

Kumpulan Kebudayaan Malaysia Kuala Lumpur & Selangor Malaysian Culture Group

Newsletter of the Malaysian Culture Group

November 2010

MCG PROGRAM OF EVENTS

FIRST WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH LECTURE:
REPRESENTATION OR RHETORIC -
POLITICAL PARTIES IN MALAYSIA

Wednesday, 3rd November

TRAVEL TIPS – DANCING WITH DRAGONS PART 2 Wednesday, 10th November

VISIT TO THE SAMAKKYA AYURVEDIC CENTRE
WITH A TALK ABOUT
THE PHILOSOPHY AND THEORY OF AYURVEDA

Monday, 22nd November

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Photo by Polly Szantor

IMPORTANT NOTICE

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

It's official!! The MCG's new Vice President is Lynn Davies. Lynn is an experienced MCG committee member, having served on the committee as Vice-President several years ago. A long-term member of MCG (best we don't ask how long!) Lynn is also a long-term resident of Malaysia. It is great to have such an energetic and supportive VP; especially one who knows the ropes! Please welcome Lynn to her new role with enthusiasm when you see her.

Healthy debate at a recent committee meeting saw your committee reviewing the aims and objectives of the Malaysian Culture Group for 2010 and beyond. MCG's recent 32nd birthday demonstrates the continued community support for the MCG. Thirty-one new members joined MCG in September alone! Your committee is focused on defining key areas of interest to its diverse members and ensuring we communicate effectively with all. More on that soon!

Have you visited our web site lately? New photos have been uploaded on the home page, illustrating some diverse experiences an MCG member enjoys. (And some funny ones...) You will also find past copies of the wonderful newsletters; our newsletters are so much more than lists of dates and venues. The reports from every event are terrific reading; and can help you plan the tour for your next group of visitors.

Sarah

Deepavali

This month, Malaysians celebrate Deepavali - the Hindu Festival of Light. It begins on Nov 5th with the new moon and celebrates the triumph of good over evil. This is an important family time and there are also special prayers at all Hindu temples. Look for the beautiful *kolams* traditionally made with colored rice on the floor of temples and community halls. And this is the time to go to Brickfields - to buy festive decorations like lamps and *kolam* kits, new saris and lots of sweets. You can also get a henna design on your hands.



The deadline for the December/January 2011 issue is November 8, 2010. 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

UPCOMING EVENTS

FIRST WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH LECTURE:

Representation or Rhetoric: Political Parties in Malaysia with Dr. Bridget Welsh

DATE: Wednesday, 3rd November, 2010
TIME: 10.00 am for 10.30 am start
PLACE: Meritz Condominium, Jalan Mayang
COST: Members RM15, Guests RM25
RSVP: mcgevents@yahoo.com



MCG is fortunate to welcome back Dr Bridget Welsh, for what should be an interesting discussion of the current political scene in Malaysia. Since the political tsunami of 2008, all of Malaysia's political parties have faced major challenges: working in their respective coalitions, internal leadership changes and increased demands from the public. This discussion will elucidate the factors that are shaping Malaysian political parties internally and externally, highlighting broad political and social forces as well and personality dynamics within parties. From UMNO and PAS to MCA and DAP, Malaysian political parties have been forced to adapt to a more demanding political environment. Many have continued to rely on persistent patterns of rhetoric, while others have introduced internal reforms and experienced major changes in political orientation and position. Drawing from interviews and observation, this discussion will explore how and why Malaysian political parties are changing and whether they are in fact becoming more effective in representing an increasingly complex and sophisticated Malaysian electorate.

Dr. Bridget Welsh has been an associate professor in the Southeast Asia Studies Program at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, where she taught courses on contemporary Southeast Asian politics. She is currently an Associate Professor in Political Science at Singapore Management University. She is committed to engagement, fostering mutual understanding and empowerment. Based in Southeast Asia, she is committed to changing the world, one day at a time, through her public engagement, teaching and research.

