

Kumpulan Kebudayaan Malaysia Kuala Lumpur & Selangor Malaysian Culture Group

Newsletter of the Malaysian Culture Group

February 2011

MCG PROGRAM OF EVENTS

FIRST WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH LECTURE: THE FAN TAN PLAYERS BY JULIAN LEES	Wednesday, 09 February, 2011
VISIT TO YAYASAN TUANKU NUR ZAHIRAH	Wednesday, 16 February, 2011
WALKING TOUR OF KAMPUNG BARU	Tuesday, 22 February, 2011
FIRST WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH LECTURE: TRAVELS WITH SOOTY	Wednesday, 02 March, 2011

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IMPORTANT NOTICE

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.

The deadline for the March 2011 issue is February 8. 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



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This month we hear from our Webmaster, Robert Tyabji

MCG TO THE WORLD...

Most of our readers will have visited the MCG website. It's less than two years old, having replaced the old website at midnight, July 15, 2009. We launched it saying: "We have endeavoured to make the new website more interactive, interesting and useful for members and visitors alike. The biggest improvement is that the site now has a members-only section which provides useful information such as a list of MCG members and their contacts (optional), the MCG Constitution, notes on using and administering the website, and other stuff which only members should see. Members will have to log in to get there, using a unique Username and Password..."

Surprised? Indeed, the website structure was changed last year after we realized that the login feature, while providing a secure area for members, actually inhibited some members from visiting! We also found that the confidential information was of little real use and that some members were reluctant to share personal information. By removing the login requirement, the site became available to everybody, everywhere; and our activities, calendar and newsletter became an 'open book'. After much discussion, your Committee decided that such transparency helps promote MCG worldwide.

Any visitor can see MCG's upcoming activities which are listed in the sidebar on the home page as well as on the Calendar. One can read the MCG Newsletter online and also check out old issues as far back as February 2004.

We recently added a FAQ page which attempts to fill any gaps or ambiguities in the information given on the website. Visit this page if you are not sure about some aspect of MCG or have any questions that you feel are inadequately addressed. However, if queries still remain, we will be happy to respond personally or via email.

Since most of our members live in or around Kuala Lumpur, the website's internet clock and weather information are useful tools for double checking the time and for planning trips in the Klang Valley. To make the website even more interactive, we hope soon to start a "member's page" which will provide space for members to write something interesting, post photographs and make comments and suggestions.

Adding a PayPal button has made it even easier to become a member of MCG or to renew a membership via the website. All one needs to do is go to the BECOME A MEMBER page, click the PayPal button, pay the membership fee online, print and fill out the membership form and email it to membership@malaysianculturegroup.org.

Finally, if you have any suggestions for further improving the website, please write to me. I would love to hear from you!

Robert Tyabji
Webmaster

ANNOUNCEMENTS

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL 2011

Final Reminder

We Don't Want To Lose You!!

For those members who joined or renewed prior to September 2010, your Membership Fees are due NOW.

Please renew before the end of January, to ensure that you continue to receive your newsletters and have access to our great lineup of events.

Renew by sending a cheque and a completed Membership Form to the Membership Secretary (address on the last page of the newsletter) or by

Paypal via our website www.malaysianculturegroup.org along with a

Membership Form emailed to
membership@malaysianculturegroup.org

Calling All Members

MCG NEEDS YOU!

The Malaysian Culture Group is an amazing organization that provides informative and interesting activities for its membership. But it doesn't happen by magic.

We need your ideas and energy on our team!

We are now soliciting volunteers for All Positions on the MCG Committee in time for the upcoming elections at the AGM.

If you are interested in serving your organization, please contact one of the current committee members listed on page 2 of this newsletter.

UPCOMING EVENTS

FIRST WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH LECTURE: THE FAN TAN PLAYERS BY JULIAN LEES

DATE: Wednesday, 9th February 2011
TIME: 10.00 am for 10.30 am start
PLACE: Meritz Condominium, Jalan Mayang
COST: Members RM15, Guests RM25
RSVP: mcgevents@yahoo.com



Julian Lees was born and raised in Hong Kong. After attending Cambridge University he worked for ten years as a stockbroker with UBS and Société Générale. Since then he has written two novels: *A Winter Beauty* and *The Fan Tan Players*. Both novels have been translated into German and published by Random House Germany with a third set for release in 2011. *The Fan Tan Players* has also been published in Polish by Proszynski Publishers. Julian currently lives in Malaysia with his wife, Ming, his three young children, Augustus, Amber, and Aisha and his constant canine companion Boobert.

