

# Kumpulan Kebudayaan Malaysia Kuala Lumpur & Selangor Malaysian Culture Group

Newsletter of the Malaysian Culture Group

August 2011

## MCG PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

MALAYSIAN ASSOCIATION OF THE BLIND  
Visit to the Blind Institute in Brickfields

Monday, 08 August

FIRST WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH LECTURE:  
CONSERVING CULTURAL HERITAGE IN PENANG -  
PUBLIC GRANTS PROGRAMME FOR  
URBAN CONSERVATION & REGENERATION  
Guest speaker Dr. Neil Khor

Wednesday, 17 August

FIRST WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH LECTURE:  
MALAYSIAN MARTIAL ARTS AND THE KERIS  
Guest speaker Encik Mohd. Nadzrin Wahan

Wednesday, 07 September

### Inside this issue:

<i>President's Message</i>	2
<i>MCG Programme Information</i>	3-4
<i>Members' Corner</i>	5-6
<i>Reports on Previous Events</i>	7
<i>Enak</i>	8-9
<i>Book Groups</i>	10-11
<i>Membership Form</i>	12



SELAMAT BULAN PUASA

## COMMITTEE MEMBERS

<b>President</b>	<b>Dawn Babcock</b> <a href="mailto:president@malaysianculturegroup.org">president@malaysianculturegroup.org</a>
<b>Vice-President</b>	<b>Vacant</b> <a href="mailto:veep@malaysianculturegroup.org">veep@malaysianculturegroup.org</a>
<b>Secretary</b>	<b>Stuart Wakefield</b> <a href="mailto:secretary@malaysianculturegroup.org">secretary@malaysianculturegroup.org</a>
<b>Treasurer</b>	<b>Catherine Zhang</b> <a href="mailto:treasurer@malaysianculturegroup.org">treasurer@malaysianculturegroup.org</a>
<b>Book Group</b>	<b>Joanne Mahendran</b> <a href="mailto:bookgroup@malaysianculturegroup.org">bookgroup@malaysianculturegroup.org</a>
<b>Enak!</b>	<b>Charlotte Sanders</b> <a href="mailto:enak@malaysianculturegroup.org">enak@malaysianculturegroup.org</a>
<b>Events Planning</b>	<b>Michelle Pease</b> <a href="mailto:eventsconvenor@malaysianculturegroup.org">eventsconvenor@malaysianculturegroup.org</a> Vicki Fennessy, Stuart Wakefield, Elise Hill
<b>Explorers</b>	<b>Currently defunct</b> <a href="mailto:explorers@malaysianculturegroup.org">explorers@malaysianculturegroup.org</a>
<b>Membership</b>	<b>Stefanie Weber</b> <a href="mailto:membership@malaysianculturegroup.org">membership@malaysianculturegroup.org</a>
<b>Newsletter</b>	<b>Cheryl Hoffmann</b> <a href="mailto:newsletter@malaysianculturegroup.org">newsletter@malaysianculturegroup.org</a>
<b>Webmaster</b>	<b>Robert Tyabji</b> <a href="mailto:webmaster@malaysianculturegroup.org">webmaster@malaysianculturegroup.org</a>



### REST IN PEACE YOSHA BEKINK

It is with great sadness that MCG announces the passing of one of our members. Yosha Bekink sadly lost her brief fight with cancer on 18<sup>th</sup> May. She passed peacefully with her family at her side. Because of her illness she had not been an active member over the past year but was part of the Explorers Group and was looking forward to participating on the Events Planning Team. We extend our condolences to her family and friends. We will miss you Yosha.

The deadline for the September 2011 issue is August 8. Please send event reports for the next issue to the appropriate event convener. If you have other material of interest to members that you would like us to include, please send it to:  
[newsletter@malaysianculturegroup.org](mailto:newsletter@malaysianculturegroup.org)

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As of the writing of this message, the Malaysian Culture Group (MCG) committee is preparing to move the MCG Library to a new location! For the last couple of years, the library has been located at the National Museum under the custodianship of the Museum Volunteers Malaysia (MVM). This arrangement has been beneficial to both MCG and MVM.