TRAVEL TIPS – DANCING WITH DRAGONS PART 2

DATE: Wednesday, 10th November, 2010
TIME: 10.00 am for 10.30am start
PLACE: Joanne Mahendran's Home (details upon registration)
COST: Members RM15, Guests RM25
RSVP: mcgevents@yahoo.com



Earlier this year, Polly Szantor spent 13 weeks exploring China. Traveling by bus and train, she not only visited major tourist sights but also moved off the beaten track to explore the beauty of the Chinese countryside. Polly shared the first part of her journey at a Travel Tips held in September. This time her talk will pick up her journey in western Hunan Province, visiting Zhangjiajie National Park, the medieval walled city of Fenghuang, and minority villages. Then it's on to Wuyishan, one of the prime tea-producing areas in northern Fujian Province, to visit temples and learn about Taoism, Tai Chi, and Qi Gong.



Onward to Beijing and what a pleasant surprise it was. Staying in one of the atmospheric hutongs, (the rapidly disappearing back lanes of this ancient city), evoked a bygone era. The Forbidden City, Temple of Heaven and Summer Palace are just as splendid as we imagine, and the friendliness of the locals added to the general appeal. From here, Polly took a side-trip to the Great Wall, climbing with a guide to hike along unrestored sections far from the tourist hordes.

Three overnight train journeys enroute to Xian, allowed stopovers to explore a hanging temple, Buddhist caves near Datong, and the ancient walled city of Pingyao. The terracotta warriors were stunning and provided a fitting end to a challenging but endlessly fascinating journey.

This event is limited to 20 participants, so please register early to avoid disappointment.

VISIT TO THE SAMAKKYA AYURVEDIC CENTRE WITH A TALK ABOUT THE PHILOSOPHY AND THEORY OF AYURVEDA

DATE: Monday, 22nd November, 2010
 TIME: 10.00 am for 10.30 am start
 PLACE: Samakkya Ayurvedic Centre, Jln Abdullah, Bangsar
 COST: Members RM15, Guests RM25
 RSVP: mcgevents@yahoo.com



We hope you will join us for a morning at the Samakkya Centre to learn about the centuries old science of health and well-being known as Ayurveda. Ayurveda is a 5000 year-old traditional system of natural healing from India which has proven effectiveness and benefits. It works by eliminating toxic elements from the body and correcting imbalances by means of herbs, oils, massage, yoga and changes in diet and life-style.

Dr. Vats will be talking to us about how we can make these changes and also give us some suggestions about weight loss. The morning will conclude with a light Ayurvedic lunch.

The Newcomer's Coffee Morning

Our sincere thanks go out to Nisha for hosting our annual Newcomer's Coffee Morning, with her charming hospitality. The turn out was awesome –more than 60 members, old and new!

Joanneke was really busy at the membership table and worked hard to put all of our new members' contact information into the database. Welcome to all of you who are receiving your first newsletter.

Our events planning team was inundated as well, with all of the members who wanted to sign up for events at the Coffee Morning. Our October events are at capacity and we have put on an extra tour of the Textile Museum because of its popularity. Wow! Let's keep that kind of momentum going!

The Committee members enjoyed explaining the various aspects of our programs to the group. MCG is a very diverse organization, offering unique ways to explore South East Asian culture. We are always looking to communicate our ideas with you, as well as listen to your feedback on what kind of programs you want. MCG is YOUR organization so please continue to make suggestions about what you can contribute and what you want to learn.

It was good to spend the morning with you! We look forward to seeing you at future events.



Deepavali Lights by Cheryl Hoffmann

REPORTS ON PREVIOUS EVENTS

Purple Cane – A Unique Tea Experience

A slightly pungent aroma assails one's nostrils as one steps into the parlor of the Purple Cane. It feels like one is stepping into China. All morning the feeling was so authentic, that having been to China earlier this year, Polly and I felt a sense of *déjà vu*.

A very elegant young woman is sitting on a Chinese stool mixing and brewing us tea. The lady sitting next to her is Hooi, who is going to give us a talk on the art of tea. There is a tense excitement in the air. We are not sure what to expect from this event.



