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Winter 2019

## **Berita Winter 2018/2019**

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Winter  
2018/2019

# Berita

Malaysia/Singapore/Brunei Studies Group  
Association for Asian Studies

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## Letter from the Chair

We are delighted to present the Winter 2019 issue of *Berita*. One of our key goals this past year has been to make *Berita* a publication that provides scholars and students a chance to present, in depth, some of their ongoing or recent research. This issue includes two outstanding articles, each providing a unique view of two crucial periods in Singapore's past.

The first, "MEMORIES OF ROLLEI SINGAPORE," by Loh Kah Seng (University of Western Australia) and Nguyen Loc Luu Ly (Yale-NUS College) is an examination of the history and corporate structure of the German company Rollei's once-thriving Singapore factory. We found it remarkable for its focus on a little-known period of industrial history in Singapore and for its attention to the memory culture of its former employees, what the authors call the "theatre of memory."

The second article, "ENCOUNTERING COMMUNISM IN A COSMOPOLITAN CITY: THE DUCROUX CASE IN THE EYES OF THE SINGAPORE PRESS," by Kankan Xie (Peking University, China), explores the media coverage in Singapore of a striking moment in the colonial fight against communism, the arrest of Joseph Ducroux. A French agent of the Moscow-based Comintern, Ducroux's trial was described by *The Straits Times* as "one of the most startling political trials which has ever taken place in Singapore." We think you'll enjoy learning why.

Also have a look at news about the Brunei Research Center, an initiative of Guanxi University for the Nationalities.

For those of you who will be attending the upcoming AAS meeting in Denver, please mark your calendars with the date and time

of the Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Studies Group (MSB) Annual Business Meeting. We'll be meeting on Saturday, March 23, 1:15 to 2:45 in Plaza Court 4, Sheraton Denver Downtown (the conference hotel). Members and non-members are welcome, and remember that members and those joining as members are asked to pay their annual \$20 dues at the meeting (you can also pay via the AAS website).

At AAS 2019, Malaysia will be represented more than ever before, with several sponsored panels that focus on the vast political and financial shifts which have occurred in the past year, and on key developments in East Malaysia. We've listed the Malaysia-focused panels and printed information on all the MSB-related panels in this issue of *Berita*.

If you aren't on one of these two media platforms, please email me and I'll ensure that you are added. The Facebook group is increasingly active and vibrant.

Two additional important points about the MSB at the AAS 2019: Our group will be seeking to sponsor a two-part panel at the AAS in March of 2020 called "REVISIONING 2020." The goal is to rethink and revisiting Mahathir's "Vision 2020" and the Malaysia that has emerged since he coined the slogan (and the "vision" of a perfect future that it anticipated). We will be talking about how to proceed with this theme for 2020 at our business meeting. And finally, on Saturday night after the last panel is finished, we'll be having our annual MSB dinner at a local Denver restaurant — we'll be sending out more information about it via Facebook and the email group soon. We'd love for you to join us!

Patricia Sloane-White  
Chair, MSB Studies Group

pswhite@udel.edu

## Announcements

*Berita* is now available through the new Ohio Open Library at:  
<https://ohioopen.library.ohio.edu/berita/>

### **MSB Group Business Meeting at the AAS Conference 2019 (Denver, CO, March 20-24)**

The Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Studies Group (MSB) Annual Business Meeting will be held at during AAS 2019 on Saturday, March 23, 1:15 to 2:45 in Plaza Court 4, Sheraton Denver Downtown (the conference hotel). Members and non-members are welcome.

At AAS 2019, Malaysia will be represented more than ever before, with several sponsored panels that focus on the vast political and financial shifts which have occurred in the past year, and on key developments in East Malaysia.

### **Panels Organized and/or Sponsored by MSB Group and its Members at the AAS Conference 2019 (Denver, CO, March 20-24)**

#### **1.) Roundtable Session (MSB-Sponsored):**

“Rising Messiahs and Fallen Heroes: Charismatic Politics and Power in Southeast Asia”

3/23/2019 5:15 - 7:00 PM; Plaza Court 7

#### *Organizers:*

Sophie Lemièrre (Stanford University)  
 Dominik M. Müller (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Germany)

#### *Chair:*

Joseph C. Liow (NTU Singapore)

#### *Discussants:*

Sophie Lemièrre (Stanford University)  
 Dominik Müller (MPI, Germany)  
 Tracy Llanera (University of Connecticut)  
 Richard Rohwer (German Institute of Global and Area Studies GIGA)  
 Ping Tjin Thum (Oxford University, UK)

