

Kumpulan Kebudayaan Malaysia Kuala Lumpur & Selangor

Newsletter of the Malaysian Culture Group August 2009

MCG PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

HERITAGE WALK

**Join Us for a walk around Dataran
Merdeka and Surrounding Buildings**

August 12, Wednesday

BRICKFIELDS

A Morning of Massage

August 27, Thursday

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There are a few sites where you can get information about a myriad of events happening in Malaysia.

Info on entire arts scene
www.kakiseni.com.my

Central Market and Annexe
www.centralmarket-kl.com.my

Heritage Society Malaysia
www.badanwarisan.org.my

National Museum
www.museum.gov.my

Film Club
www.kelabsenifilem.com

Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre
www.klpac.com

If you know of any other websites, do share them with us. Have fun exploring Malaysia.

Coming Events -

Hari Raya Pasar: Breaking of the fast - Wednesday 9th September

Newcomers Coffee Morning - Thursday 1st October

Lama Samten: A talk on tibetan medicine - 29th October

Nine Emperor Gods festival talk - Mid October (TBC)

Nine Emperor Gods festival temple visit (a follow on from talk) - late October (TBC)

**Deepavali temple visit and lunch - Mid October
Bahai Faith - Late November (TBC)**

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear MCG members,

Holiday time is here again, well for the northern hemisphere that is. The southern hemisphere is at Christmas time, splitting our year into 2 halves. I hope everyone has been enjoying their time back home or with visitors or perhaps better still going somewhere really exciting as we are spoilt for choice here.

I was invited to the KL Speakers Club for the graduation of this year's students. This was a very interesting morning, the members have to work quite hard learning how to present a talk. I enjoyed listening to the diverse subjects they had chosen to talk about. Some of the speakers were dressed in their national dress. I enjoy having occasions to dress up, but with the humidity here I dress for comfort.

Another invitation was to join the International Woman's Association for their Newcomers Luncheon. Fran and I had a very enjoyable time meeting some of the ladies. They were a small group as their members are also away for the 'summer'. The ladies were very smartly dressed this is because they have a prize for the best dressed member. Do you think we should try that???? We even had a lesson in Salsa, a good way to work off the excesses of our lunch.

Our last four events have all been well attended. Our morning with Jehan at "Heritage of the Orient" proved to very interesting. Jehan explained about all the different furniture she has collected and the extensive collection of Buddhas.

I found Mark's talk about the work that Badan Warisan carries out here in Malaysia, very encouraging as there is more awareness to save the architectural heritage. So much is still being lost to the property developers who only want to build high-rise modern tower blocks and shopping malls. Prince Charles, over the years in the UK has tried hard to get the property developers and architects to understand that old and new mix well so long as they complement each other, thus stretching their design skills to new heights to achieve this goal. This was far from a 'dry topic' Mark has great enthusiasm for what he and the very small group are working for in Badan Warisan. It is in our interest as we will have less to visit once all has been turned into looking like any other city in the world. Sorry I am into conservation, I will get off my soap box now!!!

We enjoyed a lovely intimate morning with Guat Eng Chua at Robin's home, just like old times being back where Lin used to live. Thank you to Robyn for the use of your home. Guat talked about herself, her students and how she writes. The topic of children's books and their reading and how it is very strange for them to be reading Enid Blyton or American writers as these do not translate to life of children here in the tropics. We laughed at the idea of a family picnic in the forest and of the ants at the very least helping you with your picnic. So reading these books are now not helping the young Malaysian writers to find an identity for their own writing about life here.

Guat also read from her book "Echoes of Silence", which brought the book to life for us and when I read it I will hear her voice, so making it more personal. Guat's book "The Old House" which is a collection of short stories about life of the ordinary Malaysian people is well worth a read. Does not matter where we come from we can all be affected by the same pleasures and troubles of life.

