

Kumpulan Kebudayaan Malaysia Kuala Lumpur & Selangor Malaysian Culture Group

Newsletter of the Malaysian Culture Group Dec.2011/Jan.2012

MCG PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MALAYSIAN PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA	Wednesday, 07 December
INTERNATIONAL POT LUCK LUNCH	Wednesday, 14 December
MONTHLY LECTURE : MALAYSIAN MONARCHY	Wednesday, 11 January
A TASTE OF CHINESE NEW YEAR TRADITIONS	Wednesday, 18 January
SILK PRODUCTION AND WEFT IKAT TEXTILES OF SOUTH EAST ASIA	Wednesday, 01 February
THAIPUSAM—A CULTURAL OUTING FOR PHOTOGRAPHERS	Sunday, 05 February

Inside this issue:

<i>President's Message</i>	2
<i>MCG Programme Information</i>	3-5
<i>Members' Cultural Corner</i>	6
<i>Reports on Previous Events</i>	7-12
<i>Announcements</i>	13
<i>Enak</i>	14
<i>Book Groups</i>	15-16
<i>Library News</i>	17
<i>Membership Form</i>	18



"To understand the heart and mind of a person,
look not to what she has achieved, but at what
she aspires to."
Kahlil Gibran

**This is the last MCG newsletter until we have a new editor. Please refer to the
MCG website for future programming**

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

President	Dawn Babcock president@malaysianculturegroup.org
Vice-President	Vacant veep@malaysianculturegroup.org
Secretary	Stuart Wakefield secretary@malaysianculturegroup.org
Treasurer	Catherine Zhang treasurer@malaysianculturegroup.org
Book Group	Joanne Mahendran bookgroup@malaysianculturegroup.org
Enak!	Charlotte Sanders enak@malaysianculturegroup.org
Events Planning	Michelle Pease eventsconvenor@malaysianculturegroup.org Vicki Fennessy, Stuart Wakefield, Elise Hill, Pam Osterland, Dorothy Wakefield, S. Gokilan
Explorers	Lynda Briggs explorers@malaysianculturegroup.org
Membership	Vacant membership@malaysianculturegroup.org
Newsletter	Vacant newsletter@malaysianculturegroup.org
Webmaster	Robert Tyabji webmaster@malaysianculturegroup.org

The deadline for the February 2012 issue is January 08. Please send event reports for the next issue to the appropriate event convenor. If you have other material of interest to members that you would like us to include, please send it to: newsletter@malaysianculturegroup.org

All information contained in this newsletter is for the exclusive use of Malaysian Culture Group members only. Permission must be obtained from the President of MCG for use of this material in any other publication in hardcopy or electronic form.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

One of the other projects I do in Kuala Lumpur is a photo essay for the KL American magazine. While doing the essay for the December-January issue, I was reminded just how busy a holiday season this is...of course we have Christmas and New Year, but just beyond them are Pongal, Thaipusam, and Chinese New Year. At times, Malaysia feels like a holiday season year round with many religions and cultural traditions offering an array of holidays and observances.

December is a busy month for those of us in Malaysia. Both local children and expat kids are on school holidays. Many of us will be traveling to interesting places around Malaysia and beyond in the next month. For those who don't travel, the spirit of Christmas and New Years is ever present in the malls around the city. I love to watch Malaysians and tourists alike taking photos in front of the grand holiday displays. New Years Eve brings plenty of parties, arguably the largest one being in the KLCC park where thousands join to witness the midnight fireworks display.

I myself will be traveling by phinisi along the coast of West Papua, Indonesia in early December. It's the 4th sailing trip with a close-knit group of travelers who enjoy our time on the boat as much as in the villages we visit. To relax and marvel at sunsets on the open seas that give way to more stars than you could ever imagine is a nice change from the hustle and bustle of KL. Swimming and snorkling in crystal clear water in shades of green and blue, and watching for dolphins, whales and rays from the deck are all part of the experience we miss every time our trip ends and we sadly leave the boat. The people we meet along the way on our remote island adventures always greet us with open arms and mutual curiosity; eager to share their traditions and everyday lives with us.

I hope you all have the opportunity to experience such openness and generosity of spirit in your travels and throughout the holidays.

Dawn Babcock, President MCG

Selamat Jalan and Terima Kasih

As the oft-quoted proverb notes: "All Good Things Must Come to an End..." This month I must announce that some of our active members are either leaving Malaysia or their volunteer positions within MCG. At this time I wish to thank Stefanie Weber for the great job she has done keeping our membership records in order, and wish her and her a family well at their next expat destination in the USA. Thankfully, our membership renewal period will be in good hands as Polly Szantor will assume the membership responsibilities. We must also say thank you and farewell to our Newsletter Editor, Cheryl Hoffmann and Vicki Fennessy, who have worked really well together to provide us with attractive, informative newsletters. We will still see Cheryl and Vicki at MCG activities and they will continue to contribute to MCG.

Dawn Babcock, President

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MALAYSIAN PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

DATE: Wednesday, 07 December, 2011
TIME: 10.00 am for 10.30 am start
PLACE: Meritz Condominium, JI Mayang, KL
COST: Members RM15, Guests RM25
RSVP: mcgevents@yahoo.com



Many of you may already know Dr Marc Rochester, formally the resident organist of the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra. He frequently writes witty and interesting programme notes for MPO performances. Come and hear this eloquent man who has kindly agreed to speak to us about the MPO, its History and Development . Proudly funded by Petronas, the MPO was founded in 1998, with more than 100 musicians who originate from more than 20 countries worldwide. The Orchestra's motto "Hear, And You Will See" is a reflection of its mission to share the depth, power, and beauty of music. The motto's intent is to make people aware of the power of music and to take the listener on a journey of the senses, where one can hear, see and feel whatever it is that one imagines in the music.

