

**15<sup>th</sup> Malaysia-Singapore Forum | 7-8 Dec 2015**

**FASS Research Division Seminar Room, AS7 06-42**

**The Shaw Foundation Building, 5 Arts Link, Singapore 117570**

Hosted by the FASS, National University of Singapore | Co-organized with the FASS, University of Malaya

# **POLITICS OF HERITAGE**

The notion of heritage has become an increasingly prominent theme in the socio-economic, political and cultural landscapes of contemporary Singapore and Malaysia. Against a wider milieu of globalization and modernization, heritage provides a focal point where both these relatively young nations aim to retain as well as claim semblances of objectified and embodied histories. As a consequence, the term itself is increasingly interpreted as being synonymous with calls to conserve and preserve a myriad of local sites, languages, trades and traditions—material and non-material.

This raises important questions of what stakes are involved, who the stakeholders are, what kinds of implications there are for nationhood, national identity, social collectives and individuals. With ‘heritage’ becoming progressively politicized, the term is increasingly a loaded concept with the means to value-add, privilege, and/or justify existence.

As heritage movements and processes gain momentum, it becomes urgent to critically examine what is included and excluded from this growing frame. Likewise, we need to scrutinize the main drivers and agendas behind heritage ascription. The strategic positioning of institutions and individuals in relation to heritage discourses can acutely reflect socio-economic and political ideologies articulated by governments and businesses alike.

This forum seeks to query how heritage, heritage-making processes and the ways in which these are communicated can influence or alter power relations between governments on the international stage, governments and citizenry, civil groups and personal agencies in society.



**UNIVERSITY  
OF MALAYA**



National University  
of Singapore



**PROGRAMME**  
**Day 1: 7<sup>th</sup> December 2015 (Monday)**

9:00 am – 9:15 am	<b>REGISTRATION</b>
9:15 am – 9:30 am	<b>WELCOME REMARKS</b>  Vice-Dean of FASS (NUS) Prof. Lionel Wee Deputy Dean of FASS (UM) Assoc Prof. Shanthi Thambiah
9:30 am – 10:30 am	<b>SESSION I – REVIEWING HISTORIES &amp; IDENTITIES</b>  <b>Identity, History, and Postcoloniality in Malaysia: Nation and the Artifice of Heritage</b> Assoc Prof. Sharmani Patricia Gabriel, English Department, UM  <b>The Connected Histories of Johor and Singapore</b> Adjunct Assoc Prof. Kwa Chong Guan, Department of History, NUS  <b>The Role of the National Museum in Representing Malaysian Identity</b> Yasaman Alsadat Hosseini, Masters Candidate, UM
10:30 am – 11:00 am	Q&A – Chair: Dr. Sivachandralingam Sundara Raja
11:00 am – 11:30 am	<b>TEA BREAK</b>
11:30 am – 12:30 pm	<b>SESSION II – HERITAGE AND THE COMMUNITY</b>  <b>Heritage Making and Value to the City: Challenges for Community and City</b> Assoc Prof. Ho Kong Chong, Department of Sociology, NUS  <b>Orang Asli and Protected Areas: Are Jahai Partners or Muted Heritage in the Royal Belum State Park?</b> Kamal Solhaimi Fadzil, Department of Anthropology & Sociology, UM  <b>Mapping Heritage in the Streets: Helping to Reconnect Youth with Disappearing Heritages</b> Dr Susan Philip, English Department, UM
12:30 pm – 1:00pm	Q&A – Chair: Assoc Prof. T.C. Chang
1:00 pm – 2:00 pm	<b>LUNCH BREAK</b>
2:00 pm – 3:00 pm	<b>SESSION III – RE-READING HERITAGE IN TEXTS AND LITERATURE</b>  <b>Texting and Booking Heritage: The Euphoria in Heritage Making and Its Limit</b> Dr Azhar Ibrahim, Department of Malay Studies, NUS  <b>Losing Historical Heritage to Politically Incubated Heritage: The Case of the Malaysian Indians</b> Dr. Sivachandralingam Sundara Raja, History Department, UM  <b>Reclaiming the Probable Amid Perpetuating Tenuity: Historicising Two Discursive Legacies in the Writings of Munsyi Abdullah</b> Dr. Kelvin Lawrence, Postdoc Fellow, Department of History, NUS
3:00 pm – 3:30pm	Q&A – Chair: Assoc Prof. Sharmani Patricia Gabriel
3:30 pm – 4:00 pm	<b>TEA BREAK</b>
4:00 pm – 4:40 pm	<b>SESSION IV – NEGOTIATING MODERNIZATION AND HERITAGE</b>  <b>A Tradition of Modernity: Reading the past of Malaysian Science and Technology through the case of Rubber Research</b>

	Leow Wei Yi, PhD Candidate, Comparative Asian Studies, NUS  <b>Demolition as an Act of Remembering - Old National Library Building</b> Sim Yang Jun Bernard, Masters Candidate, Department of Political Science, NUS
4:40 pm – 5:00pm	Q&A – Chair: Dr. Kelvin Lawrence
6:45 pm	<b>DINNER</b>