#### **2.) Organized Panel Session (MSB-Sponsored):**

“Malaysia in Transition? Before and After the Historic May 2018 General Elections”

3/22/2019 11:15 - 1:00 PM; Plaza Court 2

#### *Organizers:*

Jiayun Elvin Ong (University of British Columbia, Singapore)  
 Nawab Osman (NTU Singapore)

#### *Chair:*

Nawab Osman (NTU Singapore)

#### *Paper Presenters:*

Terence Gomez (UM, Malaysia)  
 Nawab Osman (NTU Singapore)  
 Jiayun Elvin Ong (University of British Columbia, Singapore)  
 Aida Arosoaie (NTU Singapore)

#### *Discussant:*

Bridget Welsh (John Cabot University, Italy)

#### **3.) Organized Panel Session (MSB-Sponsored):**

“Toward a New Malaysia? The 2018 Elections and Their Aftermath”

3/23/2019 9:00 - 10:45 AM; Gold, Tower

#### *Organizer:*

Meredith Weiss (University of Albany, State University of New York)

*Paper Presenters:*

Ibrahim Saffian (Merdeka Center, Malaysia)  
 Chin Hat Wong (Penang Institute, Malaysia)  
 Ross Tapsen (ANU, Australia)  
 Johan Saravanamuttu (NTU Singapore)

*Discussants:*

Faisal Hazis (UKM, Malaysia)  
 Meredith Weiss (University of Albany, State University of New York)

**4.) Organized Panel Session:**

“Malaysia’s Democratic Spring? Authoritarian Elections, Ethnicity and Gender in Comparative Perspective”

3/21/2019 7:30 - 9:15 PM; Gold, Plaza Court 3, Plaza Bldg.

*Organizer:*

Kikue Hamayotsu (Northern Illinois University)

*Chair:*

Kikue Hamayotsu (Northern Illinois Univ.)

*Paper Presenters:*

Maznah Mohamad (NUS)  
 Kai Ostwald (University of British Columbia, Canada)  
 Sebastian Dettman (Cornell University)

*Discussants:*

Kikue Hamayotsu (Northern Illinois Univ.)  
 James Jesudason (Colorado School of Mines)

**5.) Organized Panel Session (MSB-Sponsored):**

“Sabah and Its Region: Mobility and Migration on an Inter-Asian Frontier”

3/24/2019 11:00 AM - 12:45 PM; Columbine, Tower Bldg.

*Organizers:*

Andrew Carruthers (University of Pennsylvania)  
 Michael Yeo (University of Oxford, UK)

*Chair:*

Oona Paredes (NUS)

*Paper Presenters:*

Shinobu Majima (Gakushuin University, Japan)  
 Michael Yeo (University of Oxford, UK)  
 Vilashini Somiah National (NUS)  
 Andrew Carruthers (Univ. of Pennsylvania)

*Discussant:*

Oona Paredes (NUS)

**6.) Organized Panel Session:**

“Sound and Image in Southeast Asia”

3/22/2019 9:00 - 10:45 AM; Plaza Court 3

*Organizer:*

Maitrii Aung-Thwin (NUS)

*Paper Presenters:*

Anne Rasmussen (College of William & Mary)  
 Joe Kinzer (Independent Scholar)  
 Jennifer Rachel Morris (NUS)  
 J Paul Manzanilla (NUS)

**7.) Organized Panel Session:**

“Sites of Ruptures and Connections: Southeast Asia and Its Chinese Communities, Part I: Connections”

3/22/2019 1:30 - 3:15 PM; Spruce, Tower

*Organizers:*

Anh Sy Huy Le (Michigan State University)  
 Guo-Quan Seng (NUS)

*Chair:*

Huei-Ying Kuo (Johns Hopkins University)

*Paper Presenters:*

Anh Sy Huy Le (Michigan State University)

Huei-Ying Kuo (Johns Hopkins University)

Phillip Guingona (Wells College)

Peter Post (NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Netherlands)

*Discussant:*

Huei-Ying Kuo (Johns Hopkins University)

**8.) Organized Panel Session:**

“Sites of Ruptures and Connections: Southeast Asia and Its Chinese Communities, Part II: Ruptures”

3/22/2019 3:45 – 5:30 PM; Spruce, Tower

*Organizers:*

Anh Sy Huy Le (Michigan State University)