Please join us to discover more about this Kuala Lumpur gem.

INTERNATIONAL POT LUCK LUNCH

DATE: Wednesday, 14 December, 2011
TIME: 11.30 am for 12.00 noon start
PLACE: Members will be advised of venue at a later date
COST: Members RM15, Guests RM25
RSVP: mcgevents@yahoo.com



With Christmas just around the corner, and some members about to disappear to far flung places for the holidays, why not join us for a "Celebration of Christmas" Pot-luck lunch? Enjoy the company of fellow members, listen to Christmas music and bring along a dish that represents something of your own country's seasonal fare for us all to share.

Many of us who have spent Christmas in places other than our home country soon discover that not everyone in the world has the same traditions at Christmas that we are used to. With MCG's truly international membership, it would be interesting to hear from YOU about your own traditions and recipes for celebrating. If you feel you could give a short talk or perhaps would prefer for it to be read out, please contribute something to the event – as well as bringing something tasty for the members to sample! It would be appreciated when registering to indicate whether the dish you will bring will be sweet or savoury so that we can try to organise a balanced meal.

THIS WILL BE A MEMBERS EVENT AND ITS SUCCESS WILL DEPEND ON YOU, SO PLEASE SUPPORT US AS MUCH AS YOU CAN.

MONTHLY LECTURE THE MALAYSIAN MONARCHY

DATE: Wednesday, 11 January, 2012
 TIME: 10.00 am for 10.30 am start
 PLACE: Meritz Condo, Jl Mayang, K.L
 COST: Members RM15, Guests RM25
 RSVP: mcgevents@yahoo.com



We are delighted to have Datuk Dr. Paddy Bowie OBE speak to us again. This time she will speak about the Malaysian Monarchy. With the investiture of Malaysia's new King in December this year, this talk will be especially topical and will help us understand Malaysia's system of voting in a new King every five years.

Datuk Dr. Paddy Bowie might be known to some of us by her weekly and monthly articles in NST and the Expat Magazine. Datuk Dr. Bowie was a UK State Scholar - educated at Manchester University and Oxford University. She has been 48 years in Malaysia and has taken up Malaysian citizenship. She was the accredited ASEAN Trade Representative for the Strathclyde Regional Council of Scotland organising regular Trade Missions to ASEAN for Scottish companies and follow-up services for business penetration.

Datuk Dr. Bowie has been active in the management movement. A founder member of the Governing Council of the Malaysian Institute of Management she became its Chairman for many years and Vice President of its Court of Fellows.

A TASTE OF CHINESE NEW YEAR TRADITIONS

DATE: Wednesday, 18 January, 2012
 TIME: 10.30 am for 11.00 am start
 PLACE: Members will be advised of venue at a later date
 COST: To be advised, estimated between RM50-RM60 – preference will be given to members, maximum 25
 RSVP: mcgevents@yahoo.com



In the Gregorian calendar, in 2012, Chinese New Year begins on the 23rd of January. The celebrations stretch over 15 days, with special celebrations on the 7th, 9th and the 15th days.

What are the different celebrations over the 15 days? Why does Chinese New Year move every year? Join us for a celebratory morning and learn about some of the traditions that are practiced. Our speaker will talk us through the traditions and preparations for Chinese New Year and we will be given a taste of some of the special dishes that are traditionally served during this most important of Chinese festivals.

As a special treat we will have a Chinese lion dance performance. Don't forget your cameras and dress festively. This will be a fascinating event and a perfect way to celebrate Chinese New Year and Gong Xi Fa Chai to all.

Please book for this event as soon as you can. We have a limit of 25 as it will be held at a member's private home. Last time we had this event, it filled up very quickly. If we do not get sufficient interest, this event will be cancelled.

SILK PRODUCTION AND WEFT IKAT TEXTILES OF SOUTH EAST ASIA

DATE: Wednesday, 01 February, 2012
TIME: 10.00 am for 10.30 am start
PLACE: Meritz Condominium, Jalan Mayang, KLCC
COST: Members RM15, Guests RM25
RSVP: mcgevents@yahoo.com



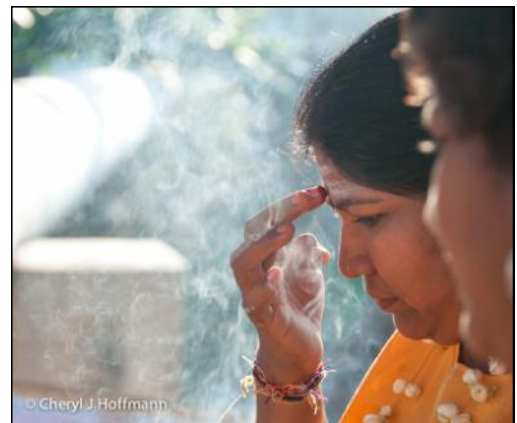
Have you ever wondered about the process which turns the humble silk worm into the beautiful hand woven silk ikats of South East Asia.