## Day 2: 8<sup>th</sup> December 2015 (Tuesday)

9:30 am – 10:30 am	<b>SESSION V – ART &amp; ARTISTRY</b>  <b>Illegal Art on Legal Walls: Graffiti in Singapore</b> Assoc Prof. T.C. Chang, Department of Geography, NUS  <b>Aging with Kumar's political semiotics</b> Jyh Wee Sew, Lecturer, Centre for Language Studies, NUS  <b>Pua Kumbu and the Politics of Heritage</b> Janet Rata Noel (PhD Candidate), Gender Studies Programme, UM
10:30 am – 11:00am	Q&A – Chair: Assoc Prof. Shanthi Thambiah
11:00 am – 11:30 am	<b>TEA BREAK</b>
11:30 am – 12:30 pm	<b>SESSION VI – HERITAGE IN SITU</b>  <b>The Past, Present and the Future: Chinese Cemeteries in Malaysia</b> Prof. Danny Wong Tze Ken, Department of History, UM Dr. Ong Siew Kian, Department of Chinese Studies, UM (Presenter)  <b>Preservation of Colonial vs Precolonial Heritage on the Hills of Singapore and Melaka</b> Prof. John N Mksic, Department of Southeast Asian Studies, NUS  <b>Conservation of Tangible heritage: Some lessons learnt from Singapore and Malaysia's agreement on Tanjong Pagar Rail Station</b> Dr. Lili Yulyadi Arnakim, Department of Southeast Asian Studies, UM
12:30 pm – 1:00pm	Q&A – Chair: Adjunct Assoc Prof. Kwa Chong Guan
1:00 pm – 2:00 pm	<b>LUNCH BREAK</b>
2:00 pm – 3:00 pm	<b>SESSION VII – POLITICIZING CULTURAL REPRESENTATION</b>  <b>Singapore's (m)other Tongue Policy: the Case of the Indians in Singapore</b> Ritu Jain, PhD Candidate, South Asian Studies Program, NUS  <b>Cultural Heritage Politics of Chinese Medicine in Singapore</b> Pauline Luk, PhD Candidate, Department of Communication and New Media, NUS  <b>Understanding the Perceptions of the Host Country's Food Culture among Myanmarese Domestic Workers in Singapore</b> Cheong Kakit, Masters Candidate, Department of Communication and New Media, NUS Eugene Gao, Independent Researcher
3:00 pm – 3:30pm	Q&A – Chair: Assoc Prof. Hanafi Hussin
3:30 pm	<b>CLOSING REMARKS &amp; TEA</b>

## Abstracts

### SESSION I – REVIEWING HISTORIES & IDENTITIES

#### Identity, History, and Postcoloniality in Malaysia: Nation and the Artifice of Heritage

Sharmani Patricia Gabriel

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Contemporary studies have illustrated how notions of identity, history and nationhood may be woven into the concept of official heritage, and how the latter, intertwined with notions of cultural truth or authenticity, is often geared towards delivering political objectives. This association of political power with identities and histories as well as objects, practices and places has led scholars to query the process of heritage making and the relationship between the state and heritage management more generally. This paper focuses on examining such dynamics in the Malaysian context, demonstrating how prevalent ideas about heritage intersect with larger political questions facing Malaysia. Towards this end, it draws on postcolonial theoretical perspectives to examine the cultural politics involved in the ownership and control of the nation's past, as well as to the Malaysian state's use of heritage to establish various fictions that allow for its ongoing hegemony in the construction of the nation's identity and history.

#### The Connected Histories of Johor and Singapore

Kwa Chong Guan

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The dominant narrative of Singapore and Johor history is that it began in 1819 when Stamford Raffles negotiated a Treaty with Temenggong 'Abdu'r-Rahman and Tengku Hussein allowing the Hon. Company to establish a settlement on Singapore and the Temenggong's descendants shifted to Johor which they opened for development with support of Singapore's growing merchant communities. This presentation proposes an earlier era of connected histories in the 16th to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries of Johor and Singapore. Reviewing the archaeological collection of surface finds recovered from the Sungei Johor in the 1930's to the 1960's in the context of the *Sejarah Melayu* narratives and recently retrieved Portuguese and Dutch records, the presentation proposed a reconstruction of the Johor sultanate established early in the 16<sup>th</sup> century on the upper reaches of the Sungei Johor as a classic riverine polity, similar to 7<sup>th</sup> century Srivijaya on the Musi river. Singapore occupied a strategic location in this riverine polity. It was the location of a port which the Flemish trader Jacques de Coutre described as the best in the Eastern Seas and was under the control of a portmaster or Shabandar appointed by the Sultan of Johor. The presentation will attempt to locate the historical development of this Johor sultanate within the larger context of Luso-Dutch competition and conflict for control of the waters around Singapore and speculate on the decline of this Sungei Johor polity in the 18<sup>th</sup> century such that Raffles in 1819 found only Temenggong 'Abdu'r-Rahman and his *orang laut* supporters and a few other fishermen on the island.

#### The Role of the National Museum in Representing Malaysian Identity

Yasaman Alsadat Hosseini

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Through changes in concepts of nation and identity, accentuated by the rise of multiculturalism, national museums all over the world have been taking on a significant role in representing their

[new] nation's identity. Within the context of Malaysia's multicultural identity, this study examines the role of the National Museum of Malaysia in representing Malaysian identity. In order to do this, it will examine the ways in which the museum confronts cultural diversity and constructs the context of their exhibitions toward nation building projects. The study uses "the multiculturalism" and "new museology" theories to examine how cultural diversity has been recognized through the Museum's policies and internal practices. Using a qualitative approach, this study gathered data from archival research, historical literature, interviews, visual analysis of the Museum's exhibitions and visitors' general responses. My one year participation in the Museum as a volunteer guide helps in contextualizing and analyzing the Museum's exhibitions and its inclusive policies and activities toward constructing and therefore, representing an inclusive identity for all Malaysians. Results suggest that the National Museum, by displaying history of the nation within its exhibition content, has developed and reinforced inclusive and politically harmonious visions of the country's sense of nationhood. The National Museum has played an important social role in representing Malaysian identity through emphasizing certain qualities of the nation linked to the values and achievements of the past.

## SESSION II – HERITAGE AND THE COMMUNITY

### **Heritage Making and Value to the City: Challenges for Community and City<sup>1</sup>**

Ho Kong-Chong

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My paper addresses the role of heritage-making as a community strategy to establish their rights in the city. Using two examples of Pom Mahakan community in Bangkok and Tangpu community in Taipei, I analyse the history and development of the two community initiated projects, the supports the communities received from NGOs and academics, and significantly how the respective city governments reacted differently to the two projects. The differential outcome of the two projects are tied in turn to the politics of heritage, the nature of democratic movements and the power and capacity of civil society, and the role of reformist leaders in local government. I argue that because these projects are initiated as heritage projects and because government resources are directed at the projects, the value of the projects should assessed not just from the standpoint of the community rights but to the city as a whole.