Guo-Quan Seng (NUS)

*Chair:*

Rachel Leow (University of Cambridge, UK)

*Paper Presenters:*

Guo-Quan Seng (NUS)

Rachel Leow (University of Cambridge)

Chien-Wen Kung (University of the Pacific)

Nicholas Wong (University of Chicago)

*Discussant:*

Rachel Leow (University of Cambridge)

**9.) Organized Panel Session:**

“States, Kings, and Politics in Southeast Asia, Past and Present”

3/23/2019 9:00 - 10:45 PM; Tower

*Organizer:*

Maitrii Aung-Thwin (NUS)

*Paper Presenters:*

Alexander Wain (International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies Malaysia)

Erick White (University of Michigan)

Tomas Larsson (University of Cambridge)

**10.) Organized Panel Session:**

“Botanic Gardens and the Mastery of Nature: Empire, Nation, and Environment in Southeast Asia”

3/23/2019 3:00 - 4:45 PM; Plaza Court 2

*Organizer:*

Luthfi Adam (Northwestern University)

*Chair:*

Timothy Barnard (NUS)

*Paper Presenters:*

Luthfi Adam (Northwestern University)

Timothy Barnard (NUS)

Andrew Goss (Augusta University)

Gani Jaelani (Universitas Padjajaran, Indonesia)

*Discussant:*

Suzanne Moon (University of Oklahoma)

**11.) Organized Panel Session:**

“Creating Healthy Publics? Pursuing Healthy Behavior in Asia, 1911-1941”

3/24/2019 11:00 AM - 12:45 PM; Tower

*Organizer:*

Sarah Yu (University of Pennsylvania)

*Chair:*

Brandon Williams (UC Berkeley)

*Paper Presenters:*

Maurits Meerwijk (St. Andrews, UK)

David Saunders (University of Hong Kong)

Sarah Yu (University of Pennsylvania)

## Article

### MEMORIES OF ROLLEI SINGAPORE

Loh Kah Seng (University of Western Australia)

Nguyen Loc Luu Ly (Yale-NUS College)

#### Introduction

Although its heyday was in the 1970s and over 30 years have passed since it wound down in 1981, Rollei Singapore remains what historian Raphael Samuel termed a ‘theatre of memory’ among older Singaporeans. Samuel viewed history as ‘a social form of knowledge; the work, in any given instance, of a thousand different hands’.<sup>1</sup> A theatre of memory encompasses a broad inquiry into areas of little interest to many historians, including heritage, memory and nostalgia.

Rollei Singapore is a theatre of memory — a long-defunct place which remains close to the hearts of older Singaporeans. In August 2017, Loh Kah Seng posted in two Facebook groups on Singapore nostalgia a short note and photograph of the main factory of the renowned German camera-maker at Kampong Chai Chee.<sup>2</sup> Industrial memory is infrequently encountered on Facebook but there were numerous responses to the Rollei post. These fell into two groups: someone had worked for the company or owned its ‘Made in Singapore’ cameras, such as the popular miniature Rollei 35.<sup>3</sup>

The idea of a ‘theatre of memory’ fleshes out Rollei Singapore, and by extension Singapore’s industrial heritage, as a site of dramatic and richly-textured memories.

This article draws upon Loh’s oral history interviews with several ex-Rollei employees, and a public oral history sharing session by three ex-Rolleians titled, ‘Memories of Rollei Singapore’, at the National Museum of Singapore in April 2018, which Loh facilitated.



(From left) Mr. Lim, Mr. Chong and Mr. Kamarudin at the ‘Memories of Rollei Singapore’ sharing session. Photograph: Loh Kah Seng.



Rollei Optical factory at Indus Road. Source: Rollei, International Rollei Press Conference and ISEAS Seminar in Singapore, March 19–24, 1973.

#### Rollei in Singapore

Rollei’s decision to relocate to Singapore in 1971 appeared typical of multinationals at the time: it was beset by high labor costs in Europe while Singapore offered affordable workers, good factory sites and tax

<sup>1</sup> Samuel, Raphael 1994, *Theatres of memory: past and present in contemporary culture*, Verso, London, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> This was part of a heritage research project led by Loh Kah Seng and supported by the National Heritage Board titled, ‘Theatres of history and memory: industrial heritage in 20<sup>th</sup> century Singapore’.

