



Genealogy Society Singapore

新加坡族譜學會

MEDIA RELEASE

16 SEPTEMBER 2023

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BOOK LAUNCH

The media is invited to cover the launch of a new book co-published by the Genealogy Society Singapore (GSS) and the Goh Loo Club on Saturday, 23 September 2023.

12 Family Histories – A Tapestry of Singapore’s Multicultural Legacy delves deep into the lives of 12 families who have called Singapore home for generations. It is an enlightening and timely exploration of immigrant roots in Singapore. The book brings to life the stories and experiences of migrant Arab, Bugis, Chinese, Eurasian, Indian, and Peranakan families.

Background

Singapore is often described as having a melting pot of cultures, with a fascinating history shaped by waves of immigration. Our nation's diverse communities have coexisted harmoniously, contributing to a shared Singaporean identity and cultural heritage.

12 Family Histories is possibly **the first book** published to bring together intricate histories and shared experiences of multicultural families in Singapore.

Through captivating narratives, precious photographs, and intimate interviews with family elders, the book offers readers a rare glimpse into the traditions, customs, and values that have been passed down through the generations.

Memories of attending a *thinnai* school on a breezy, shaded home verandah in rural India; discovering that *keropok* and *sambal belachan* are much-loved delicacies in Tarim, Yemen thanks to centuries of trade with Southeast Asia; struggling to survive forced labour on the Death Railway; soaring above the Padang in a fighter jet to film the 1972 National Day Parade; selling sundries to Chinese miners in Mexico – the writers share all these stories and more, gleaned from their family histories.

Each family's journey is a testament to the resilience, adaptability, and strength that immigrants have brought to Singapore. From the early settlers to the present day, this book captures the essence of their journeys, struggles, heartbreaking losses, and triumphs.

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The 12 families featured in this book represent the heart and soul of Singapore's immigrant history. Their stories showcase the shared values of hard work, perseverance, and mutual respect that have been the foundation of our nation's success.

In a time where understanding and celebrating diversity is more crucial than ever, it is vital that we recognise and honour the contributions of the many communities that make up Singapore. This book serves as a bridge between the past and the present, fostering a sense of belonging and pride among Singaporeans of all backgrounds.

In today's globalised world, where cultural diversity is both celebrated and challenged, understanding one's immigrant roots and the stories of multicultural families takes on great significance. The book provides an invaluable resource for current and future generations to connect with their roots, appreciate the multiethnic fabric of Singapore, and foster a sense of unity.

SYNOPSIS

This book is a rich tapestry of family histories from different communities that have been intricately woven together because immigrants from Asia and beyond chose to make a new life in Singapore. It is a book that aims to encourage the next generation to continue uncovering the fascinating stories in each family. This is the fifth book published by GSS about Singapore family histories.

Some highlights from the book:

- The Arabs, in particular the 'Alawi family, have dedicated genealogists for each generation and they have created family trees that are like works of art.
- The Bugis were once perceived as fierce warriors who roamed the seas. Sarafian Salleh shares that they adhere to codes of conduct that have become constant reminders at the family dinner table.
- The Chettiers were pioneer financiers. According to the late Subbiah Lakshmanan, they provided a much needed service in Singapore at a time when budding entrepreneurs did not have access to loans from large European banks.
- The Fong family, a humble Cantonese Sei Yap family from Guangdong, China, still holds intact its detailed genealogical records that date back to the Tang Dynasty.

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- Initiated by two brothers, Ean Teck and Ean Kiam, the tradition of supporting nationalist and social causes, education and the arts has endured in the Tan family for more than a century.
- The Ng family of Pengzhou in Shantou, China, are proud keepers of their genealogy book that contains 15 moral values that every member of the family observes till today.
- Besides being a successful businessman and renowned philanthropist supporting arts and education, Yeo Khee Lim's collection of Chinese paintings and calligraphy is the largest and most comprehensive one in Singapore during his time.
- Tan Kah Kee's son, grandson and other descendants have steadfastly followed in his footsteps to give back to society and continue his tradition of thrift.
- An ancestor of the Eber family survived forced labour on the Death Railway in the jungles of Kanchanaburi, Thailand during World War II.
- Tan Siang Long left his home in the Fujian Province at the age of 16 during the reign of the Emperor Qianlong in the 18th century to seek his fortune. He set up home in Melaka and married a local woman. His family has since grown to eight generations of Peranakans in Singapore.
- For Soundara Pandian, researching his heritage and leaving a legacy of family history for his children and grandchildren is a labour of love.
- The Teo brothers who founded Tong Eng Brothers producing tin cans and bottle caps after World War II eventually created a real estate empire that stretches across the globe.