Julian will be speaking to us about his latest novel *The Fan Tan Players*. Set in Macao, Russia, the Scottish Highlands and Hong Kong, the novel explores ideas about love, history, adversity and adventure. It has been described as “Exotic and beautifully written.” Please join us to hear Julian as he reads from his latest novel and discusses his life as an author.

Note that this lecture is in our First Wednesday series but is being held on Feb. 9th due to Chinese New Year holidays.

VISIT TO YAYASAN TUANKU NUR ZAHIRAH

DATE: Wednesday, 16th February 2011
TIME: 10.00 am For 10.30 am Start
PLACE: Yayasan Tuanku Nur Zahirah , 83 Jalan Telawi, 59100 Bangsar
COST: Members RM15, Guests RM25
R.S.V.P: mcgevents@yahoo.com



Founded in 2007, Yayasan Tuanku Nur Zahirah is a foundation under the royal patronage of Her Majesty the Queen of Malaysia, which aims to preserve and enhance indigenous craft and heritage while helping to improve the livelihoods of artisans, weavers and craftsmen – ‘Improving Lives through Heritage’. As a start it has chosen to play a central role in stimulating the songket-weaving industry, a Malay heritage that still exists in a few parts of Malaysia but most predominantly in the east coast state of Terengganu. Focusing on trade, not aid, YTNZ hopes to place the power of opportunity into the hands of the weavers, providing not only income, but the chance to take an active role in the shaping of their future by making the leap from informal cottage industry trading to international commerce. It takes several months to produce a piece of *kain songket* which can be sold from between RM200 and over RM100,000 per piece, depending on the quality and design.

Datin Noor Azlina Yunus, author of the beautifully produced book entitled *SONGKET REVOLUTION*, published by YTNZ, will be speaking to us about writing the book as well as the process of making songket.

WALKING TOUR OF KAMPUNG BARU

DATE: Tuesday, 22nd February 2011
TIME: 10.00 am for 10.30am start
PLACE: Meet at Kelab (Club) Sultan Sulaiman, Kampung Baru (car parking available)
COST: Members RM15 (This is a members only event so please register early)
R.S.V.P: mcgevents@yahoo.com

We are fortunate that Heritage Walks is giving us the opportunity of exploring this hidden treasure in the centre of Kuala Lumpur. Kampung Baru is the oldest Malay residential area in KL, originally founded in 1899 by the British as a Malay Agricultural Settlement allowing the Malays to retain their village lifestyle within the City. Modern development seems to have passed it by and there are still authentic traditional Malay wooden houses to be seen, as well as the Heritage Building where we will meet.

The Kelab Sultan Sulaiman was built in 1901 on land donated by the Sultan of Selangor, in the style of Malay Minang architecture. We will have a short briefing here before walking to the Market, which is described as a very typical Malay market. Lunch is available in the Club at the conclusion of the tour.

Numbers are limited to 20 for this walk and priority will be given to members on the waiting list for the Chinese New Year Chinatown walk.



FIRST WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH LECTURE: TRAVELS WITH SOOTY

DATE: Wednesday, 2nd March 2011
TIME: 10.00 am for 10.30 am start
PLACE: Meritz Condominium, Jalan Mayang
COST: Members RM15, Guests RM25
RSVP: mcgevents@yahoo.com



After responding to a two line advertisement, Stuart spent twelve years in the Sultanate of Oman with his family at a time when the country was beginning to emerge from a period of self imposed isolation after the little known Dhofar War. Stuart worked on the technical aspects of the Sultan's VVIP aircraft fleet and part of his duties provided him with the opportunity to be one of the few expatriates to accompany His Majesty on annual tours of the interior. The journeys afforded an insight into the culture of Omanis acting in support of their Ruler, in an environment away from the urban areas of the Arabian Gulf.

This illustrated talk is based upon these expeditions, which provided an almost unique travel experience that often conjured images of the relocation of a Royal Court in the Middle Ages.

