

Kumpulan Kebudayaan Malaysia Kuala Lumpur & Selangor Malaysian Culture Group

Newsletter of the Malaysian Culture Group

Dec 2010/Jan 2011

MCG PROGRAM OF EVENTS

FIRST WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH LECTURE:

20 GREAT MOMENTS IN MALAYSIAN CENSORSHIP Wednesday, 01 December

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTMAS POT-LUCK LUNCH Thursday, 9th December

THAIPUSAM TRAVEL TIPS AND EXPERIENCES Thursday, 13th January, 2011

THAIPUSAM VISIT TO BATU CAVES Sunday, 16th January, 2011

CHINESE NEW YEAR WALKING TOUR OF
CHINATOWN WITH LUNCH Wednesday, 19 January, 2011

TOUR OF MASJID WILAYAH PERSEKUTUAN Thursday, 27th January, 2011

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

Wednesday, 09 February, 2011

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Japanese Ikiban Costume on Display at Isetan, KLCC
Photo by Cheryl Hoffmann

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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 February 2011 issue is January 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

I would like to thank the membership of MCG for the opportunity to serve as the President of such an interesting organization. I am sorry to be leaving, particularly on short notice, but circumstances prevail. I leave knowing that your committee will continue to work hard to provide the framework for all of the group gatherings and events that make MCG the distinctive organization it is. I would like to welcome all of our new members, as well as encourage everyone to participate in as many MCG activities as your time permits. You won't regret it! MCG continues to evolve to better meet the needs of its members, to respond to the opportunities we have to experience the cultural environment of South East Asia, and to adapt to the changes in technology in our world.

We are beginning a new format for the President's column in this newsletter. A different member of the committee will be writing this column each month, to help you understand the responsibilities of each position and the rewards that come from being an active volunteer with MCG. With that, I introduce Kokkie Paauw, your Treasurer.
All the best, **Sarah**

Money, money, money.....

We all know the song from Abba about how funny money is. MCG also likes to have some money, that is why we ask you for a yearly membership fee of 60 RM and a small contribution for joining an event. That is all the income we have and luckily enough for all our members, we did not increase the fee and the contribution over the last years. Till now, there is no need for an increase because we use your money wisely. To give you an idea about our expenses, here are some examples. When an event is held in the Meritz room we pay a little amount for rental and cleaning, we welcome you with some refreshments and some snacks, and the speaker receives a present. When the event is a trip, like a guided tour in a museum, we pay the entrance fee and when we go to a temple we give a donation. Once a year we have the AGM, which is our biggest expense, where our members enjoy each other's company in a nice surrounding while we approve the official business of MCG.

These are the expenses you are most probably aware of. But we have more to pay - for brochures, printing, stamps, membership cards, computer costs like software, and keeping the internet in the air, the external auditing of the financial year report, rental of the PO Box, liability insurance and insurance for loss of the computer etc. The labour of the volunteers working for MCG is for free, but when they leave we normally give them a small thank you gift.

All this income and expenses are recorded by the treasurer and every month a financial report is presented to the MCG committee and discussed in their meeting. Once a year the annual accounts are prepared, externally audited and presented at the AGM. It was my pleasure to do all this for the last 2 years but this position is now open.

If you would like to be the new treasurer or if you can recommend someone, please contact the president via email:

president@malaysianculturegroup.org

Do you like more information regarding the treasurer's job?

Email me anytime at: treasurer@malaysianculturegroup.org

The job is easy and manageable and you will be part of a nice and enthusiastic team!

Kokkie Paauw, Treasurer MCG

UPCOMING EVENTS

FIRST WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH LECTURE: 20 Great Moments in Malaysian Censorship With Amir Muhammad

DATE: Wednesday, 1st December, 2010
TIME: 10.00 am for 10.30 am start
PLACE: Meritz Condominium, Jalan Mayang
COST: Members RM15, Guests RM25
RSVP: mcgevents@yahoo.com

Join writer-publisher-filmmaker Amir Muhammad as he takes you through 20 of the most amusing and surreal episodes of censorship in the Malaysian media. These choice examples from the world of journalism, film/TV, radio and the Internet will have you rolling your eyes ... and maybe even rolling in the aisles.