### **Orang Asli and Protected Areas: Are Jahai Partners or Muted Heritage in the Royal Belum State Park?**

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The Royal Belum State Park was created by royal decree in 2003 as the Royal Belum and gazetted in 2007 under the Perak State Parks Enactment 2001. Often described in conservationists literature as "rich in biodiversity heritage and classified as a Category One Environmentally Sensitive Area in the National Physical Plan and has been identified as one of ten most important ecotourism destination in the National Ecotourism Plan" (WWF, 2009), the Royal Belum is an important effort by the state government at conservation. In the official state park website, they boast an eco-tourism opportunity with all the basic amenities; flush toilets, sundry shop, meeting facilities, etc. Tourists are offered travel packages with an opportunity to sample the various biodiversity and adventures within the Belum including boat rides to 'see'

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<sup>1</sup> Draft of paper to be presented at the Singapore Malaysia Forum, December 2015. Please do not quote without checking with author ([sdochkc@nus.edu.sg](mailto:sdochkc@nus.edu.sg))

Orang Asli settlements. A closer reading of the themes in the website, in particular, the Park Rules and Regulations do not mention Orang Asli in any detail. The Orang Asli is simply mentioned as part of the visual attraction. In this paper, I aim to look at how the state imagines and engages the Orang Asli living within the Royal Belum through three main sources. These are the State Park, the Integrated Management Plan for Eco-Tourism Development produced by the Federal Government under its Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER) and the Royal Belum Resort. Juxtaposed, is another imagination, that of the indigenous population. Early colonial writers (Schebesta, 1928) clearly identify them in the region before others came to settle. The Jahai, a semi nomadic group, have their own notions of territory as bounded landscape which they term *Neggerik* (Gomes, 2007). For the Jahai in Belum, the main tributary rivers and the surrounding landscape make up their claims for the Royal Belum as their customary territory. The existence of indigenous peoples in the park challenges the authority and claims to legitimacy of the state park that identifies itself as sole gatekeeper and authority to the landscape. By living there, the Orang Asli engage in hunting, fishing, building their domiciles, clearing land, and commercial agriculture, all of which are not allowed under state park rules. This contradiction has not been without some measure of conflict, whether it is the deepening mistrusts between members of the communities and the state (with different agencies both at the state level and federal agencies), between the communities and various conservationists' actors, and between the communities and wildlife. This paper aims to draw attention to the gaps in representation of Orang Asli as actors with agency and rightful claims to the protected landscape. What are the stereotypes in representing indigenous peoples living within the park? Who represents the voices of the indigenous peoples here? How are their interest addressed? What sorts of challenges do they experience with the creation of the park? Has the park benefited the communities? And, are they seen as legitimate partners in co-management of the park? (M. Cholchester, 2012, Staiff R & R. Bushell, 2002). These questions anchor the main argument here calling for a conflict resolution mechanism that starts by recognizing the indigenous inhabitants as landowners of Belum.

## **Mapping Heritage in the Streets: Helping to Reconnect Youth with Disappearing Heritages**

Susan Philip

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In Malaysia, heritage can be a contentious issue. At the individual level, people are often caught between narrow definitions of heritage imposed from above, resulting in a kind of ghetto-isation of culture, which is at odds with their lived realities of hybridity and shifting borders. The confusion about heritage is compounded by the ways in which tangible, physical histories are often erased in the rush for modernisation – old buildings are demolished, or collapse through neglect; the work of skilled artisans and craftspeople disappears, displaced by modern manufacturing techniques. If these aspects of heritage survive, they are often ‘museum-ized’, fixed in time and place. Heritage, then, turns into something to be ‘preserved’, rather than being a vital and integral part of everyday life.

In this paper, I intend to examine a few projects run by local theatre groups and arts activists to examine and map living, physical culture and heritage. Work has been done in Penang by Janet Pillai and Tan Sooi Beng, while Five Arts Centre has done cultural mapping in the Chow Kit area. All these projects tend to involve local youth, in a concerted effort to reconnect (or perhaps just connect) them with this disappearing heritage. My focus will be to examine the fundamental purpose of these projects, as well as the artefacts produced (videos and maps), with a view to looking at how such projects can help not to ‘preserve’ heritage, but to make it a central, meaningful part of society.

### **SESSION III – RE-READING HERITAGE IN TEXTS AND LITERATURE**

#### ***Texting and Booking Heritage: The Euphoria in Heritage Making and Its Limit***

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The recent enthusiasm and initiative to preserve and conserve the heritage is commendable and considerable resources have been allocated towards it. It is part of ascertaining social memory, while the aim of public education and pride in the national identity become one of its main objectives. But heritage business has predominantly in the areas of historical sites, monuments, material culture, artistic creation and even the natural environment. One area of neglect is literature, or to be precise, book manuscripts. The latter deemed more to be the business of library and research institutes. The reasons for this neglect or relegation are many. Generally manuscript or literature have little visible attraction, nor could it generate or sustain a ‘demonstrative’ effect for a long time. The heritage industry today, like all other urban, public and corporate initiatives, are subjected to the expectations of generating responses, attendance and all kind of other quantifiable and non-quantifiable output. In this case, literature and manuscript would probably the lowest in the list to produce such expectation. However if this bureaucratic expectation could be overcome, another important obstacle is the political will of the ruling establishment. This paper will discuss the relegation of literary manuscripts as part of the heritage tradition with focus on three contexts. The first pertains to Singapore’s nineteenth literary manuscripts, including the early lithograph publication, which is hardly spoken as heritage, nor even known to exist. Second is on the manuscripts as found in East Malaysia. In the context where Malaccan centric is the dominant historical imagination, those texts outside the caucus remain unknown, nor deserve attention. The third similar case is the Indonesian manuscripts in the provinces outside Java. In sum, literary heritage becomes the most neglected, and very little efforts are made to boost the philological and discursive mechanisms that could ensure literary manuscripts (or literature in general), remains integral in the cultural and historical imagination of the people. To address these challenges become imperative in the age of digital frenzy and the diminutive passion for intellectual and literary legacy.