MEMBERS' CULTURAL CORNER

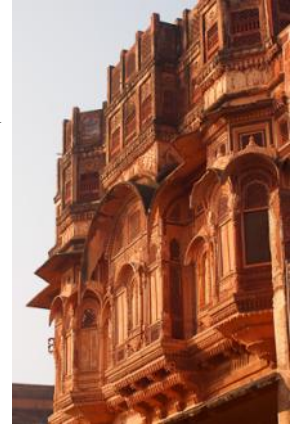
We hope that you enjoy Pam's submission to this month's Members' Corner. If you would like your story and photos to be featured here, please send us an email at mcgnewsletter@yahoo.com

RAJASTHAN: ON AND OFF THE BEATEN TRACK, BY PAM GARTNER

During the December school holidays, our family took a fantastic journey through Rajasthan, India's second largest state. Home to some of the world's most spectacular palaces and forts, the region is one of startling contrasts. We gaped and gawked at the incredible opulence of these maharajas' citadels, but equally enjoyed our time in the villages where subsistence farming goes on in the same manner as it has for generations.



As Rajasthan is approximately the same size as France, there is a lot of ground to cover. Distances between cities are vast, and we chose to concentrate our travels in the south central and south-eastern parts of the state, highlighted by the cities of Jodhpur, Udaipur and Jaipur. Any guidebook can describe these cities' top attractions, the Mehrangarh Fort in Jodhpur, Udaipur's City and Lake Palaces, and Jaipur's City Palace and Amber Fort, but nothing prepared me for the intricate beauty and the craftsmanship of



these sites. I couldn't stop taking pictures of the architectural details! Much to my family's chagrin, I filled up multiple memory cards of door frames, window screens, door knobs, carved pillars, and painted frescoes.

But it was the palaces off the beaten track which most captivated me. The Garh Palace in the tiny town of Bundi is carved right out of the rock face, and appears to be visited by more monkeys than tourists. My absolute hands-



down favorite was the Jana Mahal in the village of Dungarpur. It's a thirteenth century, seven-story fortress that is a riot of colors, patterns, mirrors and mosaics. Barefoot and toothless, the dhoti-wearing "custodian" pointed us through the maze of rooms and staircases, and opened up a wall cabinet to reveal dozens of miniature paintings depicting scenes from the *Kama Sutra*. From the palace's highest window, we loved watching the scene of the village below, with men and boys flying kites from many of the rooftops. By far the



aesthetic highlight of the trip, I was surprised to hear that "no one ever goes to Dungarpur."

Our stays in these villages plus the tiniest of villages called Narlai gave us wonderful glimpses of rural life. The most memorable images? The family making poppadums and laying them out to dry in the sun. The young girl driving her water buffalo around a water wheel. The turbaned shop keepers reading their morning papers outside their shops. The gaggle of kids coming up to us asking for "one pen, one pen." And the pigs tended by untouchable caste roaming the streets in search of food, in the midst of all the village life.



Our journey ended with a visit (outside of Rajasthan) to the indescribable Taj Mahal. There is so much more of Rajasthan to see. I would love to go back to sleep in the desert outside of Jaisalmer, see the camel fair of Pushkar, take a safari in Ranthambhore National Park, and, if I get up the courage, to visit Bikaner and its Temple of the Rats.



Text and photos by Pam Gartner

REPORTS ON PREVIOUS EVENTS

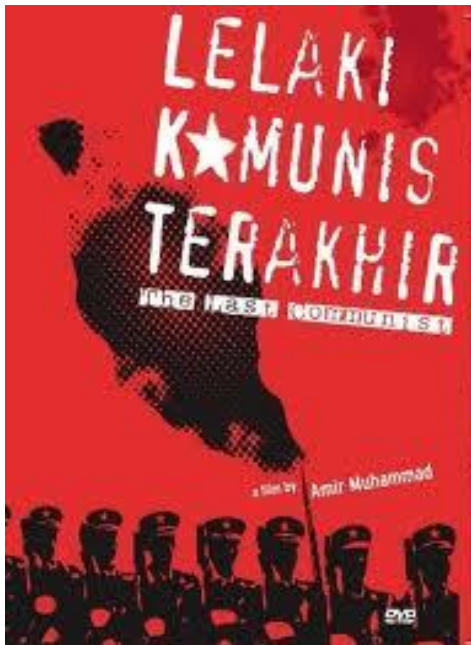
20 GREAT MOMENTS IN MALAYSIAN CENSORSHIP