Amir is no stranger to censorship as two of his documentaries are banned in Malaysia, but he has modestly not included those instances in the list of the 20 he will be presenting.

Editor's note: Might he be persuaded on the day?

Amir has published several books and we have asked him to bring along some copies of the latest.



INTERNATIONAL CHRISTMAS POT-LUCK LUNCH

DATE: Thursday, 9th December, 2010
TIME: 11.30 am for 12.00 noon start
PLACE: Home of Mary Thornton in Taman Sri Hartamas
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 a glass of mulled wine, listen to Christmas music and bring along a dish that represents something of your own country's seasonal fare for us all to share?

As a child growing up in England just after the war had ended, Christmas treats were in short supply but my family always managed to celebrate Christmas Day in the same way with a traditional Roast Turkey, Roast Potatoes, Forcemeat Stuffing, and Christmas Pudding and Mince Pies with Brandy Butter to finish with. When I grew up and started travelling, I soon discovered that not everyone in the world had the same traditions at Christmas, indeed, I discovered that in many countries they didn't even celebrate on the same day and certainly didn't eat the same food and even non-Christian countries had their own ways of celebrating the festive season!

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! If you would like to discuss what you might say about your own traditions or meals, please call me, Sue Nelson, on 012 6966727. (Mary's address will be given in the reminder email.)

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

TWO THAIPUSAM EVENTS WITH CHERYL HOFFMANN
Introductory Talk, Thursday, January 13
A Walk Around Batu Caves, Sunday, January 16

The annual festival of Thaipusam will take place on January 20, 2011. This is one of the major Hindu celebrations of the year in Malaysia, during which homage is paid to Lord Murugam, as thanks for prayers that have been answered. Thaipusam is known for its loud, all night revelry, self-mutilation rites and decorative kavadis. Based on the success of last year's MCG Thaipusam programs, we are again offering two events to help you manage the sensory overload that characterizes this festival. In these two programs, we will explore the quieter side of Thaipusam – the personal, family and community commitment, the spirituality and the important rituals.

In the program on Thursday, January 13, Cheryl Hoffmann will share some of her photos from previous years at Thaipusam and give us some insights into how to visit Batu Caves during the festival.

On Sunday, January 16, Cheryl will lead us on a walk around Batu Caves. This is a good day to visit the site, as preparations for the festival are well underway and many families choose to make their pilgrimage to the caves before, rather than during the crowded festival dates.

The talk and the tour are complementary, so you are encouraged to attend both, if your time permits, to maximize the learning experience. Please mark your calendars and book now. Spaces are limited. Note that the visit to Batu Caves is a rare Sunday event and family members are welcome.

DATE:	Thursday, 13th January, 2010	DATE:	Sunday, 16th January, 2010
TIME:	10.00 am for 10.30 am start	TIME:	8.45 am for 9.00 am start
PLACE:	Cheryl's home, near KLCC	PLACE:	Batu Caves entrance
COST:	Members and family RM15	COST:	Members and family RM15
RSVP:	mcgevents@yahoo.com	RSVP:	mcgevents@yahoo.com

Both events are limited to 20 persons.



CHINESE NEW YEAR WALKING TOUR OF CHINATOWN WITH LUNCH

DATE: Wednesday, 19th January, 2011
TIME: 10.00 am for 10.30 am start
PLACE: Meet at Central Market, Chinatown
COST: Members only RM15,
 Lunch at own expense
RSVP: mcgevents@yahoo.com



Chinese New Year falls on the 3rd February in 2011 and will welcome in the year of the Rabbit; hopefully a placid year very much welcomed and needed after the ferocious year of the Tiger in 2010. Preparations begin in earnest weeks before and Chinatown starts to buzz in anticipation of this colourful festival. We are inviting members to join us on a walk through Chinatown to see some of the preparations and to visit some of the places that are important for the tradition of present-giving and a Chinese Temple where horoscopes for the New Year are sought. We will also point out interesting landmarks and hidden treasures.