We finished our 1/2year events with an afternoon visit to Carcosa. Caroline met us and gave an interesting tour of some of the hotel suites. Then it was down to the reason for being there, the Afternoon Tea with its rich history. It was the Duchess of Bedford who started the habit of having a tray with tea, bread and butter brought to her in the mid afternoon as in those days Luncheon was served around 12 noon and Dinner was not until around 8 o'clock or even 9 o'clock, so she was a little peckish. It then became a habit for her friends to join her, so this is how the high-society ladies started "Afternoon Tea" but of course they had to have more than bread and butter so sandwiches and pastries along with scones and clotted cream and preserves were added. High tea is very different as it is around 6 o'clock and consisted of a full dinner for the 'common people'. It is much more of a man's meal than the ladies social diversion of what to do with their afternoons.

I hope you do not mind me adding a history lesson on how the custom of afternoon tea started. I love history so could not resist adding it.

I have added my impressions of these events to my greeting as Ginny has mentioned that for these last few events the EPT have found it difficult to get members to do the write up for our newsletter. I would like to encourage you please help us with this as the committee cannot do this task. You do not have to worry about not being able to write or English not being your first language. This is just our newsletter so we are not aiming for a Pulitzer Prize. As we are an international group it is good to have our write-ups with regional differences. It makes it more what we are as a group, so please do not be afraid to come forward we can even have more than one person's impression of the event. We are not looking for too many facts about the event just the

impression. Jaishree the editor will tidy it up for you. I used to be too afraid to do anything, well still afraid but am trying to do things as I am very dyslexic. We are a friendly group and like our newsletter to reflect that we are an international group. So please help to keep our newsletter interesting. Due to my dyslexia my computer quite often just gives up on me which is why you could have noticed some of my strange mistakes.

We are also launching our new website which I hope you will find exciting. We have made lots of changes and made it more interactive. We will be looking into sending the Newsletter only on the website in the future. This could help with some people not being able to receive or open the documents. Robert Tyabji has agreed to be our new Webmaster working our New Improved Website. By the time you read this you will already have been sent the details of the Website.

We have 2 events for August. One is a walking tour on 12th August. There will be only 12 places for this event so please reserve your place early. The walk around Merdeka Square and surrounding area is well worth participating in as we still learn things even if we have been here for years.

After all that walking the next event on 27th August is for a morning of massage with Lee Sheng Chow, who after losing his sight as a young man had to find a very different way to earn a living. From his training to be an engineer to a masseur, so from a hard world to the softer world of bodies. He has an interesting story to tell. For those who might never have experienced a massage from a blind person I can tell you they have wonderful touch they are very perceptive to the body they are touching and great healing can be the benefit for us.

All the notices for these events are in The Newsletter.

Looking forward to see you at some of these events in August.

Elise

EVENTS BOOKING POLICY

Wait list: Events Planning follows a policy of booking places for events on a first come first served basis. If an event becomes full then a wait list is created and participants will be informed as soon as possible if a place becomes available.

Cancellations: If for some reason you cannot attend a programme when you have reserved a place, please let the Events Team know as soon as you can. Cancellations received within less than 48 hours are only eligible for a refund if the vacancy can be filled from the wait list or if the person can find another member to take their place.

Refunds: can only be given if the EPT has 48 hours notice of a cancellation. Please note that some events have a cancellation time of longer than 48 hours, which will be indicated in the event description.

Phones: Please give your mobile phone number when you register for an event.

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

Heritage Walk - Dataran Merdeka and Surrounding Buildings



- DATE:** Wednesday 12th August 2009
- TIME:** 9.00am for 9.30am start (duration approx 2 hours)
- VENUE:** Meet in the porch below the clock tower of the Sultan Abdul Samad building (known as the Supreme Courts) opposite Merdeka Square (Please have good walking shoes, water bottle and hat/umbrella).
- COST:** RM25 members and non-members (limit 12 people)
- RSVP:** Please email mcgevents@yahoo.com attn Brylie Henderson or phone 012-288-7091 by Monday 10 August 2009 – don't forget your cell phone number and indication of whether you'll be attending lunch at the Coliseum Café following the walk.

