xi'an in Fufeng county, Shaanxi province. Its beginnings remain obscure but its history with the Buddha's relics is legendary. The Famen Temple was believed to be founded in the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220), when it was known as Ayuwangsi (阿育王寺 or Aśoka Temple). The relic at the site was also associated with King Aśoka (reigned 269–232 BC) of the Mauryan dynasty, who according to Buddhist tradition re-collected Buddha's relics and re-dispersed them to 84,000 stupas. What has been determined with greater certainty, however, is that the finger bone relic was worshipped in 555. This was the first time the veneration of the Buddhist relic at the Famensi site was recorded in writing.

This textual evidence came from one of two stone steles found within the crypt. Inscribed in 874, this stone stele provides a broad overview of the history of Famen Temple. It outlines the various occasions on which the relic was worshipped, and describes in particular detail the final occasion when the relic was conveyed to the capital city in 873. During the Tang dynasty, the relic was first worshipped in 631 upon the orders of Emperor Taizong (reigned 626–649). Other Tang rulers continued with the practice and the crypt was accessed in 660, 704, 760, 790, 819, and 873. Venerating the relic was believed to invoke good fortune and protective blessings for oneself and the empire.

On each of these occasions, the relic was conveyed to the imperial palaces at Chang'an (and sometimes Luoyang, the secondary capital of Tang China) amid much ceremonial splendour. It incited great religious fervour among the devout masses, and extreme acts of piety such as self-immolation were also noted. New offerings were likely to have been made each time the relic was re-interred at the Famen Temple, but most of these items did not survive the suppression of Buddhism in the mid-ninth century. Thus the majority of objects from the Famen Temple crypt are dated after this period and associated with the Emperors Yizong (859–873) and Xizong (873–888), the last two Tang emperors who participated in the veneration of the relic.

FACING PAGE:
THE PARTLY COLLAPSED PAGODA OF
FAMEN TEMPLE IN 1981.



LEFT:
FOUNDATIONS OF THE FAMEN TEMPLE
PAGODA IN 1987. THE STEPS IN THE
FOREGROUND LEAD TO THE THREE CHAMBERS
OF THE CRYPT. THE RAISED SQUARES ON
THE PERIMETER ARE THE FOUNDATIONS
OF THE TANG WOODEN PAGODA. THE
CIRCULAR DEPRESSION IN THE CENTRE IS THE
FOUNDATION OF THE MING STONE PAGODA.





The Secret Treasures

340 items and sets of items were excavated from the Famen Temple crypt, a figure which excludes the thousands of coins found.² It also does not reflect the full quantity of textiles that had been originally placed in the crypt, as conservation work on this aspect is still ongoing. Not only is this an impressive quantity of objects recovered from a single site, the quality of these items is exquisite. Many objects are unprecedented in form and/or decoration, including several rare works featuring Esoteric Buddhist iconography, such as the reliquary casket decorated with forty-five Buddhist figures (fig. 1). This is the earliest known visual representation of the Diamond Realm mandala in China, one of two major realms in Esoteric Buddhism.³

The objects – serving both religious and secular functions – were mostly presented by members of the Tang royal household for the veneration of the Buddhist relic. They had access to some of the finest objects manufactured and, as inscriptions on several of the excavated metal wares indicate, these included products from the imperial workshops in Chang'an as well as tributes from key metal-smithing centres in the southern part of China. The boldly-ornamented, tiered incense burner (fig. 2) and the sumptuously decorated basin (fig. 3) represent these production areas respectively. They are also two of the largest surviving examples of Tang metalwork known at present.

TOP LEFT: FIG. 1
RELIQUARY WITH FORTY-FIVE BUDDHIST
FIGURES
DATED 871
GILDED SILVER, 17 x 17 x 17 CM
FAMEN TEMPLE MUSEUM

TOP RIGHT: FIG. 2
INCENSE BURNER WITH STAND
DATED 869
PARTLY GILDED SILVER,
OVERALL HEIGHT 50.5 CM
FAMEN TEMPLE MUSEUM

NEXT PAGE: FIG. 3
BASIN DECORATED WITH MANDARIN DUCKS
BY 874
PARTLY GILDED SILVER, 14.5 x 46 x 46 CM
FAMEN TEMPLE MUSEUM





The discovery also yielded one of the most comprehensive sets of utensils used for the preparation and drinking of tea, highlighting the popularity of the beverage in ninth-century China. Noted for its many benefits, tea was enjoyed across Tang society. The royal court was no exception and tea appears to have been particularly loved by Emperor Xizong. Several of the Famen Temple tea utensils (fig. 4) are inscribed with the characters “五哥” (*wu ge* or fifth brother), a reference to the monarch’s infant name, which suggests that the objects were used specifically by him.