We will start upstairs in Central Market where we can talk about the Rituals and Superstitions of Chinese New Year before setting off on our tour, guided by members of the Events Planning Team, and split into small groups, finally meeting up at the Old China Café for a traditional Chinese New Year Lunch. There is plenty of convenient parking at the south end of Central Market.

When registering for this event, please confirm if you will be joining us for lunch.

TOUR OF MASJID WILAYAH PERSEKUTUAN (Federal Territory Mosque),

DATE: Thursday, 27th January, 2011
TIME: 10.00 am for 10.30 am start
PLACE: Masjid Wilayah Persekutuan,
 Jalan Duta, 50480 KL
COST: Members RM15, Guests RM25
RSVP: mcgevents@yahoo.com



Photo by Cheryl Hoffmann

With its huge size and colourful presence, the beautiful blue domes of this Mosque are hard to miss when driving on Jalan Duta. Now we are offering you the opportunity of visiting this magnificent building and being given a personal tour. For this event, we are joining together with the Museum Volunteers from Museum Negara.

The Mosque, which is also known as the Federal Territory Mosque, is the forty fourth mosque built by the Government within the City limits. It is situated on a five hectare site near the Government Office Complex on Jalan Duta. The construction began in 1997 and was open for public use on 25th October, 2000. It is able to accommodate 17,000 devotees at one time, the whole building being approximately 47,000 square meters in size. It has been built in a blend of Ottoman and Malay architectural styles and is heavily influenced by the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, Turkey. It has twenty two domes made from a composite material of glass fibre fabric mixed with epoxy resin to make it durable and light.

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.

PONGGAL JANUARY 14TH

Ponggal is a three-day thanksgiving festival celebrated by Tamils of Hindu faith. It is celebrated to offer gratitude to nature for a good harvest and prayers are offered to Surian, the Sun god. Ponggal is the only Hindu festival that follows a solar calendar. On the first day, milk is boiled in a clay pot until it overflows. Family members, gathered around the pot, shout “Ponggal o Ponggal” then they add rice to the pot. In Tamil, *ponggal* means boiling and overflowing. In rural areas, on the **second day**, cows are given a bath, their horns painted and they are decorated with garlands and worshipped. On the **third day** young ladies pray for a good life and a dashing husband. The young unmarried ladies wear new clothes, gold and silver ornaments and have special prayers for their future marriage.

In KL, in the few days before Ponggal, the streets of Brickfields and Sentul are lined with sellers of sugar cane and clay pots. In the very early morning on January 14th you can see families boiling the milk outside their homes and temples.



REPORTS ON PREVIOUS EVENTS

VISIT TO LAXMI NARAYAN TEMPLE



Photo by Sue Nelson

In high spirits, most of the ladies came to the event on October 19th wearing beautiful Indian dress. We were welcomed by Nalytha, and shown to the entrance where Rupali was carefully drawing on the floor; the picture was of a beautiful and colorful flower. This kind of art is called Rangoli in northern India or Kolam in southern India and it is done in front of houses to welcome guests but originally to deter insects from entering the house. It is made with dyed rice and chalk powder and the drawings can vary from flowers to Gods. We all had an opportunity to try to do it ourselves, which looked easy at first but not so easy when you try to do it. It looked so beautiful and was really appreciated.

After everyone had arrived, we headed to the first floor and had a lovely surprise to see such a beautiful and peaceful room where the celebrations and prayers take place. The priest, Dinish, greeted us with the word "Namaste", which means that he is praying for our souls. He explained that in Hinduism we are all souls and our mission on earth is to keep ourselves pure. This is a difficult task for me, but I will get there!

Dinish gave us a short talk explaining that all the religions are as one. "God", he said, "is the same in all religions". He made us reflect about the good things that we have and the good things we can do. We should be united in love with God and to one another. We learned that Hinduism has several Gods and not all of them are humans, some are also animals. He introduced us to many of the Gods and explained what they protect in the prayers or mantras that are offered to them. He finished his talk by greeting us with "Hari Krishna".