Hooi begins by giving us a background of tea growing in China. The country has the longest history of tea, from about 2,700 BC. Tea went to Japan after the monk Eisau went to Tiantai Mountain to study Zen Buddhism and took it home in 1193 AD. Tea went to Russia via two Russian travelers on their return in 1579 AD. Britain tasted it via Holland only in the 16th century.

According to legend, tea was discovered by Emperor Shennong in 2,737 BC. The folklore says that this great agriculturist liked to drink clean water and hence got his minions to give him hot boiled water. On one of his sojourns he stopped to rest and ordered his hot water. When he drank it he noticed it was pale brown and had some fragrant leaves floating in it. Upon investigation he found some tea leaves had fallen in from a nearby tree. Shennong was a great herbalist and this became the first experiment with "CHA". As early as the Han dynasty, tea was used as a beverage and as a medicine, and by the time of the Tang Dynasty it had become a popular drink used for pleasure and on ceremonial occasions, according to Lu Yu's treatise "Cha Jing"(729-804 AD). Tealeaf was compressed into dry cakes. These "bricks" of tea were ground in a mortar. The powdered tea cake was boiled in earthenware kettles and drunk as a hot refreshing beverage.

The tea plant can grow very tall according to botanical records. A. Wilson in his travels in S.E. China in Sichuan Province talks of tea trees 10 ft tall with a circumference of 6.5 ft. The plant today is continuously pruned and kept at plucking height. Only the top few tender shoots are plucked. The process of manufacturing tea then begins. The first stage is "Fermentation" or oxidation of the leaves. The next is drying. There are valley or lowland teas and highland teas, each having very different flavors. The latter having a more intense aftertaste. The length of the fermentation and drying controls the flavors. There are white teas, green teas and black teas.



The complexities of boiling tea are many. It matters what material it is brewed in. For example, red colored clay pots, which are very compact means the heat is transferred quickly; black clay is less dense, and slower to transfer heat. Purple is in the middle and porcelain is the slowest. The amount of heat, the time taken, and the vessels used to brew the tea each impact its flavor. We were taught to taste the same teas brewed in different pots. We learnt to discern between the same teas grown in the highlands and the lowlands.

Purple Cane cont'd

At the end, we began to understand what an art and science real tea tasting is. We caught a glimpse of how tasters blend teas, how connoisseurs come to select their teas for drinking, collecting and aging. Just like wines!!

We have come a long way from the days of the myths and legends of the great herbalist emperor Shennong and his accidental discovery of "CHA", which he is supposed to have used extensively as an antidote in testing poisonous herbs. Tea drinking today has evolved into an art form in Japan and the tea ceremony is a very elegant lengthy ritual full of grace and etiquette. In China it is part of marriage ceremonies, the traditional tea ceremony where young couples exchange tea with their elders in return for "ANG POWs". Tea parlors dot every street corner in China.

There is the English high tea culture of sandwiches, crumpets, tea cakes and buttered scones left over from the Raj era. There are complex tea ceremonies in Korea. All over the world tea shops are a common feature, from Indian "chai" shops offering savory snacks, to the fancy tea houses like Richoux in fashionable London, to tea parlors all over Russia.

All this experimentation in tea in all its aspects then logically ended in the MCG members going for lunch to the Purple Cane restaurant. There everything is cooked in tea, even the crispy duck in lettuce leaves. Quaint and kind of unique to have hot and cold, savory and sweet dishes laced with different kinds of tea! Oh, and not to be missed - the fun paper lanterns. No they did not have tea flowers on them but they did have hand painted birds.