A walk around the Padang, known as Merdeka Square since 1988, is really a walk around Kuala Lumpur's Past. Surrounded by distinctive government buildings, the five acre green has served as a vegetable plot, police parade ground, a sports field and the site where Malaysia received Independence.

We are fortunate to have Mr Lee Choo Sim, a guide from the Heritage tour group, take us on what promises to be a very interesting walk. We will hear how KL developed from a swampy trading post to what was to become the centre for the growing European community, taking in the Natural History Building, St Mary's church, Govt Printing Building, Royal Selangor Club, the General Post Office and the Sultan Abdul Samad Building to name a few.

Unfortunately, most of these buildings have now closed to the public, so we can only view from the outside, but we do get to see and appreciate the stunning architectural styles from Islamic Moorish to English Gothic that have given this part of Kuala Lumpur the distinctive look that we know today.

This Morning walk will be followed by a lunch at the famous Coliseum Café (98-100 Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman) so when registering please indicate whether you will be attending the lunch so a Reservation booking for numbers can be made.

A MORNING OF MASSAGE IN BRICKFIELDS

DATE: Thursday 27th August 2009
TIME: 10am for a 10.30am start
VENUE: Urut Tradisional PB, 4A Jalan Thambapillay, Brickfields
COST: RM40
RSVP: Please email mcgevents@yahoo.com attn Vicki Fennessy or call 012 6982591 by Mon 24 August 2009

If you'd like to experience a relaxing massage or foot reflexology, carried out by the blind masseurs in Brickfields, please join us.

There are several massage centres in Brickfields. A rather extraordinary man – Mr Lee Sheng Chew, started this one. Mr Lee was studying engineering when an eye disease left him blind at 21-years-old. He said he was “booted out” from university and for some time afterwards, was quite depressed.

Meeting other blind people who were happily working inspired him to decide to live life to the fullest and wrested him from that downward spiral into depression. He returned to study at HELP University, meanwhile selling insurance policies and whatever else he could to save monies.

Three years later, he opened his first massage centre and has since opened several others in the Klang Valley and teaches massage methods he learnt in China. Mr. Lee is also the founder of the Malaysian Disabled Persons Sports Association, also competing in shot put and javelin.

Mr. Lee will talk to us first, about how the blind got involved in the masseur business, followed by either a body massage or foot reflexology treatment for one hour.

When registering, please state your preference for body massage or reflexology and if for body massage, please advise if you prefer a male or female masseur.

This is one time when last minute reservations would be discouraged as we need to be sure that there are sufficient masseurs available on the day. Our morning of Massage will be followed by lunch somewhere in the vicinity.

REPORTS FROM PREVIOUS EVENTS

TRAVEL TIPS – BHUTAN

On Thursday, May 14th, 2009 MCG members were treated to a virtual tour of Bhutan, Land of the Thunder Dragon, by MCG's very own Pam Boucher. Pam and her husband, Terry visited Bhutan in the fall of 2008. We would like to thank her for sharing her experiences and pictures with us.



Pam and Terry's incredible journey began as soon as they landed at the Bhutan International Airport in Paro. Druk-Air – The Royal Bhutan Airlines is the only national carrier that flies into Bhutan.

They were received by the appointed guide. Pam informed us that tours in Bhutan had to be booked through a Bhutanese Government approved Tour Operators. The Royal Government of Bhutan set the minimum selling prices for packages to Bhutan and this had to be paid in US dollars prior to arrival in Bhutan.

Pam and Terry had booked themselves into a B&B Bhutanese style as part of their travel. Pictures of modest multi-storey wooden house looked exquisite against the picturesque backdrop of the Bhutanese landscape. Our thirsty travellers were greeted with a cup of hot Butter-tea. Though the beverage was a local favourite, it certainly wasn't their cup of tea. Later, the host served them some local dishes – Beef stew, Lamb curry, delicious red rice, sir-fried vegetables and a very hot-chilli sauce (a signature Bhutanese dish).