For the second part of the meeting, we had a very interesting talk by one of our MCG members, Mrs. Amita Shah. Amita was born into an aristocratic family in the north Indian town of Meerut, famous for being the seat of the Indian mutiny of 1857; she came to Malaysia in 1977 and has lived here ever since, raising two daughters and has been a member of MCG for twenty years. She gave us a fascinating insight into the background to both festivals, Navaratri and Deepavali, and explained the rituals, customs and traditions that are followed by Hindus around the world at this time of year.



Photo by Katherine Tan



Photo by Sue Nelson

After this, we went downstairs to join some of the ladies from the Temple in a typical dance (Dandiya) that is performed at Navaratri. We were given two sticks which we had to beat while moving clockwise in a circle, moving to the melody. This brought a lot of joy and got the group together.

After the fun we sat and appreciated a delicious meal provided by the Temple. During the meal it was what we have come to expect; good company, good conversation, appreciation for the morning's events.

Priscila Milanese Branca

VISIT TO MUZIUM TEKSTIL NEGARA (TEXTILE MUSEUM)

On October 28th, a large group of ladies met to appreciate some of Malaysia's rich textile heritage at the very new Textile Museum. The visit started with a lecture given by Mr. Najyb an architect, academic and passionate exponent of Malaysian culture, who spoke to us about the construction and history of the building that supports the museum. We learned that the history of the building dates back 140 years, the construction having started in 1896, and that the architect responsible is a British man called A.C. Norman. He explained that the architect was very influenced by Muslim and Indian styles of architecture and that the building is actually in the Moghul style rather than Moorish, although some elements of the latter are still evident.



The building was first built to support the offices of the Malaysian Railways. After many years and some refurbishments, costing in total some RM17 million, the building opened its doors as Muzium Tekstil Negara on January 2010. The museum not only conserves important documents but also exhibits some of the textile traditions of Malaysia. The textiles that are displayed have been collected since 1970 and are displayed in 35 showcases containing 486 exhibits. Due to the fragility of some of these pieces, the displays are changed every 6 to 9 months.

For the second part of our visit we were split into two groups to explore the exhibition galleries after an introduction to the exhibits by the Museum Director, Janet Tee. My group started with the jewelry gallery where ornaments that adorn the body from head to toe were on display. One ornament in particular got everybody's attention, a modesty disc, used by boys and girls when they start to walk and used for a few years to cover their private parts.



The second room displayed some Malaysian textiles with embroidery of gold or silver, called Tekatan. Other fabrics with different types of weaves were also exhibited. There are installations demonstrating the processes involved in the different techniques for traditional prints such as batik.

After the visit was over the ladies got together for the usual lunch and exchange of experiences. Once more the morning was filled with new information and gave us more appreciation about this country that welcomes us all to its shores.

Priscila Milanese Branca
Photos by Vicki Fennessy



DOCTOR BRIDGET WELSH - REPRESENTATION OR RHETORIC IN MALAYSIAN POLITICAL PARTIES

This very popular event attracted more than 50 members and guests who undoubtedly enjoyed both a brisk excursion through the contemporary Malaysian political scene as well as the subsequent vigorous question and answer session, (which, in tribute to the presentation, lasted almost as long). Whilst the audience contained a number who came with a significant interest in what may be viewed as a convoluted subject, Bridget swiftly reduced the multi-faceted Malaysian political scene into digestible portions that, for some, are normally only on the periphery of their daily digest of current events. Bridget had a very engaging lecturing style and kept the attention of her audience with a number of personal insights and quick quips.



The lecture could only have been presented by a close observer from the outside

who was capable of absorbing a very wide perspective. The point was made that Malaysian people are thinking ahead of their politicians; this notion seemed to capture the essence of the presentation. However, Malaysian politics can only be viewed in the local context, as, for example, politicians often presented Coffee Shop gossip in a somewhat useless personalisation of the campaign issues, yet this was often demanded by voters. Many of the 'alphabet parties' only appeal either to a single racial group or to one sector of the electorate, and for some of the audience, the disclosures relating to the lesser known politics of East Malaysia was new territory.