DISH
PROBABLY IRAQ, OR SYRIA,
9TH CENTURY (BEFORE 874)
GLASS, DIAMETER 15.7 CM
FAMEN TEMPLE MUSEUM

Enhancing the significance of the find is the fact that the majority of these objects were recorded in the second stone stele found in the crypt. This was essentially an inventory checklist that listed the names, quantity, and weight of objects, as well as the donors who had given them to the Famen Temple. The information gleaned from this list has enabled archaeologists and scholars to gain important insights into Tang China, such as the system of measurements that was used then. This is currently the only inventory stele that has been excavated from an archaeological site in China, making it a unique and invaluable piece of epigraphical evidence.



FIG. 4
THE IMPERIAL CONNECTION IS EMPHASISED
BY THE "WU GE" INSCRIPTION ON THE ROLLER
AND THE BASE OF THE GRINDER.

TEA GRINDER
DATED 869
PARTLY GILDED SILVER, LENGTH 27.4 CM;
ROLLER: DIAMETER 8.9 CM
FAMEN TEMPLE MUSEUM

The inscribed information on the inventory stele has also been key to the identification of *mi se* (秘色) or “secret colour” porcelain. “Secret colour” ceramics (fig. 5) were widely celebrated in poetry during the Tang and succeeding dynasties, when their lustrous appearance was compared to the “emerald green of a thousand peaks” and “fresh lotus leaves covered with dew”. However, the actual colour of these ceramics remained a mystery until the discovery of the Famen Temple crypt and its contents, when thirteen excavated celadon vessels were matched with the inscriptions on the stele. These precious ceramics with a bluish-green hue had been produced at the Yue kilns in northern Zhejiang province, where they were made with the finest materials and under strict firing conditions.



TURTLE-SHAPED
CONTAINER,
PROBABLY USED FOR THE
STORAGE OF TEA POWDER
BY 874
PARTLY GILDED SILVER,
13 x 15 x 28.3 CM
FAMEN TEMPLE MUSEUM



Another group of rare finds from the Famen Temple crypt are eighteen pieces of glassware imported from the Middle East. Of various forms and designs, this cache of treasures constitute the largest the largest group of early Islamic glass vessels (found in mostly intact conditions) currently known in China. Deemed as an exotic luxury in Tang China, Islamic glass was valued for its beauty, strength, and transparency. Its preciousness made it suitable for making containers for housing relics, such as the bottle (fig. 6) placed in the rear chamber of the crypt. The bottle was found with a fragmentary slip of paper inked with two lines of characters, of which only two—“true” (真) and “lotus” (蓮)—remain legible. This suggests that the vessel may have contained a relic of the Buddha; the lotus is a Buddhist symbol, and the finger bone relic is referred to as the True Body on the inventory stele.

Indeed, we can only speculate about many aspects of the Famen Temple and its contents. While it has been an invaluable time capsule that has enriched our knowledge of Tang society, much remains enigmatic, awaiting further resolution by current and future scholars. ❀

» *Kan Shuyi is Curator, Asian Civilisations Museum*

NEXT PAGE:
FIG. 5
CELADON BOTTLE
BY 874
CERAMIC, HEIGHT 21.5 CM
FAMEN TEMPLE MUSEUM

BELOW:
FIG. 6
BOTTLE
SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN REGION,
PROBABLY 7TH OR 8TH CENTURY
GLASS, HEIGHT 21.3 CM
FAMEN TEMPLE MUSEUM



Discoveries from the Famen Temple was exhibited at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) earlier this year. The exhibition – The Secrets of the Fallen Pagoda: Treasures from Famen Temple and the Tang Court – is organized by the ACM in partnership with the Shaanxi Provincial Cultural Relics Bureau and the Shaanxi Cultural Heritage Promotion Center, People’s Republic of China.