Come and join us for an enjoyable and informative morning as our member Michelle Pease takes us through the process, step by step from the silk worm, through the dyeing and ikat processes through to the weaving of the beautiful silk ikats or "mudmee" which are still worn by women throughout Thailand, Laos & Cambodia.

Michelle is our Events Planning Convenor and has participated in, and run several Textile Study Groups during her almost 20 years living in South East Asia.

THAIPUSAM: A CULTURAL OUTING FOR PHOTOGRAPHERS

DATE: Sunday, 05 February, 2012
TIME: 06.30 am until you drop!
PLACE: Batu Caves entrance
COST: Members given preference, RM15, maximum 12
RSVP: mcgevents@yahoo.com



For several years now, MCG member Cheryl Hoffmann has been taking groups on cultural tours of the annual Hindu festival of Thaipusam. This year's tour is especially designed for photographers. Cheryl will introduce us to the traditions of the festival with an emphasis on using cultural understanding to create better images. We will explore the light, the action and the emotions of Thaipusam and come away with a greater appreciation of the event, as well as some good photos.

Thaipusam is a three-day festival in which Hindus give thanks to Lord Murugam for blessings, through various forms of self sacrifice. In Kuala Lumpur, much of the activity takes place at Batu Caves. The festival is rich in colour and spirituality and is a joy to photograph! The day of our visit will be very busy, as many devotees will undertake their climb up the stairs before the festival officially begins on February 6th.

Register early as this event is limited to 12. Cheryl has offered to arrange a pre-tour session for interested participants to review some photography "tips" that will enhance our visit on February 5th.

You don't need a fancy camera to join this tour. You do need to know how your camera works and to be enthusiastic about taking better photos. Please note the early start time.

MEMBERS' CULTURAL CORNER

RAUB – BY ANITA MURRAY

I love the Malaysian small nothing towns. They are so familiar, friendly, and give me endless joy. It was a big reason for coming to live in Malaysia. Not for me the beautiful scenery, the hills, the sea. I want the coffee shops, the plastic flower shops, the bicycle shops, the helpful strangers.

This time I went to Raub. The bus is so comfortable. I just sat back and lapped up the scenery, along with the other assorted passengers. Where you come from? Why Raub?



Raub's congested main road

I hit the huge Sunday market on arrival. Ah, but first I had better find a place to stay. Not the grand old rest house, a bit costly now...so I found something called Seri Raub. Up some stairs over an Indian kedai, and there was a very clean and comfortable room. Reading lights! Cotton sheets! Coffee makings! TV with an astro channel! Shower with hot water! I was in heaven. Dumped my small bag, and headed out. As always, I go to a bicycle shop owned by Chinese. They never fail to recommend the best local coffee. Loud noises giving orders, feet tucked under bottoms, jars with red tops, Coffee socks, posters advertising blonde ladies cavorting...oh so familiar. Newspaper, a good read...and later some excellent noodles for lunch.



I can't really "go out" at night, so early to bed with my book.

Early morning, the sound of the mosque, lots of little swifts enjoying the dawn. Little shops begin to stir, a few cars, I walk and walk and breathe the small town air, so different from KL! I pass a baby hanging on a swinging spring. A wonderful idea. As anyone passes they give it a gentle swing. I love it! Babies don't seem to cry. I pass a Malay eatery, but there the sounds are different. Ah, Oh, softly nodding in agreement at an obvious statement. For instance, a man carrying fish from the river is asked "been fishing?"

I wonder what they make of this old bat ambling along with a smile on my face. Such a pleasure. Such small events. But how I love it!



REPORTS ON PREVIOUS EVENTS

Nine Emperor Gods : A Taoist Festival

In the early days of Chinese history, there were nine very just and good men who were brothers. Stories vary, but they died unjustly. Because of their virtue, they became the stars of the big dipper. The north and the south stars are represented by the two towers at the entrance of the temple.



Cheryl Hoffmann led our group around Nan Tjong Gong Temple in Pekan Ampang. We appreciated her knowledge and close connection to the people of this temple.

After making offerings to the King of Heaven, aka The Jade Emperor, worshipers go to the North and South Towers, then to the altar of the 5 Generals. This is unique to the temples dedicated to the 9 Emperors. The generals protect the temple posted as it were at the four corners and center, north black, west white, yellow center, red south and green east. At various times during the festival the worshipers



“feed” the army. At the inner hall on the right is the God of prosperity and on the left is the Goddess of Mercy. Offerings and prayers to these bring you wealth and health in the coming year. In the center, behind a yellow curtain, is the urn containing the Emperor.



All who attend the festival are supposed to abide by being a strict vegetarian, including no eggs or dairy. Purity in other aspects, refraining from alcohol, sex and other pleasures (although it did not



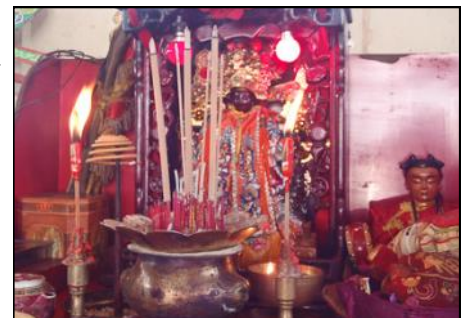
to



slow down the smoking among vendors and the Opera troop) is an act of respect towards the Emperor. Wearing white, which the Devotees do, symbolizes mourning the loss of the nine brothers.

The festival's purpose is to bring yin and yang, good and bad, water and fire into balance and harmony for both the individual and the community as a whole.