For their first night, our travellers tucked themselves into a warm bed listening to a sweet music of barking stray dogs (all night long). Pam mentioned how one could see these stray dogs everywhere. Another remarkable event was the Traditional Hot Bath at a neighbouring house. Pam seemed a little too at home, at least

from the picture.



The next day, they travelled to Bhutan's most famous tourist attraction, the Taktshang Monastery, also known as the "Tiger's Nest", located in the district of Paro. Pam shared her pictures of the temple located 3,120 m (10,200 feet) above sea level, some 700 meters (2,300 feet) above the bottom of Paro valley.

We did get a glimpse of the narrow roads they travelled to get to the monastery. There was also a picture of a toppled van that said to have taken a few days to clear due to bad weather and lack of proper road assistance.



Later, they travelled to Thimpu, the capital city of Bhutan. The city boasts to be the only one free of any traffic lights. The main thoroughfare is lined with shops, restaurants, retail arcades and public buildings. Rapid expansion of the city can be seen through the considerable building projects seen all around the valley. Pam shared her pictures of the Royal University, official Government building and other landmarks with us.

Pam and Terry happened to be there during one of the important Buddhist Festivals and were allowed to watch the main festivities. Pam shared her experience on the events of that day especially the well-known dances loved by the Bhutanese who come dressed in their best for the very special social occasion for all Bhutanese families. Since photography was not permitted, there were no pictures of the event.



The images of the local were very interesting. Pam informed us that to strengthen Bhutan's identity as an independent country, Bhutanese law required all Bhutanese citizens to wear the national dress in public areas and as formal wear. Men were always seem to be dressed in their National Dress, known as gho, a knee-length robe tied at the waist by a cloth belt known as the kera. Women wore an ankle-length dress, the kira, which was clipped at one shoulder and tied at the waist. An accompaniment to the kira was a long-sleeved blouse, the toego, which was worn underneath the outer layer. Pam said that social status and class was determined by the texture, colours, and decorations that embellished the garments. Differently coloured scarves and shawls were important indicators of social standing as well, as Bhutan has traditionally been a feudal society. Children were also encouraged to dress in traditional outfit.

Images of Bhutan and Pam's enthusiastic presentation did leave us, the audience, in awe for this country and its rich culture and beauty.

Annie Irlapati

Lembaga Tabung Haji

On June 17 our group, with much anticipation, met in the foyer of the Tabung Haji, that uniquely shaped and distinctive building (often referred to as the "pepper pot") on Jalan Tun Razak near Jalan Ampang.

The building was designed by a Malaysian architect, Hijjas Kasturi, who also designed Menara Telekom (the building inspired by a bamboo reed near Mid Valley) and the Maybank building in Chinatown. Tabung Haji was completed in 1985 at a cost of approximately RM110m, paid in cash by the Muslim Independent Community. It is designed around five long lines that run vertically. These represent the five Pillars of Islam – faith, prayer, tithes, fasting, and the pilgrimage to Mecca (the Haj).

This fifth pillar brings us to the core purpose of the Tabung Haji – financing, organising, and managing Malaysian Muslim's pilgrimage. It acts as a "piggy bank," allowing Malaysian Muslims to gradually save for their pilgrimage, as well as for other purposes. The Tabung Haji invests in various economic activities in a manner acceptable to Islam, returning profits to all depositors in the form of dividends. It also provides all the necessary facilities and support for the 26,000 Malaysian pilgrims who travel to Mecca each year. These services are provided through 126 offices located throughout Malaysia and beside all main airports.

We made ourselves comfortable in the small theatre, where we were presented with an 18 minute film which showcased the Tabung Haji and provided a clear idea of just what this dynamic organisation is all about. This was followed by a question and answer session which gave us a wonderful insight into what the Haj involved, and the amazing logistics involved in organising each pilgrimage.