The history, challenges and aspirations of all parties were briefly analysed and it was apparent that some of those established for some time have a legacy that, notwithstanding traditional loyalties, the electorate may not be willing to completely ignore. An interesting point was made that some politicians are not multi-lingual and would therefore be unlikely to read the leading newspaper editorials that analysed their policies and explored their record of achievements.

Whilst Malaysian political parties seek new direction and alliances that respond to voter concerns, coalition partners may not always be obvious, although they often provide opportunities for younger politicians to come into the fray on a 'change' agenda. Bridget believed that the pressure for change will continue whilst making the valid point that change itself is rarely linear. The lecture did not close on a pessimistic note as Bridget eagerly looked forward to future developments in which any negativity would be undoubtedly challenged by the many positive aspects of the forces for change.

Stuart Wakefield



EXPLORERS

EXPLORERS VISIT TO KWONG TONG CEMETERY, OCTOBER 11, 2010

In October, Explorers visited the Kuala Lumpur Kwong Tong Cemetery (Heritage Park). Kwong Tong was established in 1885 and is the oldest Chinese cemetery in Kuala Lumpur.



We arrived at the administration centre and were warmly welcomed not by our two contacts, but by the entire cemetery management committee and board of directors! These gentlemen had prepared a program and some historical notes for us. They graciously accompanied us throughout the visit and on to a delicious lunch at the Robson Heights Chinese Restoran, although only a few of them were fluent in English (and none of us knew enough Mandarin or Cantonese).



At the beginning of our tour we were shown a DVD, which provided an overview of the history of Kwong Tong. The DVD had been translated into English only two months previously in an effort by the board to promote the cemetery to tourists and non-Chinese locals.



The cemetery's status was changed recently to that of a heritage park on the basis that graves of up to 100 people of historical importance to Kuala Lumpur lie within Kwong Tong. Because the cemetery is spread over a large area of prime land it was earmarked in the 1990's to be redeveloped. The video and name change are efforts to promote the cemetery so that it will be seen as an important part of local and national heritage and will never be redeveloped.



Our hosts guided us through their small museum about the history of the cemetery with a special section on Kapitan Yap Ah Loy, the founder of Kuala Lumpur. The board is working to translate the displays, as most are written in Chinese.



We were then driven in a minibus past their funeral parlour facilities to visit the tomb of Kapitan Yap Ah Loy. Our main guide, Mr. Wong, answered our questions and provided explanations as the tour progressed. For example, we now know why most Chinese tombs are circular shaped. The shape mimics that of a comfortable chair and also allows for the collection of water (wealth).



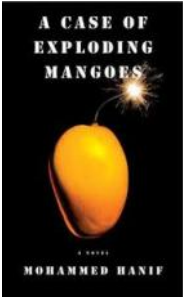
We observed that the management has an enormous task to maintain such a large area in an ever-growing tropical climate. They had kindly cleared sections especially for our visit! Because the cemetery is so expansive, and it was a very hot day, we just had time to scratch the surface of Kwong Tong. But, from our short time there, we witnessed that the board and cemetery staff are clearly passionate about preserving the Kwong Tong Heritage Park. They are gradually building it up to attract history enthusiasts and tourists in order to preserve the cemetery for future generations.

Erica Earl-Spurr

Photos by Erica Earl-Spurr and Brigit Tilborg

Editor's Apology: The article in the October newsletter entitled "Explorers Go To The Dogs" incorrectly credited the wrong author and photographer. The article was written by Pam Curry. The photos were taken by Kim Mole and Gillian Longhurst.

BOOK GROUPS



Book Group 1 : A Case of Exploding Mangoes By Mohammed Hanif

Twelve of us met at Joanne Mahendran's home on Oct 29th for a lively discussion of "A Case of Exploding Mangoes".

This book is inspired by the mysterious way Pakistani President and military dictator General Zia died along with his top Army Generals and the American Ambassador in an air crash in 1988.