This Temple is one of 54 in Malaysia dedicated to the Nine Emperor Gods. These 11 days (9 of the festival) are the only time it is active. Thousands will visit the temple each day of the festival. With so many people coming through, the workers who are at the temple 24 hours a day, have to continually clear the urns and alters to make room for more offerings. The Temple, with donations collected during the festival, supports a Dialysis center, a school, and various other charitable activities.



All photos and text by **Ann Robben Dott**

For more information about the Nine Emperor Gods Festival, visit Cheryl's blog:
www.9emperorgods.wordpress.com

Sacred Ikat - from Heirloom to Trade

Lecture and guided Tour at the National Textile Museum
Kuala Lumpur, October 6 2011

The term ikat comes from the Malay-Indonesian word meaning 'to tie or to bind' and now describes textiles made by tie-dyeing warp or weft threads (or both) before weaving them. Ikat weaving is common to many regions in the world but some of the most sought after Ikats come from the island of Sumba in Indonesia.

On October 6, members of the Malaysian Culture Group had a firsthand look at some fine examples of ikat from Sumba and Pua Kumba from Sarawak on display at the National Textile Museum in Kuala Lumpur. Many of these pieces are from the personal collection of Marie Christine Tseng who curated the exhibit.



Before the tour Marie Christine gave us a short presentation on the history of Sumba, its people, their belief systems and their social and cultural heritage. We learnt not just how ikat is made, but also the important role it plays in the everyday and ceremonial lives of the Sumbanese and why to them it is more than just a piece of decorative fabric.

Sumba lies in the southeastern part of the Indonesian archipelago in East Nusa Tenggara province. Famed for its horses and its sandal wood Sumba has a long history of trade; first with Chinese, Arab, Malay and Indian traders and later with the British and Dutch.

There are more than ten distinct cultural groups in Sumba. Alliances between the tribes and clans are sealed through a complex system of gift exchange, in which the ikat textiles play an important part. Gift exchange is also an important part of weddings in Sumba. Traditionally the groom would bring the gold, spears, brass jewellery, and horses, while the bride brought ikat textiles, ivory jewellery, baskets, and domestic animals

Sumba society is divided into three distinct classes or castes - the Maramba (nobility), the Kabihu (free men) and the Ata (servants or slaves). In the past ikats were used to display the status of the wearer and certain motifs and colours were restricted to the noble classes.

Ikat weaving is confined to two or three coastal areas because Sumba legends say that the thread for weaving ikat descend from the sky and goes through these areas into the sea. Weaving the fabrics anywhere else on the island would weaken and break these anchoring threads. Islanders in the interior trade rice, horses, and products from the forest, and the coastal people reciprocate with ikat textiles dried fish, salt, and cotton, in addition to imported goods received through trade with the outside world.

Christianity is the dominant religion in Sumba. However most Sumbanese still maintain strong links to the traditional belief systems, the 'Marapu'. The Marapu tradition reveres and worships ancestor spirits, so funerals are elaborate, expensive affairs. To save costs families will often have multiple secondary funerals. The wealthy still bury their dead under huge stone megaliths and the best ikats are often used as funerary shrouds.



Continued over page.....

Continued from previous page....



Another Marapu tradition is the popular 'Pasola' festival in which opposing teams of Ikat clad horsemen engage in sometimes violent mock battles. Pasola takes place at the beginning of the planting season in February or March as a tribute to the sea goddess Nyale. Pasola is an occasion for clan members to come together, to feast and celebrate wearing their best ikats.

Ikat weaving is an intricate art requiring great skill and patience. A single piece can take up to two or more years to create because of the complex preparation involved. In Sumbanese ikat the warp threads (the ones that are vertical on the loom) are first arranged on the loom, then the motif areas are wrapped or bound with materials such as waxed thread to prevent penetration of dye.

The threads are removed from the loom and dyed in the required colours. Depending on the intricacy of the finished fabric, the dyeing process may have to be repeated several times. The striking reds and indigo of Sumba ikat come from vegetable based dyes and the recipes for these dyes, like the designs for the ikats are carefully guarded family secrets.

The prepared threads are carefully rearranged on the loom, the binding fibres removed and then woven. As she weaves a skilled weaver will adjust the back strap loom and the threads to ensure that the pattern stays true and does not 'wander' or 'waver'.

The guided tour gave us a chance to examine the ikats in detail. The motifs on Sumba ikat are deeply symbolic. Ancestor figures and the tree of life motif is a reminder of their Marapu traditions; Crocodiles, turtles and shell figures hark back to the earliest creation myths in the Sumba narrative. Animals like horses, chickens and deer also feature prominently in the textiles. One of the more interesting ikats in the collection showed what appeared to be the Dutch royal coat of arms on an ikat woven to record the coronation of a Dutch queen.



The collection had examples of ikat woven to be worn as garments, the Hinggi, worn by men around the waist or slung across the shoulder and the Lau, a sarong like fabric worn by women. There were also some pieces made as wall hangings that are more popular today. Some of the ikats had been further embellished with bead and shell embroidery. Among the exhibits were traditional gold accessories and woven baskets from Sumba.

The exhibit also featured the Pua Kumbas, traditional ikats from Sarawak, and though similar we saw the differences in the motifs and finishing techniques.