Pilgrims need to be well equipped and undergo a 3-level course on how to perform the Haj and prepare them for the different culture, language and the millions of people congregating in Mecca. They also undergo extensive medical checks.

Tabung Haji organise special Haj passports and obtain visas, arrange all transport, accommodation, banking and medical facilities, as well as arrange for Malaysian food to be provided to pilgrims in Mecca.

The second half of our experience was a talk on the investment side of the Tabung Haj – I wont go into it here but it was very comprehensive and for those with a bit more knowledge on the investment side of banking found it very interesting – there were certainly many questions and queries.

We could have continued with many more questions but time was running out. In keeping with Islamic custom, we had a very pleasant morning tea and our generous host provided each of us with a bag of souvenirs.

We were made to feel very welcome and comfortable. I think we all left feeling very privileged to have had the opportunity to visit and gained a little more understanding of Islam and the purpose of the Tabung Haji.

Ginny Connolly

Selamat Datang

**Margaret Vasna
Satya Sundaram
Florence Kosmala
Fiona and Andrew Cooper
Kerry and Stephen Bracker
Kim and Bryan Mole
Anja Niederberger and Uwe Pecher**

Selamat Jalan

Pam and Terry Boucher

MCG members with the Venerable Lama Samten

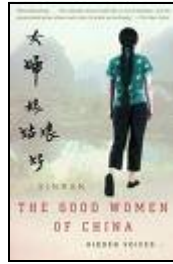


MCG BOOK CORNER

Book Group One

Title: The Good Women of China

Author: Xinran Xue.



Twelve of 15 members met at Sapna Walia's place on the 22nd

May to discuss the book. It is actually a compilation of interviews the author, Xinran, conducted during her time as a radio broadcaster in China in the 1980s.

Many of the interviews were drawn from calls-in received through Xinran's widely popular radio program 'Words on the Night Breeze'. She also interviewed other women whom she sought out for their experiences as Chinese women and their status in society at that time.

The book highlighted social issues prevalent at that time such as infanticide, son preference, suppression of sexuality, homosexuality and the sexism embedded in the Chinese culture and society. The book gave us a real life insight into the oppressive lives of women and their experiences without which the rest of the world would not have known since China was closed to the world at the start of the Cultural Revolution and the rise of Communism. Many women's stories involved rape, forced marriages, deception and abuse at the hands of the authorities and the government. All of these men gained their power over women from pre-existing cultural practices and furthered their control through the existing power structures.

The book was simply written and an easy read but the stories were so revealing, brutal and disturbing that many of us would not read it for the second time. We also find the style of writing lacking in depth. Although the stories were painful recollections of the lives of the women in China, we, the readers could not actually feel their pain. We felt the author could have made the characters more alive so that the readers could connect with their feelings.

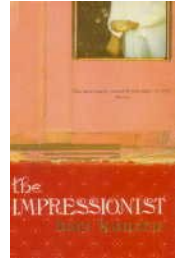
The book was first written in Chinese in London in 1997 after the author fled from China and was translated into English by Esther Tyldesley.

W. Norzela.

Book Group 2

Title: The Impressionist

Author : Hari Kunzru



This book was enjoyed by our group "If he wrote another I'd certainly read it" was the endorsement of one of our members

Through a strange accident of birth Pran Nath (the impressionist) is passed off by his Indian mother as the child of her wealthy husband. He grows up in luxury near the Taj Mahal, however all this changes when he is 15 and his true parentage is revealed.

He's tossed out on the street and there his extraordinary journey begins. He re-invents himself many times over from prostitute to foster child. His chance meeting with an unfortunate young Englishman provides his escape from India and his passport to yet another existence this time in Victorian England.

His adventures as a young "Englishman " continue and provide more settings for the author's elegant descriptions and evocative images although most of us felt the ending was a little unsatisfactory. Worth reading. Book Group 2 would recommend it.