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EVENT DETAILS

Date: Saturday, 23 September 2023

Time: 2pm - 5.30pm (Light refreshments will be served.)

Venue: The POD, Level 16, National Library Building, 100 Victoria Street, Singapore 188064

Guest of Honour: Low Yen Ling Minister of State, Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth and Ministry of Trade and Industry

ABOUT THE BOOK

Title: *12 Family Histories – A Tapestry of Singapore’s Multicultural Legacy*

Authors: Various

Publisher: Genealogy Society Singapore and the Goh Loo Club

Where to buy: \$30 for soft cover and \$100 for hardcover. It can be purchased during the book launch and from GSS after the launch

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Please see the author profiles in the Annexe.

ABOUT THE Publishers

The Genealogy Society Singapore (GSS) was launched in 2012 with the aim of providing a forum for anyone interested in genealogy and ancestral studies to meet, interact, share, and exchange knowledge. We also hope to educate members and the general public in the field of genealogy, so as to create greater awareness and interest that promote the advancement of our multi-racial, cross-cultural heritage, customs, and traditions. GSS will continue to encourage Singaporeans to write and publish their family histories. We look forward to working jointly with social, cultural, community, and clan associations to reach out to more Singaporeans to co-publish their family histories with us.

The Goh Loo Club

Established in 1905 as Goh Kee Club, it was renamed Goh Loo Club in 1907. Derived from the poetic expression by Chinese poet Tao Yuanming “吾亦爱吾庐”, the name Goh Loo Club (吾庐俱乐部) translates to ‘my humble hut’.

Its early members include prominent Chinese community leaders such as Tan Kah Kee, Tan Lark Sye, Lee Kong Chian, Tan Ean Kiam. They were involved in helping the Chinese revolution initiated by Dr Sun Yat Sen. The Club now organizes cultural programmes for its members and the public.

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CONTACT

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Yours Sincerely,



Ng Yew Kang
President
Genealogy Society Singapore

ANNEXE

PHOTO: Book Cover

AUTHOR PROFILES (In the order which their chapters appear in the book.)

Zahra Aljunied (Arab)

Zahra has a keen interest in her family history and Arab genealogy. Her grandfathers and great-grandfathers were genealogists for the Arab families in Singapore in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. After her retirement from the National Library Board as a Senior Librarian, she began intensive research on her colourful family story and the history of the first Arabs who came to Singapore. She has given public talks about her heritage and shares her research with friends and relatives. Recently, a book she co-edited, *A Reverent Journey: Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka*, won the Best Custom Publishing Title at the Singapore Book Awards 2023.

Christian Eber (Eurasian)

Christian became interested in his roots after reading his grandfather's biography about his experiences working on the Death Railway as a prisoner of war during World War II. Christian developed a passion for exploring his family history and has embarked on a lifelong mission to uncover his roots and that of his community. He serves as a committee member of the Eurasian Association Singapore. He has a Master of Business Administration from Strathclyde University and over a decade in experience in sales and marketing in the pharmaceutical industry.

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Fong Hoe Fang (Chinese, Cantonese)

Hoe Fang traces his roots back 25 generations to an ancestor who married a Song Dynasty princess. He discovered this when he first visited his ancestral village in China in 1986. Hoe Fang is a retired publisher. He founded Pagesetters Services Pte Ltd in 1988, specialising in advertising and communication design work. In 1997, he founded Ethos Books, an independent publisher of literary fiction, non-fiction, and poetry based in Singapore. Hoe Fang worked in publishing for over 40 years before retiring in 2019.

Subbiah Lakshmanan (Indian, Chettiar)

Subbiah was a fourth generation Chettiar whose great-grandfather started a financing business in 1892 in Market Street. His father was also a financier who lived in a *kittangi* (a warehouse that served both as a bank and a home) in Market Street. Subbiah had a distinguished career in senior management positions with Fortune 500 companies in the Asia-Pacific region. He holds an MBA in Finance from the University of California, Berkeley. Subbiah passed away in February 2023 before he could complete his chapter in this book.

Raymond Ng Kian Hui (Chinese, Teochew)

Raymond traces his family history back 36 generations to Pengzhou City in Swatow (Shantou), China. His great-grandfather migrated to Singapore in the 1890s and worked in a *jiubahang*, a trading company that specialised in buying Southeast Asian products such as spices and bird's nest and sold them on for a profit to buyers in China, Japan, India, USA and Europe. Raymond's interest in his roots comes from his Chinese education in primary school. He shares that the Ng family has 15 moral values that family members observe even today. Raymond has worked for an American MNC for the last 30 years.