On 1st December, MCG welcomed writer and director Amir Mohammad and his presentation on ‘Censorship – Malaysia’s 20 Greatest Moments.’ Linking his talk to the social and political development of the country, Amir illustrated this highly entertaining and informative lecture with notorious examples of censorship in Malaysia throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in the spheres of film, literature, music and the modern media. He highlighted some early examples of censorship centering on the representation of religion and superstition. The 1960 film ‘Noor Islam’ dared to depict a pagan, pre-Islamic religion and was cut whilst in 1964, that most illustrious of Malaysian artists, P Ramlee had a segment of his ‘Ragam’ (Variety Show) removed because of a graveyard prayer scene.



P. Ramlee

Mentioning the name Mona Gersang to Malaysian men of a certain age might, Amir sug-



gested, result in a surfeit of blushes. This 1980 novel was banned because of the sexual exploits of its confident heroine and became an overnight, must-read sensation.

Yet the ramifications of censorship in Malaysia can and do seriously affect freedom of expression. As Amir pointed out, the director Zain Mahmood became a literal victim of the censor’s knife, dying before his banned film ‘Fantasia’ was finally released in 1994; and in 1987 some subversive claims by The Star newspaper saw it temporarily suspended from publication and, in Amir’s opinion, the paper has never fully recovered its editorial confidence. Amir himself is no stranger to the censor’s gag; his 2006 film ‘The Last Communist’ being the first Malay film to receive an outright ban.

It was interesting to learn from our speaker that most people who apply for the voluntary role of censor are over 55 years of age and claim to have sound moral values yet the arbitrary nature of the censor’s role was illustrated by one such individual who, when assailed by a group of directors for the nature of his cuts, replied to the effect ‘But I have to watch these films and most of them are awful.’

The moral of this particular anecdote, Amir mused - if you create something ‘good’ it might just escape the censor’s scissors...

Russell Clegg



CHRISTMAS POT LUCK LUNCH



Photos by Rupali Kumar and Pam Gartner

**TRAVEL TIPS: DANCING WITH DRAGONS –
A two-part illustrated talk by Polly Szantor
23 September and 10 November, 2010**

I've travelled extensively, frequently for long periods and usually alone. Having enough time is essential if I want to understand something of the essence of a place, and being without travelling companions forces me into fascinating interactions with people I meet along the way. For many years I had no desire to visit China, but eventually images of astounding scenery and vanishing cultures piqued my curiosity. As soon as retirement granted me freedom, I started planning an extended visit.



The scope of a journey is so much broader than time spent actually travelling. It encompasses months of preparation; pouring over guidebooks, researching on the Internet and in the case of this trip to China, wrestling with the language. Coming to terms with the vast distances was daunting and how would I remember all those similar names? Take a look at a map of China and you'll see what I mean.



Dehang

All my negative preconceptions were correct - it's polluted, overcrowded, difficult to navigate and so vast that it totally overwhelms the solo traveller – but it's so much more. I was captivated by the cultural diversity and the beauty of the landscape. I revelled in ancient crumbling towns and historical sights, and everywhere I went, I met with tremendous kindness and generosity. As I travelled, I thought of the Culture Group and imagined sharing my journey as a Travel Tips presentation. I wanted to capture images to make the very best of the good times, and to explore ways to turn the less enjoyable moments into amusing adventures, which with the passage of time they eventually become. Encapsulating 3 ½ months of travel into two short presentations was challenging, but it was exhilarating to share Dancing with Dragons and allowed me to relive the journey.



Yangshuo River

Before I left Malaysia, I felt I was setting out on a quest to regain my patience. I'm not sure if I achieved this goal, but my stamina, fortitude and tolerance were tested again and again. Despite the difficulties, I am confident that I will return to China, as I seem to have a masochistic need to be pushed to the limits. Stay tuned for Dancing with Dragons #3!