The MCG committee is also seeking to increase the volunteer base among our membership. We are still looking for a Vice President on the committee, as well as members for the Events Planning Team (EPT). We would also like to develop our newsletter staff. In August we may need a few extra hands with the library move. If you can contribute your time to the MCG for a few hours on occasion or in a regular capacity, please contact me:  
[president@malaysianculturegroup.org](mailto:president@malaysianculturegroup.org)

This year the Islamic month of Ramadan coincides with the month of August. Ramadan, the 9<sup>th</sup> month in the Islamic calendar, is a time of fasting and reflection. Be sure to get out and explore some of the unique food bazaars running during the month to taste some of the foods made only during the fasting period. One of my personal favorites is the bazaar that extends out along the roads from the Chow Kit wet market into Kampung Baru. It gets started in the late afternoon every day, with many vendors offering freshly made food for *buka puasa* (breaking fast) at sunset.

August is also a busy month around KL for many newly arriving families, so when you are talking to a new neighbor, be sure to tell them about the Malaysian Culture Group! Better yet, invite them to join you at our Welcome Morning on September 29<sup>th</sup>!

Dawn Berger Babcock, President MCG



## UPCOMING EVENTS

### MALAYSIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND

**DATE:** Monday, 08 August, 2011  
**TIME:** 9.30 am for 10.0 am start  
**PLACE:** Malaysian Association For The Blind, Off Jalan Tun Sambanthan 4, Brickfields  
**COST:** Members RM15, Guests RM25  
**RSVP:** [mcgevents@yahoo.com](mailto:mcgevents@yahoo.com)



The Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) is the premier voluntary organisation in Malaysia serving visually impaired persons. It provides services that help the blind and also prevent the tragedy of avoidable blindness.

MAB was established in 1951 on the initiative of Major D.R. Bridges who was an soldier in the British army in Burma and was blinded in the war during the 1940's. After being rehabilitated in England, he was assigned to work as a welfare officer for the blind in Malaya. Subsequently, he became the first Executive Director of the MAB in the 1950's.

Since then, important developments in the work for the blind have taken place (including early intervention programmes, braille library and vocational training) and various centres have opened in other parts of Malaysia.

We will have a 45 minute briefing followed by a tour of the facility. Those that wish to could then proceed to enjoy traditional Taiwanese massage at Urut Tradisional PB, run by Mr. Lee who gave us a talk a couple of years ago on how he coped with becoming blind as an adult. If you wish to participate in the massage, please advise if you would like full body massage (with male or female masseur) or foot reflexology. There are also several restaurants in the area for a lovely lunch.

### FIRST WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH LECTURE: Conserving Cultural Heritage in Penang - Public Grants Programme for Urban Conservation & Regeneration

**DATE:** Wednesday, 17 August, 2011  
**TIME:** 10.00 am for 10.30 am start  
**PLACE:** Meritz Condominium, Jalan Mayang, behind "Avenue K"  
**COST:** Members RM15, Guests RM25  
**RSVP:** [mcgevents@yahoo.com](mailto:mcgevents@yahoo.com)



Our speaker, Dr. Neil Khor is a social historian, a former journalist and Fellow in History at the University of Malaya. He read Straits Chinese Literature for his PhD at the University of Cambridge, UK and is Honorary Secretary of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. He is also the Programme Director of the George Town Grants Programme. He oversees the "origination" of projects, dealing with stakeholders with special emphasis on cultural mapping projects. He has spoken to the MCG several times before most recently on Prositution in Colonial Penang and Twilight People: The History & Customs of the Peranakan Chinese

His presentation will begin with a description of the urban situation in Malaysia with a special focus on Penang's capital city George Town. In a highly-developed and land scarce state, the George Town Grants Programme, designed to catalyse urban regeneration, was launched in January 2010. Here urban regeneration is broadly defined as the re-use of existing building stock and the revitalization public spaces by providing incentives and technical assistance to local communities, civil society and governmental agencies. Today, 18 months later, Think City manages 76 projects including those in physical conservation, cultural mapping and shared spaces. In this presentation, the key challenges and the lessons learnt from the implementation of the George Town Grants Programme will be shared.