#### ***Losing Historical Heritage to Politically Incubated Heritage: The Case of the Malaysian Indians***

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The history of Malaysia is incomplete without the role of three major races i.e., the Malays, Chinese and Indians. It was through the formation of the Alliance (which saw the cooperation between Malayan Chinese Association and Malayan Indian Congress with United Malay National Organisation) that Malaya got its independence. The non-Malays, namely the Indians and the Chinese were very much a part of Malaysian history, having contributed immensely to the development of the nation. The contribution and the heritage of non-Malays were captured in the school text books and showcased at national heritage institutions like the National Museum and the National Archives after independence until the late 1980s. It was a different scenario from the early 90s when limited space was given to non-Malays, especially the Indians. This is indeed surprising, especially when the government of the day professes to promote multiculturalism and the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism is involved in a worldwide tourism campaign using the slogan “Malaysia Truly Asia”. This is also against the call by the World Heritage Organization to conserve and preserve all heritage sites, languages, trades and traditions-material and non-material. This paper will explore the extent to which Indian heritage has been significantly portrayed in the national school text books and the institutions which were

given the task to showcase and disseminate knowledge on Malaysian past. With the help of hindsight and reflections on the past, this paper evaluates the extent to which Indian contributions and heritage have been accorded due recognition in present day Malaysia.

### **Reclaiming the Probable Amid Perpetuating Tenuity: Historicising Two Discursive Legacies in the Writings of Munsyi Abdullah**

Kelvin Lawrence

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Munsyi Abdullah is a much studied figure who lived and worked in Malacca and Singapore between 1815-1850. As a Malay language teacher, translator and cultural intermediary to colonial figures, he was witness to both colonial and indigenous happenings, and their interaction thereof. He left several writings that depicted aspects of these encounters, a distinct rarity in that period, making him a constant feature in related historiographical musings. His most prominent legacy to posterity are his best known works – *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah* and *Hikayat Abdullah*. Abdullah's stinging criticism of sites of Malay political power and his extended lament on the deplorable state of Malay life in both these works have led many to identify him as the progenitor of the discourse of Malay backwardness. The latter was perpetuated by both British colonialism and several leading Malay intellectual types across more than a century. It extends into the present day and is effectively codified and institutionalised in the context of the Malaysian state, particularly post-1969. The presence of an overt critical dimension in *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah* and *Hikayat Abdullah* certainly marked the appearance of something new and quite distinctive, historically, in the style and content of Malay writing. Further, based on these works, Abdullah has widely been deemed as an early, if not the first, Malay intellectual. However, an examination of the context that led to the inclusion of social criticism in these well-known works of Abdullah will show that it detracts from, instead of supports, thinking of Abdullah as an intellectual. Instead, it is two of Abdullah's much neglected works, *Syair Singapura Terbakar* and *Syair Kampung Gelam Terbakar*, and the contexts of their respective emergence that provide a much stronger basis for thinking of Abdullah as an intellectual. It is in these two lesser known works that Abdullah first offered hints of an interest in providing independent commentary on matters of public interest and the ability to do so. In these virtually forgotten works of Abdullah, he can be cast as providing meaningful independent indigenous insight into the conduct of public life in a bustling entreport. There is clearly a jarring disjunction between the widely accepted discourse of backwardness attributed to Abdullah and the newly discovered alternative. That the latter coheres broadly with the rhetoric of increasingly strident Malaysian political opposition may curiously make Abdullah, yet again, the progenitor of a future institutionalised discourse of a nation-state.

### **SESSION IV – NEGOTIATING MODERNIZATION AND HERITAGE**

#### **A Tradition of Modernity: Reading the past of Malaysian Science and Technology through the case of Rubber Research**

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In 2006, the Tun Abdul Razak Research Centre at Brickendonbury, England, briefly gained the attention of the Malaysian public when a proposal was made by the government of Malaysia to build a lavish sports training facility on the grounds of the Centre. Owned by the Malaysian Rubber Board, the Centre had been established as a research outpost to study applications for natural rubber. This Centre and associated research facilities for rubber research and agricultural and botanical studies across Malaysia were components of the scientific infrastructure for

agricultural and forestry research from the colonial period to the present day. The novelty of a Malaysian research facility in England counters the normal narrative of western science emanating from the metropolitan core to the peripheries in the tropics. The surprise of the Malaysian public upon being informed about its existence suggests its forgotten status, at least outside of professional circles surrounding the rubber industry. In my paper I will present the early formation of this scientific infrastructure with a focus on the elements engaged directly with rubber research. This paper will highlight the ways in which leadership and strategy was negotiated between complementary organisations in Malaya, Britain and Ceylon. These negotiations resulted in a division of labour for rubber research activities, with the applications being delegated to Britain and botany and extraction being the responsibility of the colonial researchers. The role of the AVROS organisation in Dutch-controlled Sumatra will also be discussed, as a group that was both competitor and ally. In addition to a recounting of the archival records, this presentation will also discuss several photographs of the Rubber Research Institute in Kuala Lumpur, as a way of intuiting the visions of the founding era administrators, researchers and capital owners for the then nascent organisation. In this way, I hope to share a meaningful reconstruction of a component of modernization in the Malayan-Malaysian polity that had its roots in the colonial period and has continued to exist to the present day.

### **Demolition as an Act of Remembering - Old National Library Building**

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Should we indiscriminately conserve all culturally significant physical markers (for e.g. the Old National Library and Bukit Brown Cemetery) or demolish some along with their memories to create space for newer, more relevant memories? Does every act of destruction result in an act of creation of new memories? In light of the above issues, this presentation aims to highlight the precious in-between space between remembering and forgetting where the struggle of selecting what should be retained for the purpose of memory and identity are being worked out. The systematic destruction and subsequent rebuilding of iconic landmarks is not unique to the city-state of Singapore. Most post-industrial cities face the same dilemma of having to choose which physical markers to discard along with the memories attached to it. There are two opposing views to this conservation-development dilemma. The utilitarian view is that there is no point in clinging on to everything from the past. If the construction of a newer physical marker is more economically viable, then it is time for the old to make way for newer physical markers. The conservationist view is that physical markers contain collective social memories and serve as memory anchors to help us understand our past. Instead of taking the side of one of the above two views, this paper shall offer a unique third view by arguing that the act of demolition is in fact an act of remembering - remembering to forget. The process of *forgetting* is in fact integral to *remembering* because forgetting ensures that old memories do not hinder our process of forming new memories and attaching values to them. Preserving every single perceived 'heritage' landmark is akin to hoarding every single memory, which would only diminish the value of the memories we choose to remember.