Text and photos by Polly Szantor

EXPLORERS

November Explorers: A Behind-the-Scenes Visit to the Renaissance Hotel

In November, fifteen Explorers met at the Renaissance Hotel to take a look at parts of the hotel that are rarely seen by guests - the food preparation areas. We were hosted by Food and Beverage Director Christian Heidendreich, who has been the Executive Chef at the hotel for the past two-and-a-half years. Christian arranged for a welcome cup of coffee at the beginning of the visit, and we were able to sample some of the treats from the bakery. He told us that when he was young he knew that he wanted to be a chef. He began his apprenticeship in Austria at the age of 15, far from his family. He worked in first class hotels around the world before coming to Malaysia from Australia.



The Renaissance has five restaurants serving Italian, Chinese, Japanese and International cuisine, as well as three lounges serving food and drink. The hotel also hosts frequent banquets and conferences. This necessitates a wide range of kitchens, amongst them Western, Indian, Malay, Chinese, Chinese Banquet, Cold and Pastry. There are a total of 100 Chefs working under 10 Sous Chefs, and a twelve-hour working day is the norm.



The kitchens and storerooms open off a corridor that runs the entire length of the hotel. In the hallway, a painted line runs along the wall, changing colour at the centre point. When it was first built, this designation was important. The Renaissance Hotel occupied the West Wing and the East Wing was home to the New World Hotel. Now the entire building is under one management and the kitchens cater to restaurants in both wings.

We made a brief stop in the kitchen serving the Italian Restaurant, Marche, where we met Paul Lewis, the Executive Sous Chef in charge of all Western cuisine in the hotel. Further down the hallway, we landed in the kitchen of Executive Pastry Chef Niklesh Sharma, who is responsible for bread, pastries and ice cream. Chef Niklesh began by demonstrating how to make hard bread rolls, and we were able to watch the entire process from mixing the dough to forming it into various shapes. He uses 120 kgs of flour every day, and he explained how different types of flour are used for different baked goods. For bread making, he uses hard flour with 11% gluten content.

While the bread was proving, he made a large batch of mango ice cream. When the egg yolks, sugar, cream and mango puree were thoroughly combined, the mixture was transferred to an ice cream maker. Luckily, the freezing process was completed before we left the kitchen, and we were able to sample this delicious treat!

No pastry kitchen visit would be complete without chocolate. Chocolatier Raeina Junus made the creation of chocolate curls and fans look deceptively easy. Chef Niklesh quickly glazed a frozen mousse cake with a chocolate glaze. The cold sets the hot glaze more quickly and ensures that the cake does not melt. He added curls and squares of white chocolate followed by a few shavings of gold leaf. Voila! Another gâteau was ready for the table.



All this food was making us hungry, so we repaired to a private room at Temptations for a tasty buffet lunch. We left with a few more calories than when we arrived, but more importantly, we had gained a greater appreciation of some of the culinary events happening behind the scenes at a five star hotel.

Polly Szantor and Joanne Mahendran (photos by Joanne)

Explorers' Visit to the Museum of Asian Art on the 6th December 2010 Wayang Siam (Kulit)

Having missed *Puteri Ledang* at Istana Budaya recently (the giant Wayang Kulit show complete with the panache of “west-end” lighting), it was with a muted and scholarly interest that I attended the University of Malaysia’s December demonstration of this unique art form. The gently rolling introduction seemed to confirm my attitude and I chided myself for not having swatted up on the Mahabharata and prepared myself for a dry, technical lecture. Thus, I was blown away by Prof Dato Hashim Yacob, a colourful showman, who is a professor of dentistry, in his day job (pictured right).



After entertaining us with a little history of Wayang Kulit in the region of Kelantan, he took a short break and returned in traditional Malay dress to open the performance proper by way of a silat ceremony of dedication. The mood changed abruptly as he swivelled before us, keris held aloft. I felt myself transported back to a more mystical age as he planted the keris behind the backcloth, where it remained silhouetted throughout the performance. Then the show, entitled “Sir Isaac Newton and the Fallen Apple” began, complete with a band of musicians who plumbed each twist and turn of the plot with drums gongs, cymbals and oboe. The script, more than a decade old and commissioned when the science syllabus was rewritten into English, amiably sparkled as did the puppeteer himself. We had an open invitation to take a look behind the screen during the performance and it was fascinating to watch the master puppeteer sweeping his characters across the face of the screen like a master sailor effortlessly trimming sails.