Ikat weaving continues to be living tradition in Sumba, one that has adapted to the changing times with more ikats now being woven to cater to the tourist trade and the interior design and home furnishings market. Ikat is now common on international catwalks and Indonesian fashion designers are incorporating bespoke ikats into their creations.

This was a fascinating presentation and tour from someone who obviously loves and values the ikats of Sumba and is doing her part to keep the art alive and relevant in the modern world. Many thanks also to Michelle Pease who was on hand to lend her expertise and lead a section of the guests on the tour.

"Sacred Ikat from Heirloom to Trade" by Marie Christine Tseng and Edric Ong, is priced at RM50 is available from the National Textile Museum, Kuala Lumpur

An Introduction to Malaysian Names and Titles—Written by Lyndall Jenke

Presented by Colette Hassan for the Malaysia Culture Group—12 October 2011

We are often introduced to persons named Datuk and Dato, Tan Sri and Tun in our workplace and social gatherings. What do these titles mean; and how are they awarded?

Colette presented to the Malaysia Culture Group (MCG) interesting and well researched data on Malaysian names and the various titles that are bestowed in this country. Today very little information exists on the labyrinth of the correct forms of address. Her presentation not only enabled newcomers to Malaysia but also long-time residents and younger generations of Malaysians to see more clearly through this complex subject.



Colette who is from Switzerland, has been living in Malaysia for over 40 years, 30 of which having been spent working in diplomatic missions. She drew from her experience to explain to us the intricacies and diversification of the names and titles found in Peninsular Malaysia. She has been a member of the MCG since its early years.

Backed by a Power Point presentation, Colette divided her talk into 3 main categories:

1. Names of Common Folks and forms of address:

We learned to recognise each particle forming a Malay name. For example, the name Y.BHG. DATUK HAJI DR SYED NIK MOHD JOHAN BIN SYED DAUD means that Mr. Johan is not an MP, has received an award from a person other than a State Ruler, has performed the pilgrimage to Mecca, has a Doctorate, can trace his ancestry back to Prophet Mohamed, and has a mother who has royal blood.

It was interesting to note that women's names are carried from "cradle to grave" – they do not change their names upon marriage. We were told to be careful not to use the person's father's name. Indian names were next. We discovered the significance of Hindu names and of Sikh names (originating from Punjab). Then we went on to Chinese, Portuguese and Dutch names.

How to address Royalty:

There are 9 royal houses and the King is selected from these royal houses for a 5 year term. The royal houses are: Perlis, Kedah, Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Johor, Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan. Each of these 9 royal houses has a long history, has its own idiosyncrasies and is proud of its customs and traditions. We were made aware that The Ruler may be a Sultan, a Raja or a Yang diPertuan Besar (one who is great); the Princes and Princesses may be called Syed/Sharifah, Raja, Tunku, Tengku, Ungku according to the Royal House they belong to. There are no royal houses in Penang, Malacca, Sarawak and Sabah. Instead they are placed under a Governor.

2. Honorifics:

These are used mainly when giving speeches or in correspondence.

Here is a short version of this rather confusing subject.

For the royal households : DYMM (King & Rulers), DYTm (Crown Princes), YAM (children of Rulers), YM (other Princes and Princesses)

For Governors : H.E ((Tuan Yang Terutama)

For elected representatives both at State and Federal level : YAB (Yang Amat Berhormat - The Most Honourable) or YB (Yang Berhormat - The Honourable)

For those "decorated" who are not MPs: YABhg (Yang Amat Berbahagia) or YBhg (Yang Berbahagia)

For the Judiciary : YAA (Yang Amat Arif) for the Chief Justice and the Chief Judges and YA (Yang Arif) for upper courts judges.

3. Titles and Awards:

These are given for services rendered to King/Ruler, nation/state and community by the King (1), the Rulers (9), the Governors (4) and the Federal Territory (1) on their birthdays or anniversaries, i.e. 15 times a year. There are quotas for each award, which may be taken away if the bearer's conduct does not befit the title. The titles of Tun and Tan Sri are bestowed only by the King whereas "Datuk and Dato' " and their derivatives may be bestowed by all 15 instances.

"Datuk" is given by the King, Governors, Federal Territory and "Dato' " by all the State Rulers and Penang. This is not a hard and fast rule and there are exceptions. Note that both words have the same pronunciation.

It all became a little confusing and complex, as you can imagine, although we realized from Colette's presentation the cultural richness and history of this country. For further reference go to www.malaysianmonarchy.org.my or obtain the recommended book "*Malaysian Customs and Etiquette, A practical handbook*" by Datuk Paduka Noor Aini Datuk Abdullah.

Deepavali—Visit to Sri Raja Rajeswary Temple, Ampang—18 October

The Temple is dedicated to the Goddess Raja Rajeswary and is situated in what may well have been a peaceful setting surrounded by trees alongside the Klang River before economic planning brought major highway construction and downgraded the river to a culvert. However, it still manages to turn away from the noise pollution and provide a tranquil setting for up to 15,000 devotees who visit each year. With an annual budget of over RM 250,000, the Temple Committee, under its President, K. Ravindranthan, is supported by volunteers in its commitment to maintaining well-kept surroundings in keeping with the stature of the Goddess. Renovations are carried out on a strict twelve-year cycle; the fourth such cycle will be completed in 2013.