## **SESSION V – ART & ARTISTRY**

### **Illegal Art on Legal Walls: Graffiti in Singapore**

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Singapore is renowned for its tough stance towards any form of graffiti and unapproved art on public surfaces in the city. Yet a curious phenomenon has emerged since 2012 in which select

spaces in the city have been ‘tagged’ with graffiti-inspired works and outsized art on historic shophouses, underground spaces, pedestrian tunnels and even void decks of public housing flats. While some of the art is temporary, others are intended to be permanent installations that have been legalised as part of a larger plan in projecting Singapore as a vibrant, culturally trendy and progressive city. Taking the cue from the concept of ‘Legal Walls’ in cities of the Asia-Pacific like Chongqing, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur and Sydney, this presentation explores the ideology, practice and reception of street art in Singapore. It is argued that the state imposes a form of *regulated creativity* in which rules must be adhered to in the practice of artistic freedom. What emerges is a form of *constrained creativity* in which local artists struggle to ‘keep it real’ while observing these regulations. Members of the public have reacted to their street art warmly but their *aesthetic endorsement* belies an awareness of the highly commercial nature of the works and their ‘immobility’ across time and space. With more public street art being planned for Singapore, the presentation closes by contemplating whether such works can truly be ‘public’ or be considered ‘art’ under present regulation and control. If Singapore wishes to be a ‘Global City for the Arts’, it is asked what more can be done for street art, artists and the conditions under which they labour.

### Aging with Kumar’s political semiotics

Jyh Wee Sew

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The communicative object put to scrutiny is a 9-minute video recording of Kumar, the famous cross-dressing performer of Singapore stand-up comedy. The video clip, which was uploaded to YouTube in 2012, contains footages of Kumar poking fun at the initial reaction of residents from Toh Yi Drive to the government’s proposal of building a nursing home in their housing area. The thunderous laughter from the floor indicates that Kumar broaches expertly a pressing social issue in such a way that his styles of delivery bode well with the English-speaking audience. Since each person develops his or her own understanding of a communicative object in physical space and time differently, the well-received stand-up performance is an opportunity to investigate the semiotics of performing with which Kumar skillfully politicizes a heritage issue. Based on a demarcated segment running between 3:33 to 4:11 in the YouTube video, this discussion identifies the discursive variables underpinning the impactful turns in Kumar’s comical repertoire on stage. Through the atomic-serial framework, the selected portion is fragmented into base units of visual frames for schematizing the semiotic variables in Kumar’s political humor. By dismantling Kumar’s performance into semiotic modes such as rhetoric, dressing, gesture and voice modulation the signifiers of performativity underpinning Kumar’s political jab on aging turn out visible. Consequently, orchestrating visual semiotics and affective rhetoric into effective performatives becomes a relevant detail in the art of stand-up performance, especially for comedians doubling as social activists in developing sociopolitical humor.

### Pua Kumbu and the Politics of Heritage

Janet Rata Noel

Gender Studies Programme, University of Malaya

The Iban community is the largest ethnic group in Sarawak and is renowned for their textile weaving heritage, namely the *Pua Kumbu*, a ceremonial woven cloth or blanket produced using the tie-dye back-strap weaving technique. In the past, *Pua Kumbu* was produced in an environment where weavers were engaged in the old Iban belief system, cosmology and spirit world. As a material form, at present, it is sought after by both local and foreign collectors, dealers, institutions and museums, partly due to its aesthetic value and the spiritual mystery it offers. The indigenous knowledge of *Pua Kumbu* productions thus, is very valuable. Various

agencies are involved in promoting and developing the *Pua Kumbu* weaving industry. Nevertheless, there are too many paths woven into the efforts dealing with the promotions and conservations of the knowledge of Pua Kumbu. On one hand, interest at the federal level is obvious through the involvement of the Ministry of Tourism and agencies like the Malaysian Handicraft Council, and on the other hand, there is separate involvement by the State Government through the Ministry of Social Development which oversees the Sarawak Museum and agencies such as the Sarawak Crafts Council. The Tun Jugah Foundation, a private stakeholder plays a dual role as a museum showcasing material forms while at the same time providing a platform for preserving and sustaining the traditional knowledge via its living gallery. Other stakeholders such as Society Atelier Sarawak, Sarakraf, and Sarakup Indu Dayak Sarawak (SIDS) have been actively involved in the promotion and sustaining the knowledge of pua kumbu weaving through many events and workshops. This paper attempts to look into the role, efforts and programmes undertaken by stakeholders such as NGOs, government ministries, agencies, and universities, and then to map out and discuss the politics involved within and among these government stakeholders that hold their interest in *Pua Kumbu* weaving industry and production. This paper will also analyse the implications of the involvement of these stakeholders in terms of preservation, education, economic and cultural tourism. Finally, this paper hopes to shed light on the politics of heritage involved, and its implication for the future of Iban textiles.

## SESSION VI – HERITAGE IN SITU

### The Past, Present and the Future: Chinese Cemeteries in Malaysia

Danny Wong Tze Ken  
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Cemeteries are demarcated sites for the burial of the dead and these sites can be located not only on flat-surfaced plots of land but also on an entire hill. Cemeteries play an important role in the family institution and in the community. Cemeteries in Malaysia are classified accordingly to different religions, race and ethnicity. It is this classification that gives rise to the distinctive features between a Muslim cemetery and a Christian cemetery, and between a Chinese cemetery and an Indian cemetery. Each cemetery is a representation of the cultural baggage that it carries. For instance, the Chinese Cemeteries in Malaysia represent not only the cultural beliefs and values of the Malaysian Chinese but also the history of their migrations from mainland China. It is on this basis that cemeteries should be considered as significant sources for historical research and documentations. According to the British government rules, cemeteries should be located miles away from the more populous locations like urban and metropolitan areas. However, population growth and urban expansion and its demand for more land have led to cemeteries being in close proximity with urban areas. In Malaysia, the Malaysian government has started to question the preservation of cemeteries in urban areas like the cemeteries located on Jalan Lapangan Lama. The Malaysian government is very much inclined to giving way to industrial and economic development that certainly requires land. This has led to demolitions of a number of cemeteries in Malaysia and what most have failed to realize is that this has also destroyed the possible traces of Malaysian cultural heritage. In this paper, we would like to highlight the relation between identity politics and heritage, and the preservation of Cemeteries in Malaysia.