(Endnotes)

1 Roderick Whitfield, “The Famen Monastery and Empress Wu” in Yang Xiaoneng (ed.), *New Perspectives on China’s Past: Chinese Archaeology in the Twentieth Century*, vol. 1, (New Haven, 2004), p. 393.

2 Shaanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology, et al. *Famensi kaogu fajue baogao* 法门寺考古发掘报告 [Report of Archaeological Excavation at Famen Temple], (Beijing, 2007), p. 112.

3 Alan Chong (ed.), *Secrets of the Fallen Pagoda: The Famen Temple and Tang Court Culture*, (Singapore, 2004), p. 190.



by Tan Shin Bin

It isn't often that you get to live in a shop you once frequented in your youth. So when a Singapore couple bought a shophouse that formerly accommodated a bookstore they used to visit, they seized the chance to create something special, marrying elements from the past and present.

At first glance, 125 Joo Chiat Place presents a regally faded front, quietly resplendent in its pale, washed out colours and worn but intricate ornamental motifs. Inside, however, is a completely different story. The doors open up to a bold landscape of warm exposed brick and dark wood floors, starkly framed by black metal girders.

The owners of this conservation property grew up in the Katong area, but eventually moved away and worked abroad. Their decision to relocate back to Joo Chiat and to make this shophouse their home was a unique homecoming, marking both a re-visitation of their younger days as well as the start of a new chapter in their lives. The restored shophouse reflects this charming dichotomy of old and new.

HONOURING OLD MEMORIES

The double-storey shophouse was built in the 1920s according to a "Transitional" style, and once housed a bookstore called "The Lucky Book Store", with the ground floor reserved for retail and the second level for storage. The bookstore had been an old haunt for the couple, both of whom had fond memories of browsing through the stacks of comics and buying music cassettes and cheap chewing gum.

The couple worked with an architect friend to conserve the shophouse and convert it into a home. They also bought a plot of concrete land behind the property and transformed it into a single-storey extension of the house, surrounded by a garden that links the extension to the main shophouse.

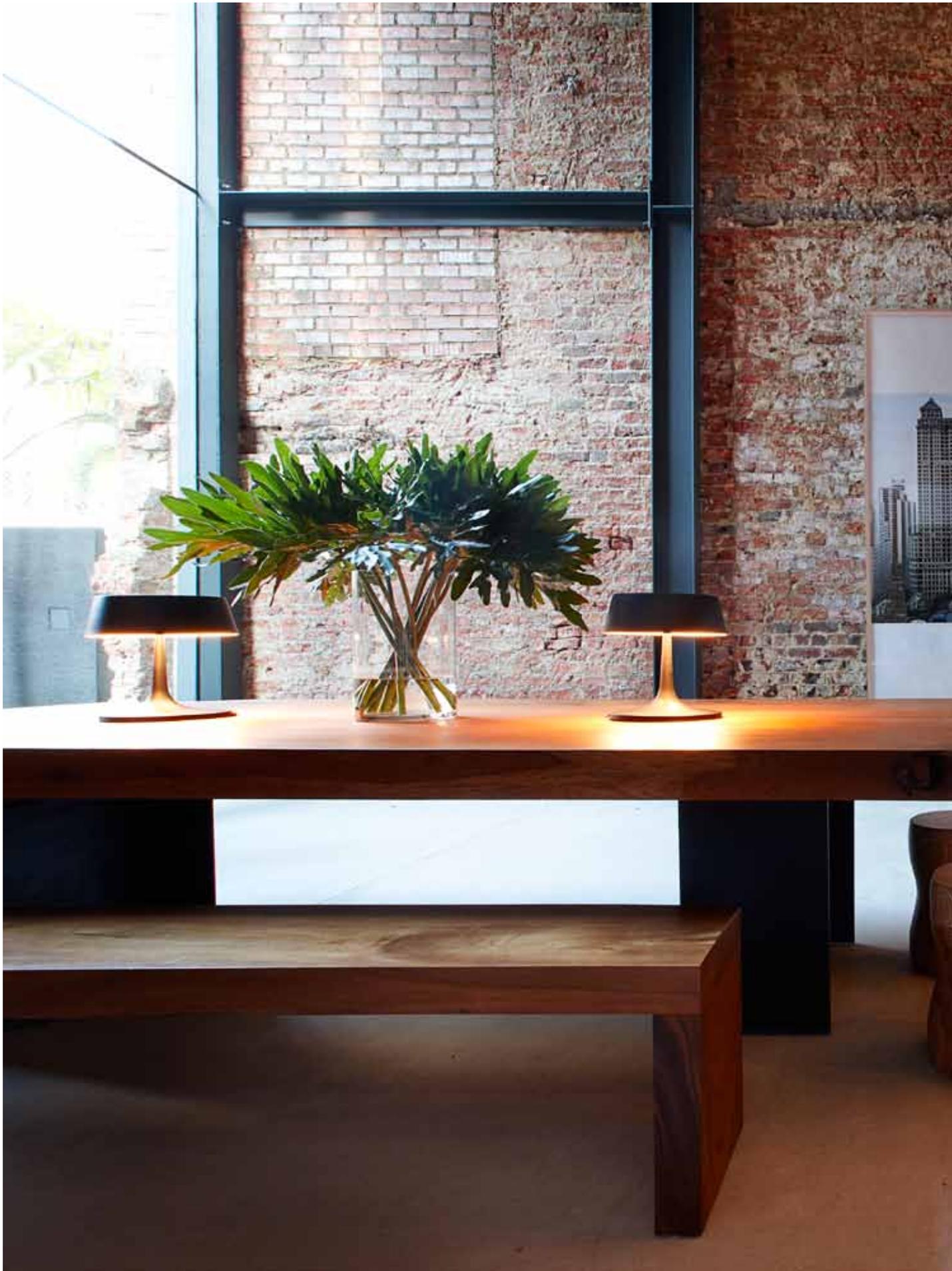
SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW



/ design

photos: Invy & Eric Ng - Shooting Gallery





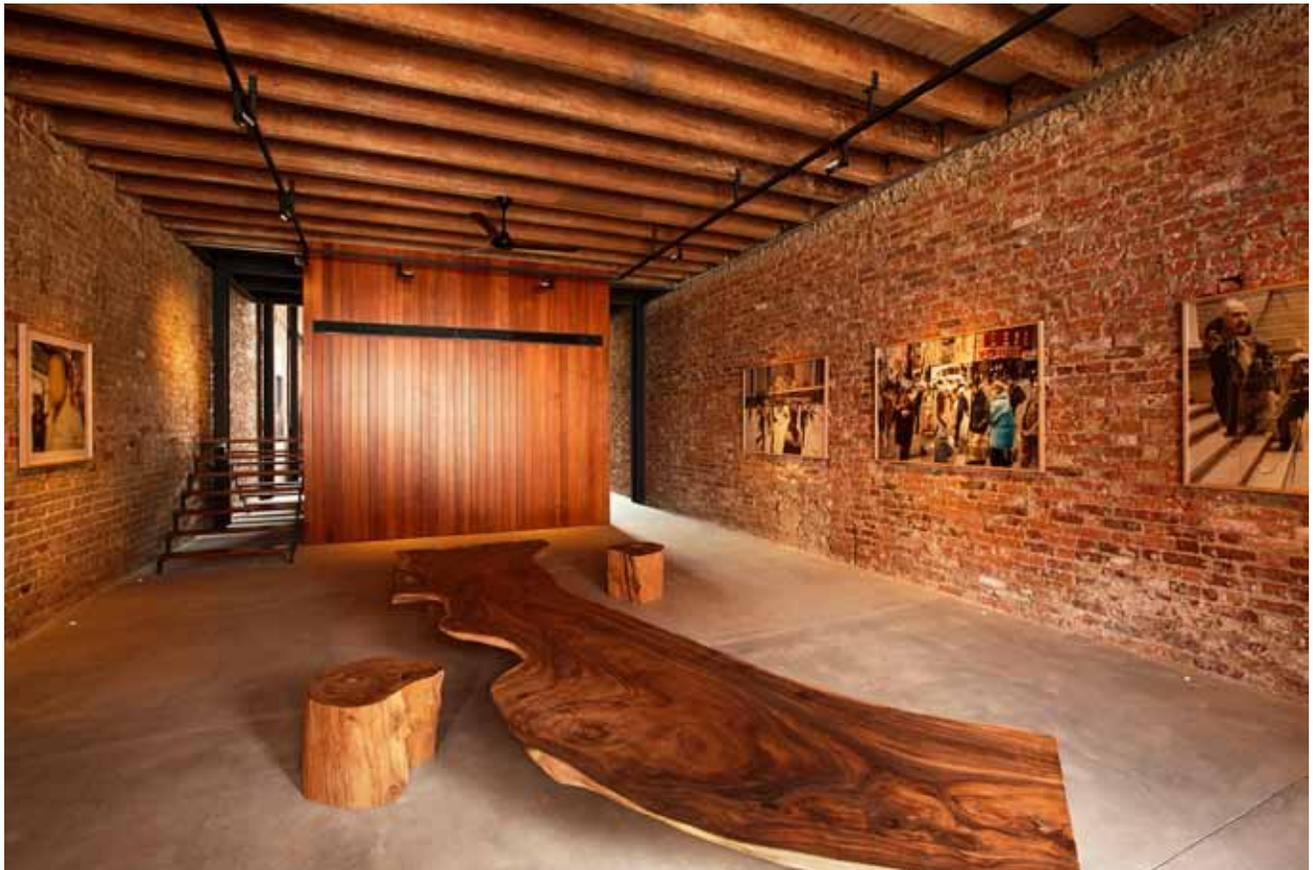


The process of conserving the shophouse was not unlike working on an archaeological site. The project team took pains to retain traces of the property's former life as a shop, rediscovering and protecting the original structures and finishings of the shophouse. To reveal the original tone and colour of the front façade, multiple layers of paint had to be carefully stripped off, and the base protected with transparent sealers to prevent the delicate surface from flaking. Across one front pillar, the faded sign "LUCKY BOOK STORE" was discovered - this too was retained as a homage to the building's previous occupant.

Inside the house, non-structural partitions were removed to expose the old brick walls, timber rafts and floor joists. Like the original façade, these were carefully restored and protected. Existing cavities in

the walls were left uncovered as clues of how the space was originally configured: the cavities had been created by floor joists, which had previously supported a mezzanine space used as additional storage for the bookstore.

Visible reminders of the original site layout were also retained in the form of fragments of the former boundary walls. Where the couple built new columns to support an extended roof over their dining area, these were kept distinct from the old brick walls, in order to reveal the old party-wall profile of the shophouse. The building's height remained unchanged to match the height of its neighbours.