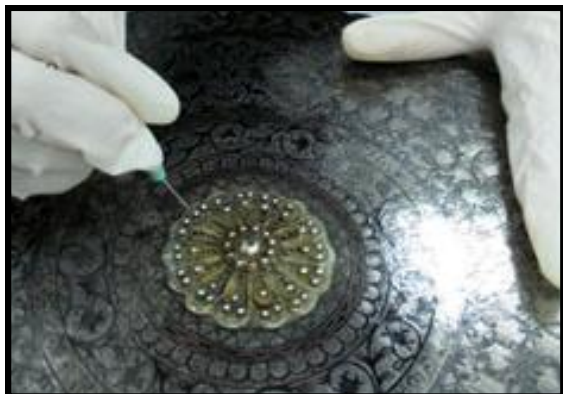
The afternoon did end on a tea note though, tea-flavored moon cakes!

Loubnan Jumabhoy

Photos by Pilar Palma



A Day at the Islamic Arts Museum



Beautiful morning, sunshine, good company and interesting conversation. This is the recipe for a happy day! This day was October 6, 2010. Several members from the Malaysian Cultural Group gathered together to visit the Islamic Art Museum with the intention of learning about art and book conservation. The museum specialists welcomed us and talked to us about the museum's conservation programs. Mr. Aristotelis Sakellariou, Head of the Conservation Centre, has been working in the museum for seven and a half months, and explained that art conservation follows some important steps such as restoration, conservation and preventative conservation.

All the objects that arrive at the museum will go through these processes. The staff members responsible for this job are called Conservators; their job is to evaluate the art, determine what might be wrong, if anything, and to restore and conserve it.

The Islamic Museum had its opening in 1998 with the creation of a conservation department in 2004. The conservation department has three laboratories where the conservators work. The organic Laboratory is responsible for the restoration of textiles and paper. It is their strongest unit where they specialize in restoring Chinese scrolls and manuscripts. The inorganic laboratory is responsible for metal and ceramic; and the last is called the analytical laboratory where the analysis of how the restoration should be done takes place.



All the conservation that takes place in the museum follows international standards with collaboration and knowledge from a group of specialists around the world. The objects are treated with respect and follow Islamic beliefs. All the art is thoroughly documented.



For the second part of our presentation Mr. Mohamed Razali Mohamed Zain started by asking all of us: "What is a book?" We all thought we knew, but were not sure how to describe it. A book is a stack of paper put one on top of the other, stitched on the side with a cover. Amazing! Mr. Mohamed explained how to take care of and respect a book which many of us take for granted. Tips on how to conserve the books were most interesting and simple to handle.

After the presentation we had an enjoyable lunch at the museum restaurant and to finish this beautiful experience: a quick stop at the museum shop.

Priscila Milanese Branca

Photos courtesy of Islamic Arts Museum

EXPLORERS

Explorers Go To the Dogs!

Eighteen dog lovers attended the Explorers' visit to the Police K9 Dog Training Unit at the Malaysian Police Training Centre or *Pusat Latihan Polis* (PULAPOL) on September 27th. We met at the front gate and were escorted a long way through the extensive grounds of the Training Centre (the facility comprises 249.50 acres). At the very end of the site was a self-contained unit consisting of offices, kennels and training grounds.

Chief Inspector Kannan and his staff pulled out all stops to impress us with the imported 'million ringgit' dogs. His staff put on quite an impressive show. We were shown how suspects are tracked and subdued by a Belgian Alsatian, then shown obstacle course hi-jinks. Then the food-loving Labradors sniffed out explosives and buried drugs. The handlers answered our many questions, and we were very impressed with their kind and affectionate treatment of their charges.



One of the best parts of our visit occurred when we could romp and play with the dogs during their 'free exercise' time. Several yellow labs enjoyed chasing our thrown toys and being petted and fussed over.

We were then shown the kennels for the 'crime dogs' and the 'drug' and 'explosive' dogs. All that was missing were the 'cadaver' dogs, which were off on other training. We were very impressed with the cleanliness of the area and also the 'retirement' area for the older dogs. The K9 dogs cost more than MYR 100,000 when they are purchased when they are a year and a half old and are worth MYR 1 million when their 'working life' and training is completed at around 12 years of age. The dogs are then kept in a special kennel area to 'retire' and enjoy life.