## FIRST WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH LECTURE: Malaysian Martial Arts and the Keris

**DATE:** Wednesday, 07 September, 2011  
**TIME:** 10.00 am for 10.30 am start  
**PLACE:** Meritz Condominium, Jalan Mayang, behind "Avenue K"  
**COST:** Members RM15, Guests RM25  
**RSVP:** [mcgevents@yahoo.com](mailto:mcgevents@yahoo.com)



Our speaker, Mohd. Nadzrin Wahan, will talk to us about his twin passions; *Silat Malayu* and the *Keris*. *Silat* is a collective word for the indigenous martial arts, originally developed in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore and traditionally practiced in Brunei, the Philippines, Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam. The *Keris* or *Kris* is a distinctive, asymmetrical dagger indigenous to Malaya. Historically, the *Kris* was used as a weapon for Malay self-defense and martial arts. History speaks of the *kris* as an object of mystery, believed to possess spiritual power and to protect the wearer from physical and spiritual harm. In modern Malaysia, it has become an important part of the traditional costume of the Malay Man. As a work of art, it is also prized as a collector's item.

Members of MCG, who have previously attended a talk by Nadzrin, can guarantee that this talk will be an intriguing blend of passion, knowledge and humour upon a subject that is embedded in Malaysian history and mythology. For those who want to know more about the topic ahead of the presentation, Nadzrin edits a comprehensive and interesting blog at <http://silat-melayu.blogspot.com/>.

## HUNGRY GHOST FESTIVAL ~ In 2011, Ghost Month falls on Sunday, 31 July to Sunday, 28 August



Celebrated on the 15th day of the 7th Lunar Month in the Chinese calendar, the Hungry Ghost Festival is an important day for the Chinese, after the Chinese New Year. Throughout the whole month, it is believed that the gates of Hell are opened and the spirits of the dead are free to roam the earth. The dead would visit their living relatives during this month; prayers would be held and a sumptuous meal would be prepared by the living for their dead ancestors. At the same time, foodstuff such as fruits and white rice would be left outside their homes to 'feed' homeless spirits who have nowhere to return to, thus avoiding them from causing trouble to the living. During this month, the Chinese would also avoid swimming or staying out late at night, so as not to be disturbed by the wandering spirits.

On the Ghost Day, which is the 15th of the month, aside from food and prayers, paper offerings are also made to the dead. Paper replicas of money (called 'Hell Money'), houses, cars, and all sorts of modern comforts such as mobile phones and television sets, are burnt for the spirits. The Chinese believe that these paper offerings would reach the spirits and help them live more comfortably in the afterlife. They take great care in performing these rituals as they believe that unappeased spirits would wreak havoc on the living, especially those who had wronged them, and well-served spirits would help bring in good fortune and ward off bad luck.

Information obtained from AsiaWeb Direct, photo by Cheryl Hoffmann

## MEMBER'S CORNER

### Learning about the Peranakan Wedding Ceremony by Lynne Samuel

Recently, I attended a mock wedding ceremony at the Craft Centre in Jalan Conlay, KL, presented by the Peranakan Baba Nyonya group of Kuala Lumpur and Selangor.