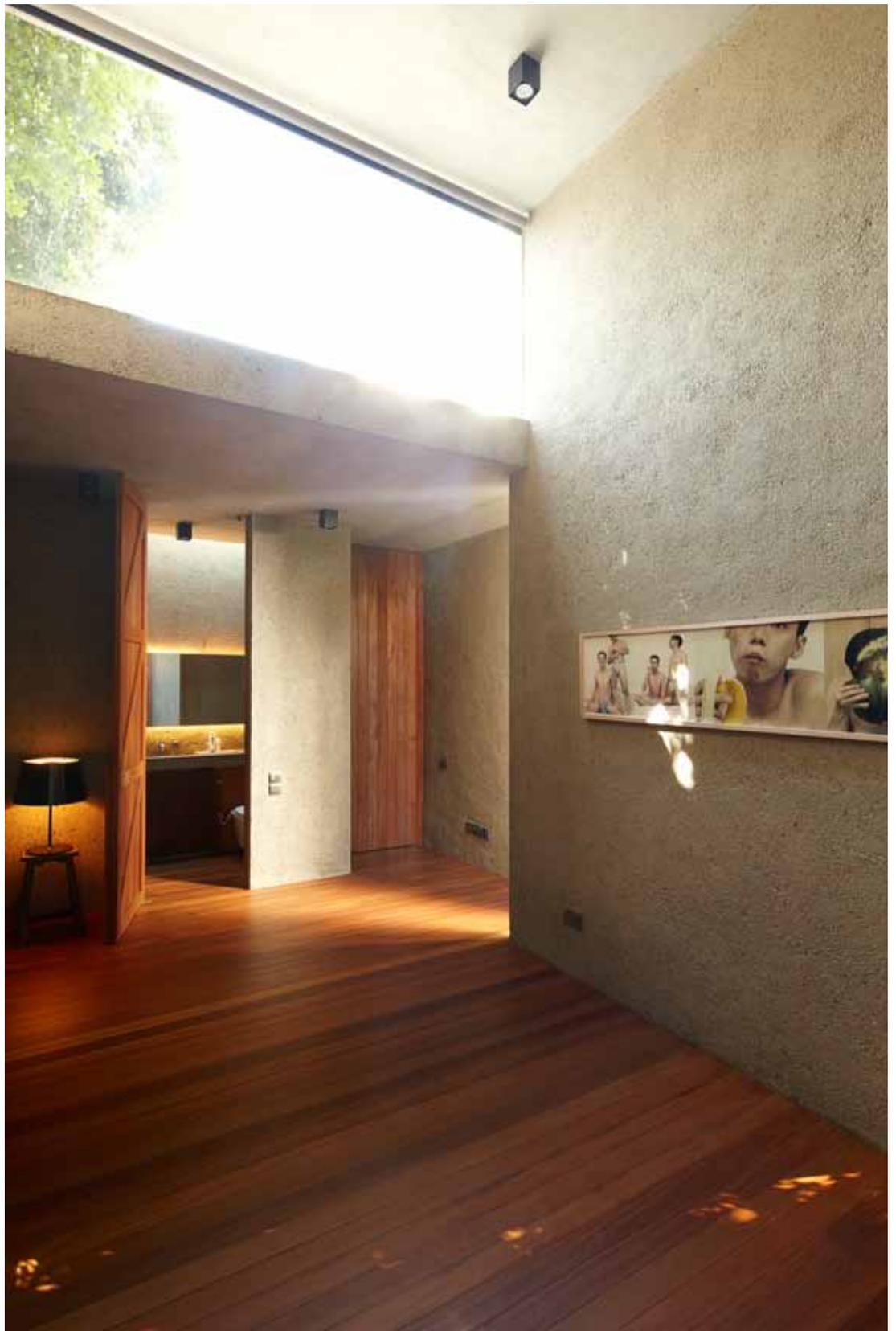


CREATING NEW SPACES

While elements of the original shophouse were faithfully retained, the property was also modernised for its new use as a home.

The new owners wanted to keep the space as flexible as possible, in order to accommodate visits from parents and relatives. To achieve this goal, the revised layout of the shophouse was kept simple. Furniture and fittings were placed along the centre of the building with the sides kept free as corridors for human traffic, allowing the stunning brick walls to stay uninterrupted by obstructions. This configuration provides clear views running 55m through the property on either side, flanked by the brick walls and framed by a pair of 6.2m-tall timber sliding panels. When the panels are pulled shut, they reveal a set of floor-to-ceiling windows that allow daylight to flood the space. These windows also provide a view of the garden on both sides, even when the spaces are closed off.





Joo Chiat

Joo Chiat was originally part of coconut plantations that stretched from the coast to what is known as Geylang Serai today. The growth of the area started in the 1900s, as people who sought an escape from the overcrowded city centre were drawn to the east.

A large portion of this land was owned by Mr. Chew Joo Chiat, a wealthy philanthropist and landowner who had the nick name “King of Katong”. In the early 1900s, Mr. Chew built roads and gave them to the municipality. In honour of his contribution, the roads were named after him, and subsequently the area came to be known as Joo Chiat.

Many members of the Eurasian and Peranakan communities settled in Joo Chiat in the early 1900s. Peranakans are descendants of 17th century Chinese and Indian immigrants who married natives from the Malay Archipelago, while Eurasians are descendants from Europeans who intermarried with local Asians.

Joo Chiat was awarded conservation status in 1993. It was also named Singapore’s first Heritage Town in 2011, by the National Heritage Board—an honour that provided additional funding for heritage and community activities.

A walk down the streets of Joo Chiat today brings back memories of yesteryear. The neighbourhood is characterised by two-storey conservation shophouses and terrace houses that were built in the 1920s and 1930s. Rich historical links to Peranakan culture are also evident, from the traditionally Peranakan houses like Rumah Bebe and Katong Antique House, as well as the many restaurants offering delicious Peranakan food.

At the same time, the area is experiencing a metamorphosis of sorts. Art galleries, trendy restaurants and cafes, retail shops, boutique hotels and design studios have set up shop here, drawn to the rich heritage of the district. Today, Joo Chiat is vibrant and lively, as people from all walks of life flock here to sample its diverse offerings.