Apple falls on Isaac Newton’s head

Sir Isaac magically travelled to the archipelago to consult with a renowned Malaysian scientist regarding the puzzling phenomenon of apples always falling downwards. Our trusty Malaysian friend aided Sir Isaac in formulating his famous theory of gravity, only to be threatened with being devoured by two jealous monsters. Fortunately, as in all good stories, our intrepid heroes survived and Sir Isaac stayed on in Malaysia to help teach English.

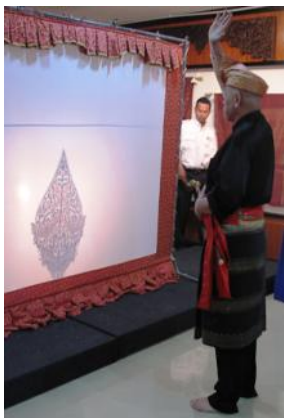
This was a rare opportunity to reconnect to a wistful world of chirpy heroes and unpredictable villains and to witness the colourful art form of Wayang Siam being performed in English. More magical and less aggressive than the Punch and Judy of my youth, perhaps bordering along the lines of pantomime, the expressions of wonder on the faces of the children present said it all. So, thank you, Prof Dato Hashim for a truly lovely experience.



Manipulating the puppets view from behind curtain

Thank you to the staff of the museum who were so pleased MCG were visiting them after such a long absence and treated us to a wonderful buffet lunch.

Val Morcom



Dalang paying respect to the tree of life



Musicians enjoying the show as well!!



Photos by Dawn Babcock

BOOK GROUPS

BOOK GROUP 1

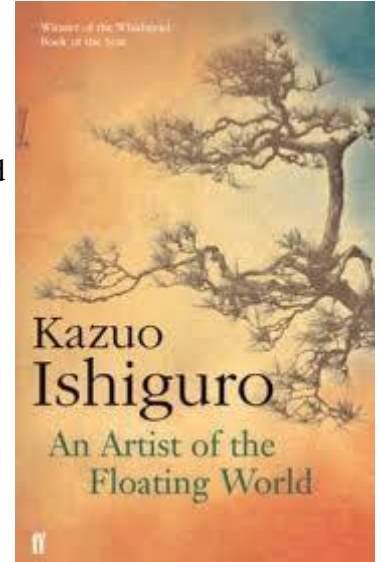
An Artist of the Floating World by Kazuo Ishiguro

Kazuo Ishiguro is most famous for *The Remains of the Day*, and this earlier work explores a similar path of reminiscences of a central character in the aftermath of war. Before and during World War II Masuji Ono was a pro-militarist artist whose work encouraged Japan to, in a sense, come of age and seek an empire as wealthy and powerful as that of Britain and France. But now, he sits in a shell of a house destroyed by bombs, his art hidden away and his family fearing he may attempt suicide to atone for the devastating defeat.

This quiet tale of loss and redemption is deceptively simple yet beautifully crafted. The tension between characters is tight and the restrained dialogue always says so much more than the actual words on the page. Rather than being a victim of changing circumstances, our protagonist finds reconciliation with his personal defeat and, at the same time, shows how a nation can too.

Book Group 1 would recommend the novel to anyone interested in a great short read. It won the 1986 Whitbread Prize and was short-listed for the Booker Prize. For any who find it a path to a broader interest in the novel's context, I recommend the Pulitzer Prize winning *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* by John W Downer.

Britt Spyrou



BOOK GROUP 2

Faces of Courage is in fact three books in one, relating to the life and times of Sybil Kathigasu. The main book “*No Dram of Mercy*” is written by Sybil herself telling her own story, particularly of her experiences at the mercy of the occupying Japanese forces during World War 2.