<sup>3</sup> On a little street in Singapore, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/183252211695508/permalink/1510221705665212/>, Nostalgic Singapore, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/48000673979/permalink/10155637687823980/>

holidays.<sup>4</sup> Its arrival was hailed in the local press as a 'big leap forward' for Singapore to become a modern precision engineering center.<sup>5</sup> Rollei Singapore operated factories at Kampong Chai Chee (the main plant), Indus Road, Alexandra, Kallang, and Benoi Road — all of which except the last were located near residential areas. The factories made cameras, notably the Rollei 35 and Rolleiflex SL35, lenses and shutters, cine-projectors, and flashlights. It employed a thousand workers in 1972, which rose to 4,700 by the time it closed down.

Rollei Singapore was keenly followed by the press, through which the company announced substantial sums of investment, production targets, turnover, and (more ominously) training costs.<sup>6</sup> Much of its social memory today is shaped by its image and symbol as an industrial spectacle in 1970s Singapore. The first few years told a narrative of expansion; subsequent developments were, however, more difficult.

The global oil shocks of 1973 and resulting recession forced the company into 'consolidation' and brought fears of major retrenchment, though this did not materialize.<sup>7</sup> A new chairman, Peter Peperzak, admitted issues with marketing and sales.<sup>8</sup> A *Straits Times* report on 2 October 1975 painted the picture of a company fighting for survival, beset by the competition from Japanese single-lens reflex cameras and high costs of training

Singaporean technicians.<sup>9</sup> Peperzak predicted the company's recovery in 1977,<sup>10</sup> while press reports two years later alluded to new product lines. But the narrative turned increasingly constrained in the final years, with news of further changes in leadership, sales policy, and an unexplained drive to improve teamwork in the factory.<sup>11</sup>

Rollei Braunschweig went bankrupt in June 1981, and the Singapore operation soon followed suit. The company attributed the failure to three factors: the Japanese cameras driving down demand for Rollei's products, the strength of the Singapore dollar which made the parent company pay more for its subsidiary's products, costing a loss in foreign exchange of \$1 million a month, and the rise in interest rates worldwide.<sup>12</sup> Notably, though, the last two issues, or the cost of training Singaporeans, would not have been factors without the first.

The retrenchment axe arrived for over 4,000 employees in Singapore, while its factories and machinery were auctioned off and sold. Soul-searching was called for; a *Straits Times* article underlined the need to adapt any product to world demand, irrespective of its brand or production technology.<sup>13</sup> Another article suggested that the training of locals in precision engineering was a decent trade-off for Singapore.<sup>14</sup>

In the second volume of his memoirs, the late Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, who was Prime Minister of Singapore at the time, told his side of the

<sup>4</sup> 'Rollei will invest \$40 m to build three new factories in S'pore' 1971, *The Straits Times*, February 19.

<sup>5</sup> 'Precision industry's big leap forward' 1971, *The Straits Times*, March 21.

<sup>6</sup> 'Rollei to go public next year' 1972, *The Straits Times*, November 17.

<sup>7</sup> 'Rollei acts to avoid layoffs' 1974, *The Straits Times*, November 17.

<sup>8</sup> 'Rollei store's big boost' 1975, *The Straits Times*, July 15.

<sup>9</sup> 'Rollei tries out a strategy for success' 1975, *The Straits Times*, October 2.

<sup>10</sup> 'Rollei well on its way to recovery' 1976, *The Straits Times*, September 11.

<sup>11</sup> 'Rollei plans to double production at S'pore plant' 1981, *The Straits Times*, May 23.

<sup>12</sup> 'Everything rests on finding new markets' 1981, *The Straits Times*, June 27.

<sup>13</sup> 'What we can learn from Rollei' 1981, *The Straits Times*, July 5.

<sup>14</sup> 'A survival plan that failed to save Rollei' 1981, *The Straits Times*, November 26.