## **Preservation of Colonial vs Precolonial Heritage on the Hills of Singapore and Melaka**

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In Malay tradition, the palaces of the kings were built on the highest point of the royal settlement. In Palembang, the capital of Srivijaya, the site of Bukit Seguntang has yielded important archaeological materials from the seventh to tenth centuries. In Singapore, thousands of artifacts from the fourteenth century have been found on Fort Canning Hill (formerly called Bukit Larangan, “Forbidden Hill”). In Melaka, the hill once called Bukit Bendera, now St. Paul’s Hill, is believed to have been the site of the sultans’ palace.

Seguntang Hill in Palembang has been preserved as a park. In addition to some Muslims *keramats* or tombs of holy men, several architectural embellishments meant to evoke the Srivijayan period have been added. In Singapore, Fort Canning Hill was used for a fort as the name implies. Much of the hill was levelled for that purpose. In the twentieth century a reservoir was built there. Nevertheless some spaces on the hill have been found to contain undisturbed fourteenth-century remains. An archaeological display has been constructed there by the National Parks Board.

In Melaka, a church, some European graves, part of the Stadhuis Museum, and a house for the state parliament have been built on the hill. A model palace has been built at the foot of the hill. The rest of the hill has been preserved. The built heritage of the colonial period has been well maintained, a feat recognized by Melaka’s designation as a World Heritage Urban Site by Unesco. Future archaeologists are likely to discover important sites on the south and west sides of the hill which should shed significant light on the pre-Portuguese history and culture of Melaka. It will then be possible to write a historical archaeology of the three hills of ancient Malay culture.

## **Conservation of Tangible heritage: Some lessons learnt from Singapore and Malaysia’s agreement on Tanjong Pagar Rail Station**

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Despite the fact that modern development destroys tangible heritage, the Singapore - Malaysian governments have successfully conserved Tanjong Pagar railway station, and have further modified it into more productive public areas as means to generate revenue for the respective countries. As it is known the main building of Tanjong Pagar railway station was gazetted as national monuments on April 9, 2011 as it was one of the highlighted objectives of the agreement between Singapore and Malaysia. The closure of Tanjung Pagar Station was not easy. Though it was supported by many business community, the closure was opposed and lamented by other communities as representing a great loss of Singapore’s heritage and of a key public transportation facility. As such this paper will analyse the conservation of Tanjong Pagar railway station as tangible heritage in Singapore. It will also investigate the process of the agreement between Singapore and Malaysia and its conservation of the station after the official closure of operation on July 1, 2011. Moreover, this paper also attempts to highlight some lessons learnt from Singapore - Malaysia bilateral agreements and cooperation on settling issues related to tangible heritage that involved two or more countries in the Southeast Asian region and beyond.

## **SESSION VII – POLITICIZING CULTURAL REPRESENTATION**

### **Singapore's (m)other Tongue Policy: the Case of the Indians in Singapore**

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In this paper I suggest that Singapore forms a crucible to study how responsive education policies, acknowledging the needs of language minorities, can be subverted by the datedness of their design and uneven language management for the language needs of transmigratory populations.

While linguistic and racial heterogeneity has always been Singapore's defining feature, the nature and scale of recent immigration has resulted in an unprecedented societal complexity. I explore the challenges posed by the increased heterogeneity to the language policy with specific reference to the numerically insignificant but linguistically the most diverse of the three ethnic groups, the Indians.

I highlight that the government's appreciation of this complexity has led to policy relaxation, allowing five other languages (Gujarati, Bengali, Punjabi, Urdu, and Hindi) as possible alternatives to Tamil (the officially assigned ethnic mother tongue). However, speakers from these other Indian language communities often prefer to forego their putative 'mother tongues' for Hindi, perceiving the latter to better meet their multilingual ambitions. The growing prominence of Hindi illustrates that progressive policies can nonetheless be confounded by the very groups they seek to empower.

I trace this policy predicament, to the inherited and unquestioned categories such as 'community,' 'ethnicity,' and 'mother tongue' and the correspondence among these (e.g., Chinese = Mandarin) that have traditional driven policy success. I suggest that the inadequacy of these *a priori* assumptions is evident in uptake of policy among transmigrant Indians whose translocal orientations and embeddedness in multiple networks prioritizes Hindi over other options. Using school enrolment figures and ethnographic interview data, I highlighted that the national status conferred to Hindi by policy in India exerts an influence that overrides its minority status in Singapore.

I propose that in order to stay relevant, language policies must acknowledge the shifting realities and overlapping affiliations of mobile populations and be realistic in the scope of their influence in 'policing' populations.

### **Cultural Heritage Politics of Chinese Medicine in Singapore**

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Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is deeply rooted in Chinese culture and has been known as one of the world's oldest traditional medicine systems for over 2500 years. The majority population of Chinese descendants in Singapore have preserved a traditional healing practices in the culture, complimented by a general openness toward diverse ways of healing and caring. Some traditional Chinese medicine practices might even be maintained more authentically in Singapore than in mainland China, where the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s had eliminated the more spiritual, mental and emotional elements of older Chinese medicine. TCM has been developed as a form of intangible heritage. Despite the popularity of TCM among Singaporeans,

the dominance of western medicine has created an unequal structure of medical systems which affects the development of TCM. This presentation will provide an overview of how TCM is situated in the medical system in Singapore. The study use in-depth interviews with stakeholders of TCM, including patients, practitioners, and Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners Board (TCMPB), in exploring the structural challenges faced by them. This help us to understand how the structure of the system influences the power relations of government, TCM practitioners and patients in negotiating their choices for using TCM in their health seeking behavior. In doing so, this presentation intends to create awareness of challenges in developing TCM as a cultural heritage via collective consciousness.