The team also removed a second-storey slab to create a double-volume dining space, which serves as a large communal gathering place for family and friends. The high ceiling of the dining space allows it to visually connect the first and second floors, and the room opens out to the central garden area and the new single-storey extension behind the shophouse. The beautiful garden oasis, unusual in its location in the middle of the development, provides both visual relief and a breath of freshness.

When planning the rear extension, the owners took a similarly enlightened approach in designing a low-density building rather than a multi-storey one. Its enclosures have a rustic stone finish that blends well with the green setting and complements the rawness of the old brick walls in the main shophouse. The rooms are organised in a staggered manner to optimise the internal space, which has the effect of creating vertical apertures for natural cross-ventilation and day-lighting. This helps reduce the energy needed for cooling and lighting. Not only is this unconventional arrangement economical and environmentally friendly, it cleverly introduces views of the greenery outside in a way that maintains its occupants’ privacy on both sides without the need for curtains.

KNITTING TOGETHER THE OLD AND NEW

The design of the development effortlessly marries the old and the new elements. A beautifully cohesive end-product is created through a thoughtful choice of materials, as well as interior configurations to provide visual connections to all parts of the development.

Recognising the sensitive restoration and innovative design of 125 Joo Chiat Place, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) awarded it an Architectural Heritage Award in 2013.

Today, it stands as a wonderful example of creative restoration, where one can traverse the three distinct parts of the development and yet still experience a sense of seamless continuity between the old and the new. ❀

» *Tan Shin Bin is Writer, BeMuse*





plain sailing...

/ travel



“Let me carry your bags, Madam.”

The guide broke the silence as we made our way from the hotel to a pick-up point, where a van was waiting to bring us to Halong Bay. I politely declined his offer; my bag was light, since I had packed for only an overnight stay. My nine-year-old fashionista daughter, who was decked in pink winterwear, quickened her steps in excitement.

We were soon joined by another Singaporean family, a couple from Germany and a few other travelers from Hong Kong and China. Speaking bits of English, the guide told us to expect a bumpy ride during the four-hour journey to Halong Bay. Knowing that there were a number of Singaporeans in the group, he was quick to sing the praises of Singapore’s well-developed roads and infrastructure.

Halong Bay, located in northern Vietnam, is approximately 180km from Hanoi. Better known among the Vietnamese as Vinh Ha Long, it literally means ‘descending dragon bay’. In 1962, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of North Vietnam listed Halong Bay among its National Relics and Landscapes. Subsequently, in 1994, the core zone of Halong Bay was designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. In 2011, it was declared one of the New 7 Wonders of Nature.

by Asmah Alias







Almost two hours into the journey, which offered quiet views of the flat green countryside dotted with rice paddies and small villages, we stopped for some Vietnamese coffee and local snacks at a place that looked like a handicraft workshop. I was fascinated to see the rows and rows of young locals working on beautiful, finely-embroidered paintings, which I later found out were sold at prices of between US\$100 to US\$500 each, depending on the size and quality.

According to our guide, the place had been set up by an entrepreneurial former soldier to employ local people. He was so successful that the government helped him acquire more land and expand his facility along the highway. The business has certainly prospered – it is a regu-

lar stop for most of the tour buses en route to Halong Bay.

Our journey continued for another two hours and I heaved a sigh of relief the minute I caught sight of the pier, as my daughter had become a little restless by then. Fortunately the sight of many traditional junks lined up neatly at the pier got her excited again, as she tried to guess which of them would be our home for the next two days. Despite the number of tour groups arriving at the same time, there was an organised system in place. Before long, our tour group was ushered to a small boat that would bring us to our junk, which was anchored a distance away.



Covering an area of 1,553 km², Halong Bay includes over 1,900 islands and islets predominantly made of limestone, most of which are uninhabited and unaffected by humans. It would take almost a week to cruise around all the islands in Halong Bay, according to our guide. The karst landscape in this bay has evolved under the influence of the tropical climate, a process that has taken 20 million years. The geo-diversity of the environment in the area has also given rise to a rich biodiversity, including a tropical evergreen biosystem, an oceanic biosystem and a seashore biosystem. It is home to 14 endemic species of flora and 60 endemic species of fauna.