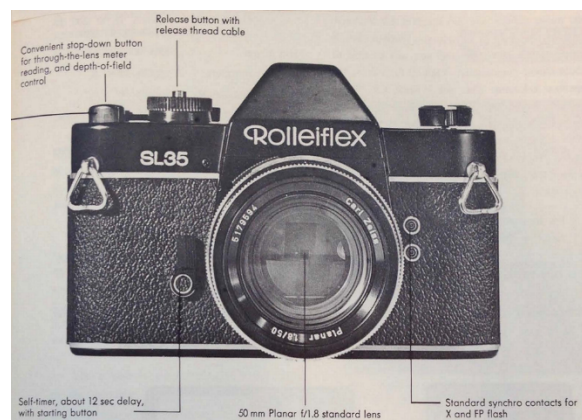
Rollei story. He attributed the company's failure to shifts in technology and markets within the industry and to its inability to coordinate its research and production in two different countries. The failure was not due, he emphasized, to the Singaporeans Rollei had trained, as many European investors alleged at the time. Quite the contrary, as Lee pointed out, 'One consolation was that the 4,000 workers trained in precision engineering became a valuable base for the disk drive industry that arrived in Singapore in the 1980s'.<sup>15</sup>

Lee's reflections form a positive interpretation of history: despite Rollei's failure, Singapore benefited from the collaboration. He situated Rollei within the narrative of Singapore's transition to a technology-intensive and skills-based economy in the 1980s.

Skills transfer was in the government's mind from the start. Speaking at the official opening of the Rollei factory at Alexandra in 1971, Minister for Finance Hon Sui Sen urged young people to take up a career in precision engineering. This was an industry which depended on product design and development, and the skill and productivity of workers.<sup>16</sup> Two years later, Rollei and the government jointly established the Rollei-Government Training Centre to train locals in precision mechanics and optics, and tool and die-making.



*Mr. Chong's Rollei 35. Photograph: Courtesy of Juria Toramae.*



*Rolleiflex SL35. From Rollei News, Vol.1, Nos. 1-2, 1975. (PublicationSG)*

<sup>15</sup> Lee, Kuan Yew 2000, *From Third World to First: the Singapore Story 1965-2000: memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew*, Singapore Press Holdings: Times Editions, Singapore.

<sup>16</sup> 'Precision industry's big leap forward' 1971, *The Straits Times*, March 21.

### Memories of Deindustrialization

Lee Kuan Yew recalled the past as a political leader, but if we consider oral histories of deindustrialization in Western contexts, former workers of small industrial towns have remembered similar events in diverse ways. Although Singapore has not experienced deindustrialization, arguably the closure of industries or their relocation elsewhere due to market or policy changes was a similar type of experience for workers.

Deindustrialization was a difficult experience, especially in small towns where industries provided work to locals and forged a strong community. In Beverley, East Yorkshire, England, the growth of manufacturing after the Second World War kept young people in the town to work, while the industries also built sports and social amenities which locals used. Deindustrialization had an adverse impact on the community of Beverley.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, in Sturgeon Falls, a milling town of 6,000 people in Canada, the mill was a major source of jobs, providing stable employment for local families. When it closed in 2002, it precipitated widespread anxiety about having to travel long distances to work. Just as 'everybody knew everybody' was a common frame of reference in people's memories of the mill, its closure brought about a rupture in the social fabric of Sturgeon Falls.<sup>18</sup>

However, memories of deindustrialization can also be more optimistic. Long-time

residents of the industrial town of Castleford, Yorkshire, England, spoke positively about pride, gratitude and hope in remembering their jobs. Such 'progressive nostalgia', while not ignoring the difficult aspects of industrial work, was imaginative and oriented towards a better future.<sup>19</sup>

In Point Saint-Charles District in Montreal, Canada, nostalgia has become a defence mechanism against socio-economic disruption. It was fondly remembered by long-time residents; as one person warmly recalled the change in shift, "it was black with people in the streets." Their tough manual jobs were proudly recalled by many residents, who were unhappy with the gentrification of the neighborhood and influx of middle-class families.<sup>20</sup>

These reminiscences illustrate the nature of oral history. As oral historian Alessandro Portelli found in his study of Terni, a steel town in Italy, oral histories of the working class should not be read for their veracity alone. It is rather their inherent subjectivity and emotion that make them interesting. Workers' oral histories express 'judgment, dream, desire' to an external audience and are thus public and creative narratives.<sup>21</sup>

This was also the case with our interviews with ex-Rolleians and their sharing at 'Memories of Rollei Singapore'. As a historian, Loh Kah Seng posed questions and facilitated the sharing, but it was the interviewees who decided what they said, how to say it, and whom they said it to. They

<sup>17</sup> Ramsden, Stefan 2016, 'The role of the industrial workplace in working-class community, 1945-1980', *Family & community history*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 34-49.

<sup>18</sup> High, Steven 2015, "'They were making good money, just ten minutes from home': proximity and distance in the plant shutdown stories of northern Ontario mill workers", *labour/le Travail*, vol. 76, pp. 11-36.