The subject matter is intriguing and has been surrounded by mystery, as the case was never resolved. The book takes us back to the months leading up to the event and concludes a few days after the assassination. It gave us a peek inside the workings of the army establishment at that time.

At the center is Ali Shigri, a Pakistan Air Force pilot. His father, one of Zia's colonels, committed suicide under suspicious circumstances. Ali is determined to understand what or who pushed his father to such desperation—and to avenge his death.

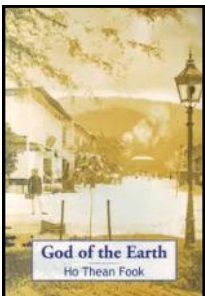
In addition, a lot of different characters (General TM, General Akhtar, Major Kiyani, Baby O) were plotting to kill President Zia, but we were kept guessing. The author has developed these characters quite impressively and all the sub plots come together nicely at the end.

But far from coming to a conclusion about the cause of Zia's death, the author adds to the pile of conspiracy theories, introducing at least six other possible suspects.

The surprise element in the book is its humor. It is unusual for a Pakistani writer to use humor when discussing an important event in the history of Pakistan. The jokes start early in "A Case of Exploding Mangoes," and they keep on coming.

"A Case of Exploding Mangoes" is best understood as a political satire. The group agreed that those who had read the book a second time could appreciate the humor and the nuances better, but most of us were not game to read it one more time. The group was equally divided in recommending the book.

I would say: read it for a laugh!
Sapna Walia.



Book Group 2 : God of the Earth by Ho Thean Fook

In October, Book Group 2 met to discuss *God of the Earth* by Ho Thean Fook. This book was chosen together with *Faces of Courage* in preparation of our trip to Ipoh and Papan in November. *God of the Earth*, Ho's second book, chronicles the life of Ho's grandfather as a child in Papan, a small mining town.

In a review of the book, the Perak Academy wrote, "Under the author's magical touch, the people of Papan spring to life, drawn in all their ordinariness and in vivid colours." We tended to disagree with this statement. Ho does a great job of describing the tin mining industry and cultural aspects of life in Papan, but the book is stilted in terms of its dialogue. One member commented that Ho documents, but does not paint a picture.

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We do believe that it is a good book for local students to read in order to learn more about their cultural history. It is also a worthwhile read in order to learn more about the area (the book includes a map of Papan and historical pictures). We think that it is great to have a balance of historical views in a multi-cultural country like Malaysia, so having a cultural history book written by a Chinese-Malaysian is important.

We had a lengthy discussion about the education system in Malaysia – today versus the Chinese Confucian School discussed in the book. The education system has improved a great deal from the time when people thought that educating a daughter was a waste of money because the family into which she married would benefit from the investment (as stated by one of the character's parents). However, we agreed that some Malaysians still have difficulty thinking "outside of the box". We believe that this is partially due to the rote learning system. However, this too is changing because of the Internet and the availability of blogs that are not censored by the government or other editors.

Another interesting discussion was based on one of the character's comments, "Englishmen are strange people...They like to live in far away and lonely places" (p. 20). Then on pg. 33 the character continues to discuss how Europeans build and maintain roads so they can visit their friends. There is definitely a British legacy here in Malaysia (especially evident to this American!). The British put in place systems – both good and bad – which have shaped Malaysia, including education, judicial, and infrastructure.

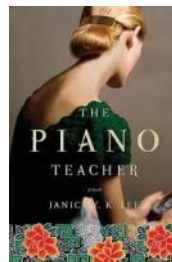
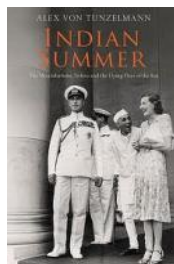
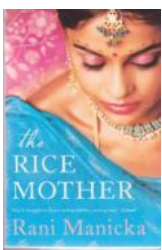
In concluding our discussion before eating a Malaysian-themed lunch, the book group decided that it was nice to read a mix of books – both in caliber (Booker Prize and no prize) and author (local and international). It gives our discussions more depth and reminds us that there are many writing styles.