Peranakan means descendants of mixed marriage, predominantly between Malays and Chinese known as the Baba Peranakans. There are also a number of other communities recognised as Peranakan, including the Jawi Peranakan descended from Indian Muslims, and the Chitty Melaka community descended from Hindu traders. The term "Baba" applies to the ethnic Chinese populations of the British Straits Settlements of Malaya who adopted, partial or fully, the customs of local Malay communities as they assimilated. "Nyonya" is the term used for the ladies and "Baba" for the gentlemen. They were usually traders or middlemen for British companies and spoke two or more languages and a creole dialect of Bahasa Melayu that included Hokkien words, Chinese, English and sometimes Portuguese. Gradually over generations this group began speaking Malay as a first or second language.



The Mock ceremony we witnessed suggested that the Mothers of two families would discuss the suitability of their son and daughter to marry. The most important rite would be the coming of age. Often marriage partners would be as young as 16 years of age and would be selected within the community or of similar stature. Astrological readings would be taken to assess suitability of the couple.

Peranakan weddings combine Chinese aspects of religion, worshipping Chinese Gods and Malay elements of language, jewellery and proceedings. Traditionally, such weddings are elaborate affairs often lasting twelve days of rites and rituals and costing both a lot of time and money, according to the wealth of the families involved. Weddings are a community affair. Proposals of marriage are made by a gift, a tiered lacquered basket containing liquor, fruits, candles etc. intended for the bride's parents. Some of the items are returned to the prospective husband's family at a later date. Traditionally, women guests are given a folded Pandan leaf with slices of Betel nut inside as an invitation.



Pre-nuptial procedures are many and various according to the families involved. Before the wedding, there is the presentation of birth certificates. A crucial ritual is the wedding bed to be decorated with hangings and accessories and ornately carved with fertility motifs of birds, flowers, insects and sea creatures. Bed covers are often embroidered with fertility symbols. The bridal chamber is prepared on a chosen date with bananas, yams and flowers placed under the bridal bed by a young boy who rolls three times across the bed to provide male energy and, in the hope that a boy child will be conceived.

Relatives come to help with preparations of food and decorations. We saw the fine slicing of Pandan leaves mixed with various coloured flowers and sprinkled with Safflower and Patchouli oils for Pot pourri to decorate and make the house smell good. At the mock ceremony we saw the preparation of papaya cut in the shape of crabs (crabs and rats are fertility symbols) layered between limes on a skewer to adorn the Altar (3 or 5 in number) where prayers are offered to the Gods. (see photo left) Wedding gifts are exchanged and displayed on trays including candles with dragons and phoenix, shoes, cloth, ang-pow, betel nuts, wine, rock sugar, oranges and other delicacies.

The tableau we saw at this mock wedding showed that on the day of the wedding the front entrance to the ceremony house is decorated in red material pleated to form lotus flowers. The wedding couple are dressed in Peranakan traditional attire. The girl's trousseau is presented by her parents and gift items depend upon the wealth of her parents. The bride wears a gold and silver crown held on with hairpins, (adorned with a dragon). At her neck a phoenix collar symbolises the power of the feminine phoenix in Peranakan society. She is dressed with numerous items of jewellery and accessories befitting her wealth and status and covered from head to toe in the finest garments of pure Chinese silk. The girl's head is covered in a black lace with a red circle centre placed on the top of the head, to ward off evil spirits. On her feet hand she wears crafted beaded slippers. (Glass beads are now imported from Japan) The Groom is less ornate but handsome in an embroidered jacket/hat of Chinese influence.



Traditionally the ceremony itself becomes a fanfare of musical instruments and men carrying umbrellas and lanterns and the whole procession proceeds to the bride's home. As the girl meets the Bridegroom her black veil is lifted to reveal her face.



Wine/tea is offered to the daughter and groom and further rituals are performed, including a tea ceremony. Prayers are offered to the Gods with a decorated Altar.