Lynn Davies

Book Group One

Title: **Snow Flower and Secret Fan**

Author: **Lisa See**



On July 26th, eight of us met at Diana Cooper's home to discuss Lisa See's 'Snow Flower and Fan.' This tale takes place in 19th century

China, a period in time when it was better to have 'dogs than daughters' and your role as a wife was limited to bearing sons, when girls had their feet bound, and then spent the rest of their lives in seclusion with only a single window from which to see.

Illiterate and isolated, they were not expected to think, be creative, or have emotions. But in one remote county, women developed their own secret code, *nu shu* – "women's writing" – the only gender-based written language to have been found in the world. Some girls were paired as "old-sames" or "laotongs" in emotional matches that lasted throughout their lives. They painted letters on fans, embroidered messages on handkerchiefs, and composed stories, thereby reaching out of their windows to share their hopes, dreams, and accomplishments.

Generally speaking we all thought the book was likeable and relatively enjoyable! The style of writing has been described as magical, haunting fiction, beautiful and graceful on See's website. We as a whole found it, although easy to read with a flowery narrative, to be stilted, affected and ponderous. Lisa See, we felt was not a sophisticated writer. She opened the book well, with a lot of potential, however, maybe the period covered was too long and to give it credibility wove in factual / historical bits that didn't really fit. They left us asking more questions really!

We concluded that Lily the protagonist was too self centered and self involved to be an old same. She wasn't as naive as the book portrayed. The foot binding process has been explicitly described, as is the role of women and the class structure that existed at that time. It was interesting to read about Nu Shu, its evolution and how the women used this to express themselves and communicate.

This brought the question of background being a very important factor in comprehension and how Lily's poor background did lead to a lack of understanding the nuances of Nu Shu and Snow Flower's phraseology. It brought home to all of, how in today's day and age, as

our means of communication gets more and impersonal, misunderstanding grow perceptibly.

We learnt the Chinese character for 'mother love' consists of 2 parts: one meaning 'pain', the other meaning 'love'. Lily's relationship with her mother exemplifies this.

We discussed whether emotionally or physically there was an element of truth in this, and if time had changed this perception.

We also discussed at length other traditional practices, which today have become cultural practices and are tied to our identities. Are these truly important factors of our identities or just tools of manipulation? We are all guilty in some way or another of being culturally manipulated and if we don't adhere what are the repercussions.

Finally we were left with the question – 'Are there any positive stories before the Cultural Revolution or are they all like this with negative portrayals of women?'

All in all, the book gave rise to many of questions that have relevance today.

Nisha Dobberstein



Kumpulan Kebudayaan Malaysia
Kuala Lumpur & Selangor

**New Members
Application Form**
(one subscription for the whole family)

2009 Membership Form

Membership fees: Annual Membership: January —December 2009 RM 60
Half-year Membership: July—December 2009 RM 30

Please make your cheque payable to Malaysian Culture Group and mail with this form to:

**Annie Irlapati
A 2-2-1 Persiaran Persekutuan,
Sri Bukit Persekutuan,
KL 50480, Malaysia.**

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

The MCG Board is investigating alternative means of delivering information. Would you be interested in receiving the newsletter solely by email? Yes, I'd be happy to get a monthly email with the newsletter.
 No, I want to have a paper copy mailed to me.

MCG is run by volunteers. What would you like to do in 2008?

- Write a report about a meeting
- Mail newsletters
- 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?



Kumpulan Kebudayaan Malaysia
Kuala Lumpur & Selangor
Malaysian Culture Group

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IMPORTANT NOTICE

All information contained in this newsletter is for members' use only. For any contents to be printed elsewhere, permission must be obtained from the President.

The Malaysian Culture Group is a registered, non-profit organization made up of Malaysians and people from all over the world who wish to increase their knowledge of the art, history, religion and culture of Malaysia and Southeast Asia.

Website: www.malaysianculturegroup.com