We look forward to reading *Faces of Courage* next month and going to Ipoh to see in person where these authors received their inspirations.

Elizabeth Havercamp

Book Group 3

An inaugural meeting of a new book group, Book Group 3, was held on October 27th at the home of Elise Hill. This group will meet regularly on the last Wednesday of each month. The group selected books from lists given by Book Groups 1 and 2. Their selections for the remainder of the season, from now until June 2011, are:



Rice Mother	Rani Manicka
Under the Dragon	Rory Maclean
The Piano Teacher	Janice Y K Lee
Green Is The Colour	Lloyd Fernando
Indian Summer	Alex Von Tunzelman
The Man from Saigon	Marti Leimbach
An Artist of the Floating World	Kazuo Ishiguro

ENAK!

Enak! October 2010 Joanne Mahendran

On the evening of October 14th, seventeen of us went on an Enak! adventure to Thong Kee Restaurant in SEA Park, PJ. Part of the fun was an LRT ride on the Putra Line and then a short walk from the Taman Paramount stop to the restaurant. As we arrived, we were greeted by a glorious sunset.



Thong Kee has been famous for its gigantic pork ribs since 1956. It began under a Rain Tree in Medan Selera in Old Town PJ and after many years moved to SS2 and finally to SEA Park. It has been a well-known expat hang-out all these years with Chinese food of high quality and variety but with very reasonable prices. Former expats who return to KL always want to pay a visit. The present restaurant is owned by Thong Kee's grandson who oversees the kitchen while his wife, Jessie Lim, attends to the guests.

The gang gathered with introductions made all round; spouses had been encouraged to attend. There are both air-conditioned and non-air-conditioned sections of the restaurant; we elected to sit outside at two tables pulled together.



We began with crispy duck, one of the specialties of the house which must be ordered ahead; it has a superb herbal yet spicy flavor.

This was followed by the famous Pork Ribs of astounding size, one per person is usually enough. Yam Basket, Butter Prawns and a couple of vegetable dishes were amply supplemented with beer, fruit juices and soft drinks.



One husband commented that finally he could see good value in his wife's MCG membership! HA! He should come to more events! A good time was had by all, so more such evenings have been requested.

Joanne Mahendran



MEMBERS' CULTURAL CORNER

We are introducing a new section in the newsletter for articles and photographs contributed by our members. If you would like to share a story or photos about some place you have been, some thing you enjoyed doing or some moment that inspired you, please send it to mcgnewsletter@yahoo.com. Submissions about SE Asia culture are preferred and we would appreciate your respect of our policy not to promote events of a commercial nature. We hope you enjoy these two articles that Dawn submitted and that they inspire you to share your adventures with the MCG membership.

BORNEO INTERNATIONAL BEADS CONFERENCE



In October, I attended the inaugural Borneo International Beads Conference in Miri, Sarawak. Approximately 120 bead enthusiasts from a number of different countries joined the conference to share their knowledge and appreciation of beads. The conference was supported by World Crafts Council and the Conference Director was Heidi Munan. You may recognize Heidi's name as the author of the books *Beads of Borneo* and *Culture Shock: Malaysia*.



Presentations took place over a two day period. Reita Rahim, a familiar name to MCG members, started the presentations by discussing the use of organic materials (fruits, seeds, stems, roots, shells, bones, teeth, and husks) as beads and ornamentation among the Orang Asli and Rungus. My friend from Indonesia, Yekti Kusmartono, spoke about modern day bead making by recycling glass in central Java. Both Reita and Yekti also had very popular sales tables over the course of the conference.



Jamey D. Allen, a highly regarded beads expert, presented a paper on heirloom beads in SE Asia. This presentation was nicely complemented with presentations on heirloom beads given from (Sarawak indigenous) cultural and family perspectives by Eileen Paya Foong (Dayak) and Poline Bala (kelebit). In addition to the material culture value inherent in beads (as ornamentation, trade objects, signifiers of status and objects for ritual use), both women mentioned that heirloom beads were important because of family oral histories and kinship relationships associated with heirloom beads. Eileen told the story of how one bead came into her family as a result of capturing the wife and child of a man be-headed on a head-hunting expedition. These presentations were further complemented by local indigenous families bringing their heirloom beads to the conference for us to see and learn from.