We then re-convened down the street at the D'Saji Restaurant at the FELDA Villa complex on Jalan Perumahan Gurney off Jalan Semarak. This complex has the administration buildings of FELDA, as well as a large exhibition centre and a restaurant, which can hold up to 1,000 wedding guests.

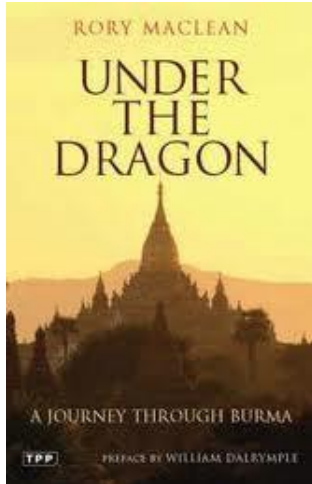
We had the 19 RM buffet, which consisted of several traditional Malay foods and desserts in honor of Hari Raya. The attentive and friendly staff explained all of the dishes to us. The restaurant was a nice ending to our very interesting and fun visit to the K9 Unit.

Pam Curry with photos by Gillian Longhurst and Kim Mole



BOOK GROUPS

Book Group 1



Under the Dragon by Rory Maclean

Under the Dragon is considered one of Rory Maclean's best travel books and has garnered support and praise from reviewers world-wide. William Dalrymple who wrote the preface has this to say about it. "A work of great political commitment, powered above all by the authors' outrage at the injustices, brutalisation and mass violation of human rights that he witnessed in Burma. Yet for all its pain, Under the Dragon is a beautiful book. It remains his masterpiece; and in the light of the continuing tragedy in Burma is now more relevant than ever.

”

The book is a clever travelogue in which the author weaves the story of his search for traditional Burmese culture (in the form of a 100 year old antique basket) with the tragic stories of three Burmese women. These are ordinary people struggling to survive under one of the most brutal and repressive regimes in the world.

Though several of us in the group found the story contrived, the majority felt the book is beautifully written. Its evocative descriptions stay with the reader leaving a lasting impression of both the people and the place.

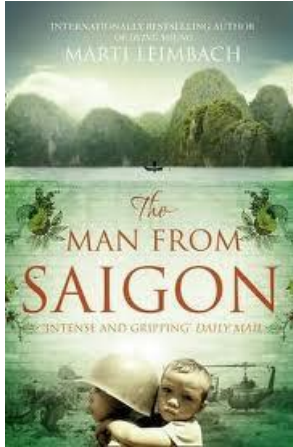
Maclean manages to convey not only the pain and horror of the Burmese living in constant fear, but he also brings out the good in the people who he says "appear to be free of envy and greed, seem to be at peace with each other, remain cheerful, modest and happy. They smile while telling a tragic story of eviction and execution."

Under the Dragon keeps the history of the authorities' abuse of human rights in readers' minds and reminds us all to act on Aung San Suu Kyi's words "Please use your liberty to promote ours" Our group ended the discussion by talking about ways in which we could address this appeal.

Hootoksi Tyabji

BOOK GROUPS

Book Group 2



The Man from Saigon By Marti Leimbach

Last month eight of us met in Sabine's house, sipping a fruity flavoured French tea, to discuss Marti Leimbach's *The Man from Saigon*. The book's plot revolves around Susan Gifford, a female correspondent, who goes to Vietnam in 1967 to cover the war and her encounter there with an American TV reporter and a Vietnamese photographer. The three later find themselves prisoners of some Vietcong soldiers in the dense jungles and the story unfolds the attempt by them to escape from their captives.

An American member of the our group said while reading the book she was transported to the terrifying time during the Vietnam war, when her family in the US spent days worrying whether her young brother would be sent to fight there. All of us agreed that Leimbach, who was probably very young when the war began, had written an extremely vivid and believable story almost as if she had been there herself.

Leimbach, who has authored several books including *Dying Young*, has tried to remain faithful to the general history of America's war in Vietnam. Reading her protagonist Susan Gifford's travails in the jungles, we agreed that the author had researched extensively taking help of books, websites, films and documentaries.