Our Group was warmly welcomed and the Vice-President, R. Ponnudorai, provided a lucid but necessarily brief excursion through the 10,000-year history of the Hindu religion. He spoke of the religion's common threads, although its beliefs being not prescribed, has allowed countless variations of style and practice to develop throughout the Hindu world. Hindus believe that we are all born with the impediments of anger, evil and greed, which we should strive to overcome throughout our lives. Unlike many other religions, Temples have no central role to play in many Hindu weddings, funerals or other devotions. The shrine that is invariably found in Hindu homes is equally as important as the Temple, which has a significant social function as a meeting place. The four Brahmin priests with their assistants who reside at the Raja Rajeswary Temple manage the festival calendar as well as the never ceasing round of daily rituals associated with the opening and closing of the shrines. Later we witnessed the midday closure, which was accompanied by ringing on the 'Alayam Mani' bell, beating on the 'Thavil' or 'Melam' drum, plus evocative playing of the long 'Nadheswaram' flute.



We were invited to an informal presentation of Deepavali provided by ladies on the Temple Committee who told us of their preparations and celebrations associated with the forthcoming festival. Deepavali is celebrated in the seventh month of the Hindu calendar during either October or November and translates as the 'Festival of Lights' and symbolises enlightenment and following the true path. A number of weeks before the day of the festival Hindu houses and compounds are thoroughly cleaned, which symbolises the purging of unworthy thoughts and past misdeeds. Women manage virtually all arrangements. Special vegetarian food and sweets are prepared and new clothes are bought for the whole family. Colourful and invariably complicated 'Kolam' rice patterns are created on the floor at the entrance to the house, which traditionally provides ants, birds and other small creatures with simple access to food and thereby symbolises a welcome to the house. Mango leaves are often placed around the entrance to Hindu houses and these hangings are refreshed for Deepavali.

The household rises before dawn on the day of the festival and undertakes the purifying and symbolic ritual of anointing the family with oil, signifying wellbeing and prosperity. The family dress in their new clothes and pray together at the household shrine. Younger members prostrate themselves before their elders asking forgiveness for transgressions and receiving their parents' blessing whilst having ash smeared on their forehead. The family's devotions are followed by a strict vegetarian breakfast. Sometimes an 'Open House' with large amounts of food, is held later in the day for all neighbours and friends. Before departing, our group was invited to taste some round 'vaday' with chutney, which was accompanied by sweet orange 'kesary'.



devotions are followed by a strict vegetarian breakfast. Sometimes an 'Open House' with large amounts of food, is held later in the day for all neighbours and friends. Before departing, our group was invited to taste some round 'vaday' with chutney, which was accompanied by sweet orange 'kesary'.

In all, our Group was made very welcome to the Raja Rajeswary Temple and enjoyed the simple pleasures of Hindu hospitality.

Stuart Wakefield

Land for the landless, jobs for the jobless

2 Nov 2011

Datin Kalsom Taib was an inspiring speaker about FELDA's (Federal Land Development Authority) remarkable journey from 1956 till now. It is a story of passionate people who took the initiative to elevate the life of poor Malay families in kampungs by giving them land and jobs. The journey evolved beyond this scope. The FELDA organisation has had a major impact by bringing large companies in palm oil, rubber, sugar, coco under the leadership of the Malays.



Datin Kalsom Taib has seen FELDA growing with her own eyes since she was 16 year, through her father Taib Andak. He was the chairman of FELDA in the period 1958 –1971 and invited her on his trips. Tun Abduls Razak (father of the current Prime Minister) had the vision, Taib Andak executed the program with a lot of courage, determination and integrity. He took over from D.E Fiennes, a civil servant just after Merdeka in 1957.

The program started with by providing loans to settlers through state governments. Settlers (Malays) were selected based on interviews and had to start from scratch to develop a plantation. Soon FELDA took over not only the loan but also the land development. The first one was in Pahang. Felda provided infrastructure, housing, schooling, medical facilities, shops and training for the housewives.

In the late sixties FELDA invested also in processing and marketing the crops. Not only palm oil, but also rubber, sugar and coco. FELDA employed 25000 people by the end of the seventies. Corporations and Joint Ventures were set up to keep the activities manageable and to expand further. The last settlers were selected in 1990, making the total 120000. By 2005 more than 70000 land titles were earned by the settlers. After the death of the settler the family may run the plantation or Felda may do it on their behalf and provide income to the family.

Poor kampung people from the past have seen a major change in their welfare by this program including good education for their children. Today the FELDA Holding and FELDA Global Venture (needed for global expansion) have a major stake in the oil, rubber, sugar and coco business. In 1980 FELDA received the prestigious Tun Razak award and was recognised by the World Bank as one of the most success land development schemes.

Alexius Collette

(if you want to read more: Taib Andak, In A Class of His Own by Kalsom Taib)



EXPLORERS

Come and explore the streets of KL and environs with us!

Every second Monday of the month starting next January, brave and adventurous explorers will again try out a new and exciting venue. They will not be following the beaten path but will search for hidden places, exciting back roads and intriguing citizens living maybe even close to your backyard! Explorers are not afraid to go and look for something more exciting, something unusual, inspirational or sensational!

The group was originally founded by MCG members, whose sole aim was to get to know their environs more intimately by visiting new places, giving a different aspect to an already known area or meeting some of the interesting people who live in this fascinating country called Malaysia.

Places are limited so don't hesitate to sign up. The commitment needed to make the Explorers program a success is minimal. All the program requires is for participants to commit to the designated Monday each month, volunteer with a partner to plan one month's program and submit a write-up (photos always welcome!) for the newsletter. Organizing an event is not as difficult as it may seem - there are plenty of experienced members who can help!