Nowadays, the principal Peranakan wedding ceremony is a much shorter affair where the rites and rituals are carried out mostly in a day and, because of the cost of wedding attire, costumes are hired/simplified and the traditions are carried out by specialists for the families concerned retaining the important essence of the rites and rituals that the families believe to be important. Peranakan societies continue to work hard to keep the important elements of their culture alive. I have highlighted the aspects of Peranakan wedding culture that I understood from the visit to the Craft Centre and from a little research on the subject. I hope it may whet your appetite to discover more about this interesting subject. Historical and cultural items relating to Peranakan culture can be found in museums in Malacca, Penang and Singapore, and watch for further shows in venues in KL.

**Photos Cheryl Hoffmann**

## REPORTS ON PREVIOUS EVENTS

### THE BABA AND NYONYA—O.C.B.C.?

MCG members were third time lucky to hear regular speaker and sixth generation Baba Cedric Tan share the story of his family's Baba Nyonya culture. Cedric has spoken to the MCG twice before; in this talk, he asked members to think of Baba Nyonya in terms of O.C.B.C: Orang Cina Bukan Cina. Are Baba Nyonya Chinese people, but yet not Chinese at all?

Cedric's well-organized talk started with the origins and terminology of the Baba Nyonya people. Baba Nyonya typically included families of Chinese and Malay mixed origin. They are descendents of Chinese traders in Malacca, of Chinese immigrants in the 18th and 19th century, or perhaps even descendents of Princess Hang Li Po's maidens who came to Nanyang and married Malay men.

The definition of the Baba Nyonya people is vast and flexible, but they share many characteristics. The men in Baba Nyonya culture generally marry into their wives' homes, and their wives usually receive inheritance from their families. The men often bond with their wives' family, but the women generally take their husbands' surnames. This had roots in the arrival of single Chinese men into Nanyang, marrying into local families. As these families developed, the Chinese customs faded in favor of the adaptation and absorption of local and British cultures. Due to the influx of British missionaries, British culture and education was pervasive throughout the area at the time.

Each of these characteristics influenced the move from a more traditional Chinese culture to one of Baba Nyonya. The economic success of the Chinese immigrants at this time meant that women often stayed at home, with more time to indulge in time-consuming handicrafts, cuisine and festival preparations. Over the years the focus shifted from Chinese language and patriotism to a mix of local and British customs.

The picture Cedric painted of his culture was one of forward-thinking, open-minded party people. Their love for cross-cultural festivals and bright colors, coupled with their tendency to pick the best bits of every culture they come in contact with, made Baba Nyonya a group we all wanted to learn more about!

Cedric encouraged MCG members to learn more about the Baba Nyonya and Peranakan cultures through the Per-satuan Peranakan Baba Nyonya Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, of which he is currently Honorary Secretary. You can find out more at [www.babamelaka.com](http://www.babamelaka.com).

#### Lauren Massey



Photos scanned from [The Straits Chinese. A Cultural History](#), Khoo Joo Ee thanks to Michelle Pease



# ENAK

## MAY ENAK!

On the 12th of May, Enak! met at this little deli, (they call it kopitiam here) in a corner of Bangsar. It is called Baba Low and it has its roots in Malacca since it serves Nyonya food. My interest in this place was piqued when my family went to Malacca last Hari Raya. We decided to have nyonya laksa for lunch and hence we headed for Baba Low's. When we reached there we were told all the food was sold out. This aroused my curiosity and I told myself I must try out this place in KL. I went there just before Enak!, met with my nieces who gave the food their thumbs up.



On that day we were a cosy group of seven and we tried the nyonya laksa which appealed to everyone's taste buds. The pie tee and tahu were a bit bland. The meal ended with everyone having cendol which was good. Vicki took some otak-otak and chicken wings home. She emailed back to me saying they were very good. Otak-otak when translated means 'brains'. However it is just marinated fish paste wrapped in banana leaf and steamed or grilled.

So, dear members, you can give this place a try. Baba Low's is situated at 11 Jalan Kurau, Bangsar.

Best wishes.