Sybil was a Eurasian, married to a doctor who had a thriving medical practice in Ipoh, where she assisted him as a nurse and mid-wife. When the Japanese invaded Malaya, the family (husband, her mother and three children) escaped the bombing and moved to Papan, a tiny one street town not far from Ipoh. The book gives a vivid description of their home there, 74 Main Street. Her husband split his time between Ipoh and Papan but Sybil remained in their new home. She was a fervent supporter of the British and was convinced they’d return soon and life would continue as normal. She was very keen to remain up to date on what was going on in the world and went to great lengths to hide the now forbidden radio receiver. In the jungle behind Papan the communists were fighting as ‘freedom fighters’ against the Japanese. They approached Sybil for help in treating injured comrades which she bravely agreed to do. The Japanese knew someone was helping the jungle fighters but thought it must be someone Chinese - Sybil could speak Cantonese and was betrayed by one of the villagers from Papan. She was taken to the Kempeitai headquarters in Gopeng savagely tortured and beaten, but resisted all attempts to make her confess her activities. She was imprisoned in Batu Gajah prison anyway, which is situated next to St. Joseph’s church. A deeply religious woman, the bells of St. Joseph’s gave her hope and helped her survive her horrendous ordeal. In failing health, after the war as a result of her treatment, she went to the UK for expert medical help. She was awarded the George Medal for bravery in 1947, the only Malayan woman ever to receive this prestigious honour, but sadly died in 1948.



The group had mixed views on Sybil’s story and although all agreed she was a very brave and courageous woman, her motivation for aiding the communists had different interpretations. She sacrificed her family life and put them all in serious danger at the time, as well as causing long-term psychological damage to her children. Her older daughter Olga is still alive (89) and living in Ipoh.



Book Group 2 read this book and “*God of the Earth*” last month as background to a brilliant weekend trip to Perak. We followed in the footsteps of Sybil and her family with a trip to their

house in Papan, the prison in Batu Gajah, and to her grave in Ipoh. It was very poignant to stand in 74 Main Street, quite unchanged and see exactly where she had hidden her radios and treated her “freedom fighter” patients. You could really feel the history of this extraordinary Malayan citizen.

We also explored many other historical sites in Kuala Kangsar and Taiping, with a fascinating visit to the Kuala Sepetang mangrove reserve and a charcoal-making facility. We had a most enjoyable time and are now planning books and a trip to Kuching and Sarawak for next year!!

Lynn Davies



Book Group 3

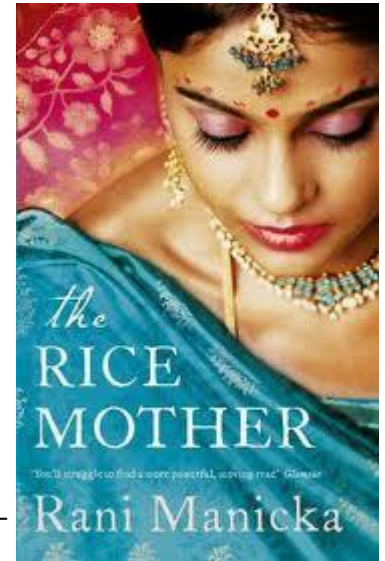
The Rice Mother by Rani Manicka

Book Group 3's first meeting started with a discussion on Rani Manicka's first novel, The Rice Mother set in Malaysia. We enjoyed over 2 hours of lively discussion. We are lucky to have a Malaysian in our group who was able to give us insights that we were struggling with from our Western cultures.

One review describes the book as being "A multigenerational narrative that spans the nightmare of WW 11 and the Japanese occupation of Malaysia.

The Rice Mother

gorgeously evokes a world of exotic beauty and vivid characters, where small pleasures offset unimaginable horrors. It is a powerful story of laughter and loss, love and betrayal, in a world where ghosts and gods walk hand-in-hand".



The author says she based the character Lakshmi on her grandmother, who burnt herself out; this we could understand as Lakshmi was driven to better her family's lot in life. The author found the Malay tradition of storytelling, along with added help from her mother, made the writing come easily giving us fascinating and beautiful descriptions. She did have to research the atrocities of the Japanese occupation.

The story is about a young 14 year old girl living a very poor life in Ceylon when her mother arranged her marriage to an older Tamil man who lives in Malaya. He subsequently leaves his two children from his previous marriage behind in Ceylon with the match maker. Lakshmi had such high hopes for a better life but then was faced with finding her husband was not wealthy and only had steady employment but no ambition. We did feel he loved all his family but as with all dominant women it is easier to just stay in the background. She set about cleaning her home and setting high standards to live by. When her beautiful twins were born she put all the hopes of the family bettering themselves on a good marriage for daughter Mohini. This all came to a very unhappy conclusion with her capture, torture and death at the hands of the Japanese and was so much more tragic as the war was coming to its close when she was taken.