It is hoped to have an informal meeting early December to establish dates and possible venues for the 2012 calendar year.

If you are interested in joining this new group of explorers or would like some additional information please contact Lynda at explorers@malaysianculturegroup.org.

I hope to be able to welcome you to the fun of MCG Explorers in KL.

Lynda Briggs

JOIN THE TEAM!

MCG is looking for creative members with talents in:

Writing
Photography
Editing
Proofreading
Layout
Graphic design
Communication Innovation

Help take our newsletter and website to the next level!

Contact: newsletter@malaysianculturegroup.org

or webmaster@malaysianculturegroup.org

ENAK!

October Enak!

The October meeting of Enak! was held at Raju Restoran, in honor of Deepavali.



Raju's is a beloved institution in Petaling Jaya, close to Bukit Gasing, dishing up its famous roti canai and banana leaf rice since 1967.

Our group of twelve gathered in the leafy courtyard to enjoy an al fresco lunch. In addition to the banana leaf rice, we ordered the roti canai – a must-have item at Raju's – several curries, and fried items.



The tenggiri (mackerel) and sotong (squid) were big hits. In order to ensure freshness, seafood items are fried to order. The restaurant even markets its own brand of frying mix, so you can enjoy the Raju taste at home.



The banana leaf rice, roti canai, and the fried dishes all got good reviews from a discerning crowd. One of the members remarked that this was one of the best banana leaf rice she'd had.

Raju's Restaurant can be found at 27 Jalan Chantek 5/13 in Petaling Jaya, near the LaSalle Secondary School. Note that it can be quite crowded on weekends, especially for breakfast.



Rachell Gautz—text and photos

Charlotte Sanders—photos



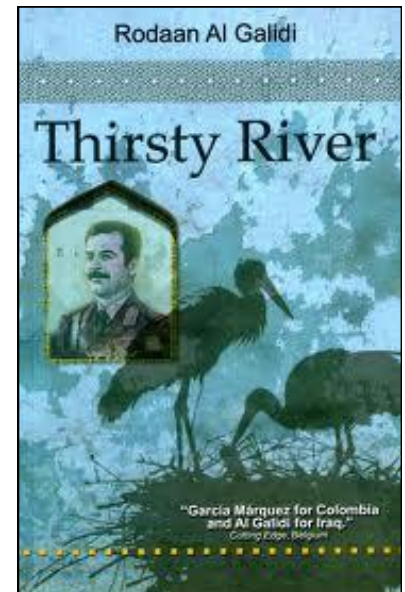
BOOK GROUPS

Book Group 1

Thirsty River by Rodaan Al Galidi

Rodaan Al Galidi was born in 1971, studied civil engineering and fled from Iraq in 1998 to avoid military service. He lived as an asylum seeker in Holland, but his appeal was turned down several times. In 2007 an amnesty allowed him to finally stay legally in Holland. He wrote this book in Dutch, which he taught himself during his years waiting for his case to be decided. Since then he has written several novels and poetry in Dutch and has won literary prizes.

In his novel Thirsty River the author depicts the life of an Iraqi family through the last four decades. Many little stories and fates of individuals make up a tableau of the state of the Iraqi society and the lives of the common people enduring Saddam's tyranny and the insecure form of democracy the Iraqis are living in nowadays. The plot is filled with imagination, folk tales and symbols, using recent history as the background for the day-to-day lives of the protagonists.



The book describes the life of the Bird family in a small southern Iraqi town spanning four generations. There is Simahen, the matriach, who sits in front of the Party office for the rest of her life after all the men of her household have been taken away by security forces for a minor offences. She wants to find out what happened to them, but no-one can or wants to give her information. As she observes every day who enters the building and who does not re-emerge, she becomes the source of information for other people missing their relatives. A small market comes to life around Simahen which is eventually named after her. Another character is Joesr, one of Simahen's grandsons, who verbally volunteers to marry a girl who one of his brothers got pregnant. But time goes by and Joesr finds excuses not to act on his promise until her pregnancy shows and she is killed by her uncle. Joesr cannot cope with his guilt and hides for years, lives abroad and returns after the US invasion. He then starts to supply suicide bombers with explosives and finally blows himself up.

As these examples show, the book is quite disturbing, but written in a very laconic, matter-of-fact style, which makes the reader realize what is happening only after letting the plot settle. But there is no time to think about the cruelties, as life in the small town goes on and the next grotesque event starts taking place. The style was aptly described by one of the critics as "humorous yet horrifying".

Our group felt that this is an important book to understand the situation in Iraq, even though it left some of us without hope for the country. We agreed that Galidi is not a particularly gifted writer although his prose is easily readable. We concluded that he tried to achieve too much in one book especially given his writing limitations. Nevertheless the book should be read by a wide audience as it helps to understand the people in Iraq and moves us away from perceiving the events in Iraq as just another bit of gruesome world news.

Unfortunately the publisher of the English version of this book has ceased to exist, so no new copies can be ordered, but it is available used or as an e-book.