**Tasnim Onn**



Photos by Joanne Mahendran

## ENAK! introduces you to ... SRI LANKAN CUISINE on Thursday, 9 June 2011

Amidst the great debates about "Enak!" and whether the food we select should be Malaysian or regional to fit our original concepts, Regina (co-ordinator/hostess of this month June) came up with a very viable alternative, Sri Lankan but Tamil style cuisine ... how about that for ingenuity!

A Li Yaa is a quaint little restaurant tucked into Damansara Heights round the bend of Jalan Dungun. It is in a double storey bungalow with a pleasant staff and good home style Tamil food with a Sri Lankan patina. It was very authentic, in my opinion, since I have had Sri Lankan Tamil maids in the last few years. The flavours are fresh and homey. Aliyaa's Chef Prashant Weedyage had prepared a very ample buffet for us. Three delicious sambals; Senni, Pol, and Katta. a dry mutton dish called Paal poriyal as well as fish cutlets and mutton rolls. He went on to more substantial Pilau-style Rice, a String Hopper Kottu, a Muslim festive dish, and a traditional Pittu. A chicken curry dense in flavour and thick in consistency was wonderful. There was also a vegetarian coconut curry (sothee) The Squid in heavy spices with onions was also interesting. Everything is coconut rich so this is not for anyone who does not enjoy the latter and divine for those of us who do. The rich palm sugar custard or vattilappam ended the meal very well and it took the edge off the spices. Of course the free Mojitos were a welcome surprise!



It was a perfect colonial style laid back afternoon right out of Malaya in the days of Somerset Maugham. Everyone seemed to have a pleasant time. Regretfully, we missed Stewart and Dorothy who went off to another A Li Yaa. A nice finishing touch to the afternoon was co-ordinator/hostess Regina's "smiley" lucky draw and love gift.

### A LI YAA Island Restaurant & Bar

Aliyaa means 'elephant' in Sinhalese and the influence is profusely, but never overwhelmingly displayed in the decor scheme. The A Li Yaa brings back memories of the 50s colonial restaurants in Sri Lanka. It serves you the real authentic Sri Lankan cuisine.

### Specials authentic dishes to look out for:

**Lumprais** (pronounced lum-rai) is rice boiled in stock with a special curry, accompanied by various choice of meat, all of which is then wrapped in a banana leaf and baked. In Sri Lankan homes, cooking the lamprais was a real performance. Something of a treasured family activity that the Sri Lankan families took pride in and fussed over.

**Sri Lankan Crab** - humongous crab cooked in Colombo sauce (like curry) eaten with Doosra or Sri Lankan Pittu is awesome. You will need 2-3 others to share this huge and succulent crab.

**Watilaapam** - a steamed pudding made with coconut milk, eggs, and jaggery (palm sugar) has become a staple Sri Lankan dessert.

**Sambol** - Side-dishes include pickles, chutneys and "sambols". The most famous of these is the coconut sambol, made of ground coconut mixed with chillies, dried Maldive fish and lime juice. This is ground to a paste and eaten with rice, as it gives zest to the meal and is believed to increase appetite.

The restaurant does not serve pork and serves beer, liquor and hot beverages.

The restaurant is located at: 8 Lorong Dungun, Damansara Heights, 50490 KUALA LUMPUR Tel: 03-2092 5378 (between Jarrod & Rawlins and Courtyard Garden in Lorong Dungun).

### **Text Loubu Jumabhoy, Photos Michelle Pease**



## BOOK GROUPS

### Book Group 1—May

#### The Piano Teacher by Janice Y K Lee

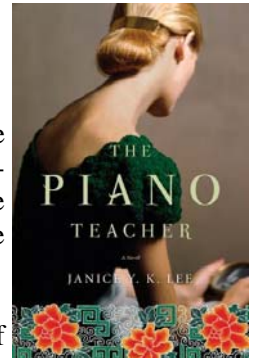
The Piano Teacher by Janice Y K Lee is set in Hong Kong and contrasts two love affairs. The first in 1952 between the enigmatic Englishman Will Truesdale and Claire Pendleton, an uptight newlywed English wallflower; and the second, a decade earlier between Will and the beautiful Eurasian socialite Trudy Liang. As the love stories are told in tandem, an intrigue which involves certain characters collaborating with the Japanese is gradually unraveled.