As we sailed within the core area of the bay, the limestone karsts appeared, guiding our boat's direction much like the corners of a maze, against the ever-changing landscape. Soon after boarding the junk, we had been served a sumptuous seafood lunch cooked the Vietnamese way, accompanied by steaming white rice. Despite the language barrier, the crew's enthusiasm to cater to our every need was endearing, as was their inquisitive nature in regard to our own cultures. Our room was quite a surprise and better than what we had expected: in addition to the good-sized bedroom, we had a bathroom with a very large shower. Clearly these crafts had been purpose-built for tourists.



No one was allowed to remain in the rooms for long, as we had a packed afternoon planned for us. Our next stop was the Sung Sot Cave, which was located a few minutes away. The path to Sung Sot is lined with shady trees. To enter, you have to climb up some very steep steps, which reminded me of my trip up the Great Wall of China some years ago. Although this was just a fraction of the Great Wall climb, I could feel some of my 'sleeping' and untrained leg muscles screaming in pain. My little one was not too pleased either.

The cave itself has two chambers. The square outer chamber is often referred to as the "waiting room". Its ceiling is approximately 30m high and its walls are so smooth they seem man-made. The inner chamber is known as the "serene castle", and has an approximately 3m-wide path leading to it.

The formations in the inner chamber take various shapes: sentries conversing with one another, animals in varying poses, etc. In the middle of the chamber stands a structure that resembles a general surveying his troops. There is a side entrance approximately 6m in height, through which light is reflected from the moving water outside, causing the formations inside the chamber to take on a life-like appearance. The locals say the awe-stricken reaction of the visitors to the cave was the reason it was named Sung Sot, which means "surprise".

The view inside the cave – with stalactites and stalagmites of all shapes, some sparkling with quartzite – was simply magnificent. A lit path guided us through the winding passageways, which opened up to one strange vista after another. The panoramic view of Halong islets from the top of the cave was simply surreal and indescribable.



After stopping for a few photos, we walked down and hopped back to our small boat for the next activity: kayaking. But the weather was too chilly, so we chose to skip this and seized the opportunity to laze around on the deck.

A short while later, we were spotted. A Vietnamese person rowing a boat filled with snacks and drinks approached our boat slowly, gracefully captaining her boat towards us. My husband was tempted to buy a snack or two; I knew that he was attracted not by the snacks but by the experience of buying from a boat vendor. But I stopped him from making a purchase as our tour guide had warned us about buying from these 'fly-by-night' boat vendors – some of their products were nearing expiry.

An hour later, everyone had gathered back at the boat and we were off to the last destination for that day. We were brought to a stretch of white sandy beach for swimming. The water was inviting, but everyone resisted the temptation of taking a dip.

Instead, we watched the sunset, listening to the subtle waves hitting the shore and the sounds of birds chirping filling the air. We soon headed back to the junk and after a quick wash-up, it was time for a cooking class. We were taught how to make Vietnamese spring rolls and ate what we cooked for dinner, topped off with another spread of seafood. It was free time for all after dinner. While some chose to laze around on the main deck or indulge in squid fishing, we chose to rest in our cabin as we wanted to catch the sunrise at 5am the next day.





A wooden boat with a dragon-like prow sculpture sailing on a body of water with limestone karsts in the background. The dragon sculpture is intricately carved with scales and a fierce expression. The water is a calm, light blue-green color, and the sky is a pale, hazy blue. In the background, several tall, jagged limestone karsts rise from the water, some covered in sparse vegetation. The boat's deck is made of dark wood planks.

Sunrise was a beautiful sight, despite the freezing early-morning weather. It was over all too fast and soon after, everyone retreated back to the cabins to await breakfast. Only white bread and unlimited sunny-side-up eggs were served, but somehow they tasted so good in the cool and tranquil atmosphere.

After breakfast, we adjourned to a nearby kelong that had been transformed into a pearl farm. We witnessed first-hand the cultivation of pearls, which takes a few years to reap results; even then, the success rate is only 30%. That explains the high prices of pearls in the market.

Before we knew it, it was time to pack our bags as we were brought on a slow cruise back to the pier. Sitting on the deck, we gazed, mesmerized, at the limestone rocks one last time – each unique yet similar as they, together with the clouds and the sun, painted a perfect backdrop against the turquoise water.

The natural spectacle was but a momentary ripple in our lives, but will forever remain carved in our memories. ❁

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