Other presenters included: Heidi Munan on modern day bead culture in Sarawak; Nor Azmah Abdul Kadir on the cottage industry of clay bead production in Kampong Long Tuma, Sarawak; Ipoi Datan on beads from archaeological sites in Sarawak; Cheah Hwei-Fen on Nyonya beadwork; and David Baradas on the bead cultures of the Philippines.

I thoroughly enjoyed myself and learned a lot. This first conference was considered a success and it has already been announced that the 2nd conference will take place next year on the 8th and 9th of October 2011. For information on this I encourage you to check the following website:

www.crafthub.com.my

Text and photos by Dawn Berger Babcock



A NIGHT OF DANDIYA AT SHREE LAKSHMI NARAYAN TEMPLE



I love dandiya...the colors of the participants' clothing and the movements of the dance are mesmerizing to me. Dandiya is a folk dance from India (Gujerat), and along with another dance called Garba, is associated with Navratri. Dandiya involves striking sticks together in a particular series of movements—I have been told this dance represents a mock fight between the Goddess Durga and Asura Mahishasura.

I first had the pleasure of participating in dandiya, 20+ years ago, when I still lived in the United States and had many Indian students and friends. They introduced me to the Gujerati community's Navratri observations, including garba and dandiya dancing that took place in school auditoriums.

Since moving to Kuala Lumpur a few years ago, I have been wondering where to find dandiya during Navratri. When I learned that MCG was hosting a talk about Navratri at a KL temple, I knew I would finally find out for sure when and where dandiya took place. The talk actually occurred after Navratri had ended, but I was in luck because they announced that the temple would be having one more night of garba and dandiya on the night of the full moon following the end of Navratri.



Knowing that this would also be a photographer's delight, I contacted Cheryl Hoffmann and encouraged her to accompany me for a cultural experience and photographic challenge! We were welcomed at the temple entrance to an array of Indian curries, snacks and sweets for sale. Inside the temple, the musicians were warming up, while guests and participants socialized. Soon after we had made our way into the hall, the announcer called for the dancing to begin...

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CHERYLJHOFFMANN

CHERYLJHOFFMANN

A NIGHT OF DANDIYA AT SHREE LAKSHMI NARAYAN TEMPLE (CONT'D)

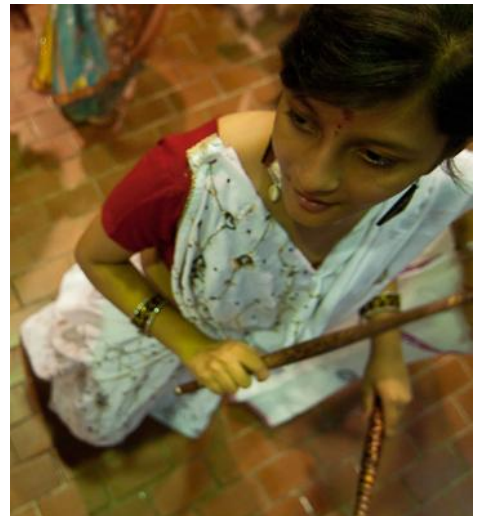


The dancing took place at an outside community space within the temple grounds. A small altar was erected in the middle of the space and had been there since the beginning of Navratri. Dancers interacted with each other by dancing around the small altar in concentric circles—one moving clockwise, the other counterclockwise. Each dance began slowly, but the



movements became more pronounced and faster as time went on. Each dance cycle lasted approximately 20 minutes. Dancing was segregated by gender, and remained that way thru the night. This surprised me because with my experience in the United States, we also did mixed dancing among men and women, young and old all together.

The night began and ended with a women's dandiya. After taking enough photos and admiring the dancers all night...I just had to get up and dance too. I gathered up a set of sticks and joined the outer circle.





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

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

**Joanneke Verweil
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68000 Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia.**

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Email	Explorers _____		
Enak! _____		

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?