The setting is extraordinarily vivid and the reader is drawn into the anxieties and traumas of Hong Kong both pre, during and post the Japanese invasion.

Our book group all enjoyed The Piano Teacher. Most of us were gripped by it and found the characters engaging especially Trudy and Will. However, we all agreed that it was rather 'light' and lacking in depth. In interview the author alludes to the fact that she followed no plan when writing the book and the whole of our group felt it would have benefited from more planning especially the 'who done it?' element of the story. The Penguin website compares the book to The English Patient and Empire of the Sun. We felt that was rather an ambitious comparison.

The general consensus was that it's a great 'holiday read' but not suitable for in-depth discussion. We also agreed that it would make an excellent movie.

**Alexandra Carey**



### Book Group 1—June

#### Indian Summer: The Secret History of the End of an Empire by Alex von Tunzelmann

In June I hosted our last book group of the current season. We were reading Indian Summer: The Secret History of the End of an Empire by Alex von Tunzelmann. The group was small; however the discussion very lively and informative.

All agreed that the book was a good read, although we were curious if this was her dissertation thesis. Saying that, not in anyway did we feel it read like a history textbook. Her references and notes were all much appreciated and thoroughly researched.

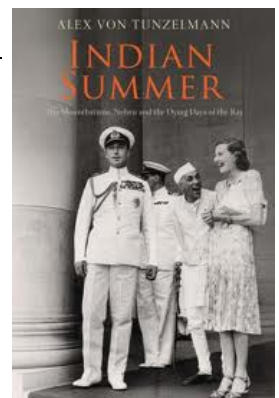
The three main protagonists, the last Viceroy of India – Louis Mountbatten, his wife Edwina, and Nehru, were very well portrayed. One did get a sense of who they were. However not much of the 'love' between Edwina and Nehru was truly established. The author, by her own admission, says that she was not given access to the private letters exchanged between Nehru and Edwina.

Mountbatten's weak leadership skills, Gandhi's grandstanding, Nehru not standing up to Gandhi, Churchill's playing off both sides for his own benefit and Jinnah's arrogance lead to a partition that should never have happened, especially on the basis of religion.

One can't help reading Indian Summer without thinking of likely scenarios when the United States finally leaves Iraq, another country beset by sectarian divisions the parties seem unwilling to bridge. It was unanimously felt that approximately 65 years after India and Pakistan's Independence we, as a world, have learnt no lessons! On closing I would like to bid farewell to my fellow members. Sadly, we as a family are relocating after 15 wonderful years. I have been a part of the group almost from inception, and will truly miss all of them, especially all the very interesting discussions. This is a definitive highlight of my month!

Three other members are also leaving us: Fran Jones, Lina El-Saadi and Sapna Walia. We wish them all the best for the future. Happy Reading!

**Nisha Dobberstein**



### Book Group 3—May

#### The Man from Saigon by Marti Leimbach

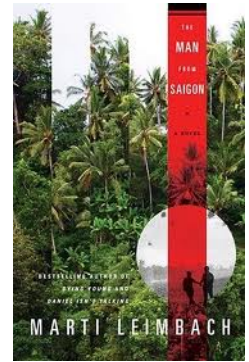
Book group #3 met May 25<sup>th</sup> to discuss *The Man from Saigon* by Marti Leimbach. In the novel, Susan, a young journalist, travels to Vietnam to cover the war for a US women's magazine. As she settles in, she has a passionate affair with another correspondent, Marc, a married American man who has been in Vietnam for two years and is struggling to come to terms with both the horrors he's seen and the thought of returning home to his pregnant wife. Susan also strikes up an unconventional platonic affair with a Vietnamese photographer named Son.