### **Understanding the Perceptions of the Host Country's Food Culture among Myanmarese Domestic Workers in Singapore**

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Eugene Gao, Independent Researcher

A 2013 International Labour Organization report estimates that there are approximately 52 million domestic workers worldwide. The trade is lucrative – and considered to be the world’s tenth largest employer. Mirroring the rise of this industry, a growing body of research has explored the lives of domestic workers through multi-disciplinary approaches. In Singapore, research has historically skewed towards the more established Filipino and Indonesian diaspora – leaving room to build on the existing literature, and to examine newer, smaller, minority groups. As such, this paper focuses on the experiences of Myanmarese domestic workers in Singapore. Specifically, we’d like to understand how food shapes their notion of individual and group/ethnic identity, and the role it plays in assimilating the Myanmarese into their new surroundings. As Claude Fischler argues, “food is central to individual identity, in that any given human individual is constructed biologically, psychologically, and socially by the food he or she chooses to incorporate”. Moreover, eating is inherently social. It is a window into the *unspoken world of sociality, and understanding our place in society*. We seek to explore their dietary habits through ethnographic interviews – identifying aspects of Myanmar food culture they consider important, as well as how Singapore’s food culture has impacted their daily lives.

## Presenters' Biographies

**Sharmani Patricia Gabriel** is Associate Professor at the Department of English, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Malaya. She researches primarily in the field of postcolonial literary and cultural studies, with particular interests in the cultural politics of race and ideas of diaspora, migration, national identity, transnationalism and globalization in Malaysian, British Asian and Asian American literatures.

**Kwa Chong Guan** is Adjunct Associate Professor (Honorary) at the department of History in NUS. He works on the intersections of history, security studies and international relations of Southeast Asia. As an Honorary Adjunct Associate Professor and Visiting Fellow at the Archaeological Unit of the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Kwa is interested in the long cycles and emerging deep history of Southeast Asia's past. As Senior Fellow at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies at the Nanyang Technological University he works on a range of regional security issues with a focus on the implicit narratives underlying our framing of regional security issues. He started his career working on policy analysis in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and then the Ministry of Defence before being assigned to reorganize the Oral History Department in the National Archives and concurrently, the old National Museum which he lead through a strategic planning process to transform it into the current three museums under the National Heritage Board. He continues to be associated with these heritage institutions in various advisory capacities and as Chairman of the National Archives Advisory Committee. As Chairman of the National Library Advisory Committee he is involved in the integration of the National Archives with the National Library under the National Library Board. He was previously Head of the old Department of Strategic Studies at the SAFTI Military Institute where he taught military history and strategic studies while concurrently teaching history at the School of Arts at the National Institute of Education. Kwa was called up for National Service after graduating from the old University of Singapore in Philosophy and History, and continued to serve as a reservist officer in various command and staff appointment for the next 20 years.

**Yasaman Alsadat Hosseini** is a Master's Student at the Faculty of Art and Social Sciences, University of Malaya. She is doing her research on the role of the National Museum of Malaysia in representing Malaysian identity. She has a background in Museum studies (Bachelor degree) from the Higher Educational Center of Cultural Heritage (Iran) and, has worked as a curator in the Niavaran Museum Palace in Tehran, Iran. She has recently worked as a volunteer guide in the National Museum of Malaysia.

**Ho Kong Chong** is Associate Professor of Sociology at the National University of Singapore. Trained as an urban sociologist at the University of Chicago, Dr Ho's research interests are in the political economy of cities, urban communities, higher education, and youth. He is a board member of Research Committee 21 (Sociology of Urban and Regional, International Sociological Association) and an editorial board member of *Pacific Affairs* and the *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*. Kong Chong is co-author of *City-States in the Global Economy: Industrial Restructuring in Hong Kong and Singapore* (1997); *Youth.sg: State of Youth in Singapore* (2011) and co-editor of *Service Industries, Cities and Development Trajectories in the Asia-Pacific* (2005); *Globalization, the City and Civil Society in Pacific Asia* (2008), and *New Economic Spaces in Asian Cities* (2012).

**Kamal Solhaimi Fadzil** is a Lecturer at the department of Anthropology and Sociology in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya.

**Susan Philip** teaches at the English Department, Arts Faculty, University of Malaya. She has published on Malaysian theatre in English in a number of journals and books. She is particularly interested in the complex issues of identity which prevail in Malaysian society, and has looked at

how these issues are negotiated and challenged through the theatre, as well as through new spaces such as social media and the internet.

**Azhar Ibrahim**, PhD is a Visiting Fellow at the Department of Malay Studies, National University of Singapore (NUS). He obtained his PhD., and MA, from the same Department in 2008 and 2002 respectively. Before joining NUS in 2009, he was a lecturer National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University. His research interest includes sociology of religion, sociology of literature and critical literacy, as well as the Malay-Indonesia intellectual development.

**Sivachandralingam Sundara Raja** is Associate Professor, Department of History, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya. His specialisation is Malaysian economic history with interests in trade and the Indian community. His article, 'Charles Alma Baker's uneasy role in the expansion of the Malayan economy 1890s-1910s', was published in the *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 11 (1), 189–207 (2009).

**Kelvin Lawrence** is a Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Department of History, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore.

**Leow Wei Yi** is a PhD candidate enrolled in the Comparative Asian Studies Programme at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences in NUS.

**Bernard Sim** is a Ministry of National Development (EDGE) Scholarship Holder who graduated with a BSoc.Sci.(Hons) in Economics and Political Science. He is currently working as an Industrial Properties Manager at Housing & Development Board (HDB) and is involved in industrial relocation and redevelopment projects which recognizes certain needs for preservation of heritage of the old industrial estates. The former President of the NUS Political Science Society has organized several student-based events such as the Singapore Model Parliament 2013 to facilitate intellectual discourse between students, academics and policymakers. He is currently pursuing his Graduate Studies in Political Science at NUS.

**T.C. Chang** is a tourism geographer by training, and has research interests in urban, social-cultural and tourism geographies. His research interests include Southeast Asian tourism, vernacular architecture and heritage, arts, culture and creativity in Asian cities. He received his Ph.D. from McGill University (Montreal, Canada) in 1997 and became an Associate Professor at NUS in 2003. A/P Chang was Deputy Head of the Department of Geography in 2006-2007; Assistant Dean (Alumni and External Relations, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, NUS) in 2008-2010; and currently Vice Dean (External Relations and Student Life, June 2010-December 2015). He was awarded the NUS Outstanding Educator Award 2006 and the Annual Teaching Excellence Award 2008.