As a result of this tragedy the family were not able to overcome their grief and things went from bad to worse. In one of Queen Elizabeth's Christmas speeches she said that she and her family had had an 'Annus Horibilus'; this poor family had decades of that.

This is a beautifully crafted book with lovely pictures painted for us. The characters each had their own chapters but we felt this did not help us to understand them fully as we were not sure who was doing the writing. Rani also said in an interview that her editor thought the book was too long so there was quite a bit of editing done.

We enjoyed the book and a lively discussion and hoped that the character, Nisha, could turn the family's fortunes around with collating the tapes Dimple had collected from talking with family members and that healing could take place for her. We felt she was more in tune with her relatives at the start of the book comparing them with men who collect birds' nests and how they test and listen to their poles before making the dangerous climbs.

Elise Hill

ENAK!

Vegetarian Eating Experience At The Kun Yam Thong Temple 19-Nov-10

The internet arguably claims that the Kun Yam Thong Temple contains Kuala Lumpur's favourite central area Vegetarian Restaurant, and this may well be true if quality, variety and value for money are the criteria used. The Temple, situated across from the Corus Hotel in Jalan Ampang, was originally called Deng Bi An, which means "Ascend The Other Shore", although a wit recently re-named it as the "Temple in the Shadow of the Towers". Within the Temple complex is the Office and Library of the worldwide 'Dharma Buddhist Association', the Guan Yin Sagely Monastery and the simple open-air cooking and eating area at the back with seating for approximately 200.



Lunch is available on weekdays from 1100 until 1400 on a self-service basis with the week's menu displayed on a board. Our ten Members arrived early before the office workers from the Golden Triangle took their lunch break and sat together on stools at a clean stainless steel table, and most spent no more than RM 5.00 on their selected dishes. On the day of our visit the featured dish was a Hakka mixture of steamed rice, chopped vegetables, beans and chopped nuts served in a tea broth called 'Lui Char' which is translated as 'Thunder Tea Rice'; (for a recipe see <http://www.sloppychic.com/diy-homemade-hakka-lui-char/>).

Also featured on the Menu were Cantonese Chee Cheong Fan rolls made from rice noodles filled with vegetables, as well as a selection of twelve other well presented vegetarian dishes.

The restaurant wall decoration consists of various posters and quotations that commend the vegetarian diet including "One who eats meats is brave but violent whereas one who only eats grains is intelligent and gentle" from the Confucian 'Book of Rites'. There are also posters, which are quite unusual for Malaysia, that extol the virtues of the green agenda. All in all, this venue is recommended for an informal lunch whilst in the vicinity of KLCC.

Stuart Wakefield



Photos by Robyn Curry

ENAK!: A Trip to the East Coast for Lunch

Well...almost.

In a busy week full of holiday luncheons and commitments around town, a few members of Enak! met amongst the holiday hustle and bustle of Mid Valley Mega Mall and The Gardens. We were lured out to Belanga Café with the temptation of traditional flavors from the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia.

To follow are the restaurant's "Signature Dishes" from the east coast that we ordered:

Nasi Tumpang: this traditional food item from Kelantan is

made with layers of pressed rice cakes, fish serunding, fish curry in an egg and anchovy sauce served in a banana leaf cone.



Nasi Dagang

Nasi Dagang: a traditional Kelantanese meal of aromatic brown rice cooked in coconut milk, accompanied with either curry chicken, beef rendang or ikan tongkol.



Nasi Kerabu

Nasi Kerabu: an east coast favorite meal of steamed turmeric rice served with a hot and spicy coconut sauce. It can be accompanied with ayam percik, grilled beef or grilled fish.

Our taste buds were not limited to the east coast however, as a few of us also had Malaysian classics: Nasi Lemak, Ice Teller and Sago Gula Melaka.

I am ready to go back as there is more to explore on the menu. Among Belanga Café's "specialties" is Grandma's recipe of Laksa Lemak Pedas. Care to join me?

Selamat Makan!



Unwrapped Nasi Tumpang, Kelantan



Annette enjoying her first Ice teller



Kumpulan Kebudayaan Malaysia
Kuala Lumpur & Selangor
Malaysian Culture Group

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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?