The book is told from Susan's point of view until she and Son are kidnapped by guerilla fighters, and then the point of view alternates between Susan and Son's captivity in the jungle and Marc's attempts to find Susan.

Our book group was divided in our opinions of this book. Among the members, we spotted three markedly different book covers, which led to a discussion on the marketing the book, from airport fluff to serious historical fiction. Many found the descriptions of the war-time atrocities, the hospitals, and the jungle very evocative and horrifying. Susan's character was particularly divisive; some group members admired her chutzpah for getting out of her comfort zone and finding the best stories. Others chided her for being so naïve and getting herself in such awful situations.

We agreed that it was a book we might lend to a friend if they needed something to read on the beach or the airplane. The majority of us felt that it did not stand up to the scrutiny of book club discussion; that it didn't have much 'meat', and wasn't something we'd remember.

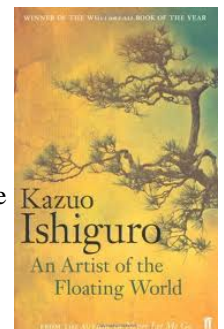
**Lauren Massy**



### Book Group 3—June

#### An Artist of the Floating World by Kazuo Ishiguro

Ishiguro's first novel is set in post World War II Japan. Masuji Ono is an aging artist who reflects back on his life and how he has lived it. He considers himself to have been a prominent man whose artistic efforts had substantial influence in encouraging the rise of Japanese militarism and the war effort. However, while negotiating a prospective wedding for his daughter Noriko, he contemplates whether he has betrayed his artistic integrity by his leaning towards political art. He notices how his reputation has faltered and how attitudes towards him and his paintings have changed since the end of the war. Ono is uncertain of his personal culpability in the eyes of a younger generation who potentially perceive him as having played a role in leading Japan into a disastrous war.



Written in the first person, the novel alternates easily between past and present events. The group felt this was an effective way of demonstrating changing attitudes in Japan: the older generation represented by Ono, and the more modern generation characterized by his daughters, Setsuko and Noriko as well as his spoilt grandson Ichiro. Ono appears to be an unreliable and fallible narrator whose views were often to be questioned and doubted.

An interesting theme is Ishiguro's reference to the 'floating world'. This he defines as "the night-time world of pleasure, entertainment and drink..." It is also the early subject matter of Ono's paintings before he ventures into propaganda art. Some suggested that the title may have had an even greater meaning by referring to the changing cultural behavior in post-war Japan as well as shifting societal patterns.

To provide a greater insight into the changing attitudes of people in post-war Japan, the group had invited Sharon to our meeting. Sharon is a long-term resident of Japan. As such she offered a fascinating insight into the Japanese psyche and how the war affected the next generation's perception of its elders.

Further discussion focused on the concept of whether art exists only for the reproduction of beauty or should it be a conduit for change and a leader of public opinion. Is propaganda art? Had Ishiguro modeled the protagonist Ono on any prominent Japanese artists in the post war era? Sharon again provided fascinating evidence of artwork of that period which suggested that this was possibly the case.

The more the novel was discussed, the more layers and themes were uncovered.

Whilst the pace of the novel is slow and the storyline uneventful, the consensus was that this was a beautifully written novel, which provided a different perspective on the Japanese during World War II.

**Sylvia Bullock**



Kumpulan Kebudayaan Malaysia  
 Kuala Lumpur & Selangor  
 Malaysian Culture Group

**Member  
 Application Form**

**2011 Membership Form**

**Membership fees: Annual Membership: January —December 2011                      RM 60**  
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**MCG is run by volunteers. What would you like to do in 2011?**

- Write a report about a meeting
- Assist with Events Planning
- Assist with membership
- Give a talk about \_\_\_\_\_
- Occasionally provide a venue for meetings
- Something else?

**Do you have any expertise or experience to share with MCG?**