**Jyh Wee Sew** publishes with Kajian Malaysia and WORD and teaches at the Centre for Language Studies, National University of Singapore. He published *Persembahan@Media.com* (2010), *Semiotik Persembahan Wacana* (2009), *Reduplicating Nouns and Verbs in Malay* (2007) with University of Malaya Press. His professional awards include Hadiah Karya Kencana (2011) and Outstanding Contribution Award (2004).

**Janet Rata Noel** is a PhD candidate enrolled in the Gender Studies Programme at the University of Malaya.

**Danny Wong Tze Ken** works as a Professor of History at the Department of History, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya, where he lectures on the history of Indochina and Southeast Asia. His research interests include the history of Champa, Sabah and Vietnam; in addition to the study of the Sabah and the Chinese communities in Malaysia. He was Visiting Lecturer at Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (1998); Visiting Scholar at Magdalene College, Cambridge University (2008); Visiting Professor at the Asia-Europe Institute (2008-

2012); Visiting Professor at the Center for Integrated Area Studies, Kyoto University (2010) and Visiting Scholar at the Research Center for Humanities and Social Sciences, National Tsinghua University (2010 & 2011). Currently, he also leads the University of Malaya Malaysian Chinese Research Group and acts as Director of the Center for Global Planning and Strategy, University of Malaya. His publications include: Spirit of Borneo (2009), The Nguyen and Champa during 17th and 18th Century (2007), Historical Sabah: the Chinese (2005), Historical Sabah: Community and Society (2004), The Transformation of an Immigrant Society: a Study of the Chinese of Sabah (1998) and Vietnam-Malaysia Relations during the Cold War (1995).

**Ong Siew Kian** obtained her Bachelor's degree in Arts and Social Sciences from the University of Malaya, majoring in Chinese Studies. She later went on to pursue a Master's degree of Humanities/ Liberal Arts at the Capital Normal University, Beijing. She later received her PhD from Nankai University, Tianjin. She has previously worked as a primary school teacher; junior editor; language teacher and translator. She is deeply interested in Chinese culture and literature. Dr. Ong is currently employed as a Post-doctoral Research Fellow at the Malaysian Chinese Research Centre, University of Malaya.

**John N. Miksic** is Professor in the Southeast Asian Studies Department, National University of Singapore. He completed an MA in International Affairs at Ohio University, and another MA and PhD in the Department of Anthropology at Cornell University. In 1987 I came to Singapore. I first taught in the Department of History at NUS; in 1991 I joined the newly-formed Southeast Asian Studies Programme, as the Department was then called. I have served on the National Heritage Board and the advisory boards of the National University Museum and the Asian Civilisations Museum. I have received awards from Singapore and Indonesia for contributions to the study of Southeast Asian culture.

I served on the board of the Center for Khmer Studies from 2000 until 2016. My current research projects include the archaeology of ancient ports on the shores of the Straits of Melaka, early cities in Indonesia, Cambodia, and Myanmar, and ceramic analysis. I manage the Archaeology Laboratory for the Department of Southeast Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, NUS.

**Lili Yulyadi Arnakim** is currently head of the Centre for Latin American Studies (CLAS), University of Malaya, and senior lecturer at the Department of Southeast Asian Studies, University of Malaya. He completed PhD program at the Department of International and Strategic Studies, from the University of Malaya. He has been writing many book Reviews and articles on Islam, international politics as well as Economics, and involved in several research projects including the field research on Conflict resolution in Southeast Asia, The Impact of the Southern Thai Conflict on the Cohesiveness of Southeast Asian Nations, Indonesia-Malaysia Bilateral relations. His current research projects are Rumpunism, Collective identity in Indonesia-Malaysia bilateral relations, Regionalism in Southeast Asia, and Revisiting Development in Developing Countries; comparative studies between Southeast Asian and Latin American region. His latest books include Regionalism and political development in Southeast Asia, and Dinamika Pelancongan di Asia Tenggara di Alaf Baru published by the UM.

**Ritu Jain** is a doctoral candidate in the South Asian Studies Program at the National University of Singapore. Her interest lies in aspects of language management among Indians in more recent transnational/diasporic societies. In her dissertation, she is exploring the influence of language ideologies in shaping language practices among the non-Tamil Indian language speakers in Singapore. In particular, her focus is Hindi, its status within and beyond Singapore, and how it frames second-language choices of the five other Indian languages that have been given semi-official status there. She also teaches a range of diaspora studies, language and communication-related undergraduate modules at various tertiary institutions in Singapore.

**Pauline Luk** is a PhD candidate of Department of Communication and New Media. Her doctoral research focuses on the meanings and interpretations of traditional Chinese medicine. She uses the culture-centered approach as a theoretical and methodological framework in her

studies which view on discourse as situated at the intersections of culture, structure, and agency in defining meanings of health. Her research uses qualitative research methods, including in-depth interviews and participant observations, to find out what cultural influences on health decisions and how they affect health-seeking choices, specifically those concerning TCM.

**Kakit Cheong** is a MA Candidate in the Department of Communications and New Media, National University of Singapore. His current research explores how information and communication technologies can be designed to support family storytelling for migrant workers. His recent work include “Kwento: using a participatory approach to designing a family storytelling application for domestic helpers” (with Alex Mitchell, for the *International Conference on Human-Computer Interaction*, 2015) and “Helping the Helpers: Understanding Family Storytelling for Domestic Helpers in Singapore” (with Alex Mitchell, in S. S. Lim (Ed), *Mobile Communications and the Family – Asian Experiences in Technology Domestication*, 2015)

### **Eugene Gao**

I am an independent researcher from Singapore. A major influence was my mentor, Prof. Michael Gilsean, who first encouraged me to become a social anthropologist. My research interests include folk religion, gentrification, and the Anthropology of food. I took a B.A. double-majoring in Anthropology, and International Studies, at the University of Melbourne (2010). I also hold a graduate diploma in Advertising from Miami Ad School (2015). My current research examines the lives of Myanmarese domestic workers in Singapore viewed through their dietary habits, and interprets the latent dynamics of memory, identity, and cultural assimilation.