The characters are all fictional, except some including Georgette Meyer "Dickey" Chapelle who according to Leimbach was a famous war correspondent and one of the pioneering women in the field.

However, one member felt that the book just seemed to be a 'walk, walk, walk...some bugs, walk, walk walk ...then nothing ! Most liked the book. We were all unanimous that if we were in protagonist Susan's place in 1967 we would not have gone to cover the war.

Jaishree Balasubramanian

ENAK!

SEPTEMBER ENAK!

The Wok Cafe - Peranakan Fare - A Non-Meat Eater's Viewpoint



An opportunity to renew acquaintance with Nyonya cuisine with its distinct flavours from coconut, tamarind, herbs and spices, including the ubiquitous belacan prawn paste should never be missed. What can be difficult is travelling to outer Kota Damansara; that's a bit rhetorical as the request was to write-up the gastronomic aspects and not to compose a missive concerning arguments with the GPS lady, (which, as always these days, went to a tie-break). OK, as you really want to know, for future reference, first ignore folk who offer their version of the 'obvious route' and then drive to a location within a couple of kilometers or so from the Curve. Once on the glideslope, it is a simple matter of calling up the owner who will guide you down to the threshold. In this case, he said "look for the mini" and as I adopted a quizzical frown, my Navigator advised that he meant a car. Four minis later, in response to my belated suggestion that he could help by confirming the colour, a gent jumped in front of the bonnet, frantically waving a number of arms, which I took to indicate that I was driving between two rows of double parked cars the wrong way down a one-way street. My Navigator kept calm, (my feelings are unrecorded), and, to paraphrase 'Zulu', said "you don't understand, he wants you to park" whereupon a car, like the one I should have, pulled out to let me in only a few meters from the dining tables.



My Navigator and I strolled in, a mere fifteen minutes late, and nonchalantly glanced at the large table weighed down with typical Peranakan fare including chicken and pork soup, plus chicken, minced pork and belly pork dishes each with their own sauce and copious vegetable dishes plus plain rice. Admittedly, there was an eighteen inch red snapper, again with its own sauce, and I was permitted a throaty warning growl each time a fellow diner's fork hovered over the delicious flaky flesh, (not that any forks were withdrawn). Before long, the Navigator was telling me how tasty and beautifully cooked each of the meat dishes were which provided me with the long awaited opening to offer the remains of the snapper's head; (the video rights were immediately taken by the Café Owner). A while later, after a very tasty sago-mango desert, it seemed totally appropriate to natter for a while as we had all eaten well and some even had photographs of each dish served for later private viewing.



The furnishing and décor of the Wok Café exuded comfort and tradition in equal measure, and it was not at all difficult to accept that the establishment's origins were indeed in Penang. There were many Chinese and Malay 'ancestor' photographs on the walls, (in what appeared to be their original frames), although HM QEII, (long may she reign), had pride of place in her Coronation robes alongside the air conditioning outlet. There were also a number of large signatures in felt tip pen written directly on the whitewashed walls, but my offer to the owner to join them was rejected.

The Wok Café is on the ever-growing list of those places to which we shall return; those signatures on the wall amount to unfinished business.



Stuart Wakefield Photos by Vicki Fennessy



Kumpulan Kebudayaan Malaysia
Kuala Lumpur & Selangor
Malaysian Culture Group

**Member
Application Form**
(one subscription for the whole family)

2010 Membership Form

Membership fees: Annual Membership: January —December 2010 RM 60
New Members Special: Sign up now and pay RM60 from now until December 2011!

Watch for announcements about PayPal or mail a cheque with this form to:

**Joanneke Verweil
70 Lorong Chong Khoon, Lin 3,
68000 Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia.**

	First Name	Surname	Nationality
Member			
Spouse/ Partner			
Address			
Postcode			
Telephone	Are you interested in:		
Handphone	Book Group _____		
Email	Explorers _____		
Enak! _____		

MCG is run by volunteers. What would you like to do in 2010?

- 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?