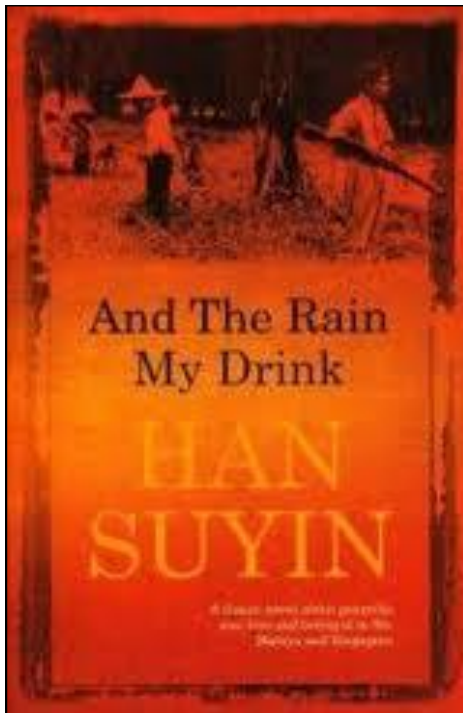
Stefanie Weber

Book Group 3

And The Rain My Drink by Han Suyin

The title of the book, And The Rain My Drink, is part of an old Chinese ballad:

"..... I will go to the forest for justice.
The wind for my garment I wear.
Together with my many companions,
The wind for my garment and the rain my drink,
We build a new heaven and earth."



Set against the tumultuous period of the Emergency in Malaya and Singapore (1948-1953), the author tries to portray the characters of the British officers who were attempting to contain the communist threat on one hand, and the "People Inside", those suspected of being supportive of the communist cause on the other.

Han Suyin has been accused of being anti-British and sympathetic to the communists in this book but our Book Group feels that she was only trying to make an honest attempt to portray the strengths and weaknesses of both the people working for the British Authorities as well as the people being resettled. Though some of the characters portrayed may seem one-dimensional, generally the author has succeeded in giving a well-balanced description of human nature in the book: how power corrupts, betrayal, and survival instincts, as well as of characters that stood by their principles and refused to betray.

Reading about the hardships faced by the people being forcefully resettled in the New Villages, it is possible to feel that the British Authorities had handled the situation in a very harsh and inhumane manner: villagers being forced to resettle in swamps behind wires, the burning of their previous homes and livestock prior to their resettlement, suspected communists being detained for indefinite periods, being tried behind closed doors and finally repatriated to China.

However from the British Authorities' viewpoint, faced with the communist insurgency and the violence created by its members, it is logical to ponder how else the British Authorities could have handled the situation "faced with impassive, stony-faced, silent, impenetrable stupidity and insolence" of villagers who had chosen the path of non-cooperation and silence?

It is thus not easy to reach a judgment as to whether Han Suyin was being anti-British or pro-communist. She made astute observations of the cultural practices as well as of the various ethnic identities and interracial relationships in Malaya then, some of which, more than 50 years later, still hold true.

This book gives a very insightful account of the Emergency and is a good study of human nature at its best and worst. Generally we all enjoyed reading this book.

Meei Chan

LIBRARY NEWS

Firstly, a reminder that your library is open before and after every event at the Meritz. Please come and browse the shelves, and borrow some books. There is no charge.

If you have books you would like to give to the library I'd be very happy to receive them. I'd like to improve our fiction collection and so, this month, I am asking for donations of novels written by South East Asian authors and/or set in SE Asia. Just bring them to the library. Thank you!

Here are a few book suggestions relating to some of October's events;

Nine emperor gods festival - tour to Nan Tjong Gong temple

We have a book entitled *Nine emperor gods* (by Cheu Hock Tong) and more general ones such as *Book of Chinese beliefs* (by Bloomfield), *Chinese ancestor worship in Malaysia* (by Comber), and *Chinese gods: introduction to Chinese religion* (by Chamberlain). These are all on the shelves at 299. Further along the shelves in the 390s, we have books about the festivals such as *Chinese festivities* (by Wong) which is an illustrated cycle of Chinese festivities in Malaysia and Singapore, and *Chinese customs* (by Dore) which is an illustrated account of the customs of Chinese social and family life.

Sumbanese Ikat textiles - tour and lecture at the National Textile museum

Although we don't have any books specifically about Sumbanese textiles, we have several about Malaysian ones, for example *Woven dreams: Ikat textiles of Sarawak* (on the shelves at 746).

Malaysian Names and Titles Lecture

We have a few books relevant to this, such as *Malaysian protocol* (by Abdullah Ali), also *Malayan orders and decorations* (by O'Toole). Find these on the shelves at 395.

Alison Harrison





Kumpulan Kebudayaan Malaysia Kuala Lumpur & Selangor
Malaysian Culture Group

www.malaysianculturegroup.org

MEMBERSHIP FORM 2011/2012

Individual Membership Fee : RM 75

	Date: _____
First Name	_____
Surname	_____
Address	_____
City	Postcode _____

Telephone	_____
Handphone	_____
Email	_____

I would like to join / I would like to continue to participate in (please tick):

Enak! _____ Book Group _____ Explorers' _____

The MCG is run by volunteers. Please consider to help keeping the group interesting by sharing your skills, experiences and/or time. Please tick below in which area you can volunteer:

___ Share expertise or experiences in the area of: _____

___ Write a report about an event

___ Occasionally provide venue for a meeting

___ Volunteer in the MCG Committee

Do you have any suggestions for events?

*Please complete the form and bring it together with your payment to the next MCG event you are attending
Cheques should be crossed and made payable to "Malaysian Culture Group"*

*If you prefer to pay by Paypal, please send a completed membership form using the e-mail address of your
Paypal account to : membership@malaysianculturegroup.org*