Soundara Pandian (Indian, Tamil)

Soundara is a retired Science teacher who was born in 1947 in Tamil Nadu, India. He migrated to Singapore with his parents in 1955. He has been an active community volunteer all his life including serving as chairman of a Residents' Committee and a member of a Citizen Consultative Committee. After he retired from teaching, he decided to produce a book on his family history together with his wife, Ambujam, who was born in the French colony of Pondicherry, India. The book, meant mainly for their grandchildren, took five years to produce. Soundara wanted to create an awareness in his grandchildren of the relationships among family members and their ancestors, and to record family traditions, cultural ceremonies and document lifestyles of the years gone by.

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Sarafian bin Salleh (Bugis)

Sarafian is a heritage activist engaged in reviving Bugis traditions. He is a passionate researcher of local history and is the president of the Bugis Malay Society Singapore. An engineering consultant by profession, his interest in studying the history of the Malay World began when he was a teen in 1985. His extensive research and knowledge about the Bugis community in Singapore has led to him being honorifically called *Tuah Bugis* on social media. Sarafian continues to conduct public talks and heritage walks for schools, universities, societies and government organisations. He recently launched his first book, *Tuah Bugis – Chronicles of the Seafaring People of Singapore* in August 2023.

Tan Keong (Chinese, Hokkien)

Tan Keong is the grandson of the late Tan Ean Teck, a prominent Hokkien businessman who was a founder of the Oversea Chinese Bank (which later became OCBC). Tan Keong enjoys researching his family history and recording it for future generations. He is an adventurous traveller and avid foodie, always on the lookout for new culinary experiences. When he's not traversing scenic trails, you can find him on the tennis court where he plays regularly to stay active.

Ronney Tan Koon Siang (Peranakan)

Ronney is a Peranakan Chinese who traces his roots back to the 1700s in China and Melaka. He was an auditor for 40 years until his retirement in 2012. After retirement, he became President of the Keng Teck Whay (one of the oldest mutual aid associations in Singapore, founded in 1831) and Treasurer of the Genealogy Society Singapore and The Peranakan Association Singapore. He is also a Museum Volunteer and guides at the Asian Civilisations Museum and the Peranakan Museum.

Daniel Teo Tong How (Chinese, Hokkien)

Daniel is a real estate developer, philanthropist, art collector, patron of the arts, and founder of The Private Museum, a non-profit organisation. He is married to Goh Soo Khim, doyenne of Singapore ballet and co-founder of the Singapore Dance Theatre. Daniel's family story is that of the Tong Eng family business which began with his father and uncle venturing from China to Singapore, a marriage with the family of Singapore pioneer Lim Loh (father of war hero Lim Bo Seng), and an enterprise that grew and pivoted over the decades from scrap metal trading to industrial manufacturing and today's real estate and related blockchain technologies. His chapter in this book includes material drawn from various sources, including his memoir *Together We Prosper* which delves much deeper into his rich family history.

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Vivienne Wang Li (Chinese)

Vivienne's late husband, Danny Tan Koon Poh, was the grandson of Hokkien businessman and philanthropist Tan Kah Kee. She has written this chapter in memory of her husband and her late father-in-law, Tan Guan Chay to share their illustrious family history and focus on their tradition of thrift and philanthropy. Vivienne serves as a committee member of the Tan Kah Kee Foundation, a non-profit organisation that promotes the spirit of entrepreneurship, and supports educational causes through scholarships and grants. She actively maintains and promotes cultural interaction between China and Singapore. Vivienne has been managing her husband's various businesses since his demise in 2018.

Yeo Eng Koon (Chinese, Teochew)

Yeo Eng Koon, together with his brother Yeo Eng Huat, has penned this chapter about their father, Yeo Khee Lim, a prominent businessman, Chinese art collector, and philanthropist. Eng Koon joined the Tong Fong Group (their family business) in the late 1970s. He inherited the Xiu Hai Lou Collection from his father. This includes precious Chinese art and calligraphy works, rare inkstones, and jade pieces. Eng Koon also continues his father's passion for contributing to society and serves in the Chiu Chow Social Hall and Thong Chai Medical Institution which provides free traditional Chinese medical services to people from all walks of life. He is married to Shirley Yeo. They have two daughters, Lynette and Yvette, and one son, Gerald.

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