<sup>19</sup> Smith, Laurajane & Gary Campbell 2017, 'Nostalgia for the future: memory, nostalgia and the politics of class',

*International journal of heritage studies* vol. 23, no. 7, pp. 612-627.

<sup>20</sup> Chatterjee, Piyusha & Steven High 2017, 'The deindustrialization of our senses: residual and dominant soundscapes in Montreal's Point Saint-Charles district' in Katie Holmes & Heather Goodall, (eds), *Telling environmental histories*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

<sup>21</sup> Portelli, Alessandro 2014, *Biography of an industrial town: Terni, Italy, 1831-2014*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

were not merely recounting the history of Rollei, but interpreting its memory and meaning to a wider audience.

### **Training in Germany**

The oral histories of the ex-Rolleians can be divided into three chronological frames: initial departure of technicians for training in Germany, work and play in Rollei Singapore and closure of the factory. The technicians recalled training in Germany as a milestone event for themselves and Singapore.

One such trainee, Chong Nam Soy, joined Rollei Singapore as a production technician in December 1971 upon graduating from Singapore Polytechnic. He was part of a group of Singaporeans who spent seven months at the headquarters of Rollei-Werke in Braunschweig and at a camera shutter plant in Calmbach in the Black Forest. Chong returned to set up a shutter production line in Singapore, supervising a group of female production workers.

For Chong, the German stint was not merely a prelude to his work at Rollei Singapore but an important part of his life story. Although he took photographs of the trainees outside their training – including their trips to the Black Forest – the training experience was the most formative. The idea of being a pioneer was central to his narrative: he was among the early trainees (though not of the first group) who went to Germany. He also viewed Rollei as Singapore's first multinational, vertically integrated to make an entire product from start to finish locally.

The other significance of the Rollei experience for Chong concerned productivity — one of the major official themes in Singapore's industrialization, as Hon Sui Sen had emphasized.<sup>22</sup> Most of the production workers in Germany were Yugoslav women while some were physically-challenged war veterans (possibly a cost-cutting measure). Chong found them to be disciplined, unquestioningly obeying their supervisors and taking immense pride in their work. In Germany, he learnt about the importance of nimble hands and productive work.<sup>23</sup> At the sharing, he highlighted industrial values such as discipline, punctuality and pride.

The recollections of Mr. Lim Hong Hin, a technician from the pioneer batch of trainees, were however more offbeat and independent of the Singapore Story. He joked about taking a flight to Germany as soon as 'the next morning', and when Rollei wanted to extend his training, he rejected it for his wife in Singapore wanted him to return home! Both Lim and Chong agreed on the intense training in Germany and having to meet production targets. Both also remembered the food — Chong missed having rice in Germany, while Lim found that the locals drank coffee without milk. But Lim went a little further, recalling how some trainees were caught using the Singapore 20 cent coin, which was similar in size to the Deutsche Mark \$1 coin, to buy beer.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Economic Development Board 1965–1968, *Annual report*, Economic Development Board, Singapore.

<sup>23</sup> Loh Kah Seng's interview with Chong Nam Soy, August 10, 2017; Chong Nam Soy at the 'Memories of Rollei

Singapore' sharing session, National Museum of Singapore and Singapore Heritage Festival April 14, 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Loh Kah Seng's interview with Chong Nam Soy, August 10, 2017; Lim Hong Hin at 'Memories of Rollei Singapore'.



*Rollei headquarters in Braunschweig, Germany. Photograph: Courtesy of Mr. Chong Nam Soy.*



*Training in Germany. Photograph: Courtesy of Mr. Chong Nam Soy.*

### **Work and Play at Rollei Singapore**

Returning to Singapore, Mr. Chong implemented what he had learnt. He had no problem setting up the shutter production line. His real difficulty was in supervising the ‘girls’ — the young female production workers who were mostly recent school-leavers. While his assessment was generally balanced, he found them frustrating at times. They learnt quickly but were not disciplined — they ‘can’t compare with the Germans’, he said.<sup>25</sup>

At the sharing session, Chong remarked how challenging it was for a young man like him to ‘take care’ of the girls, drawing laughter from the audience. It was not a question of age, though the women workers in Germany were middle-aged. The real issue was discipline, for ‘when they worked, they didn’t talk so much, and even if they talked, they would talk softly and they did not turn their heads to talk’. But the Singaporeans, energetic and talkative, stopped work when they talked.<sup>26</sup>

Mr. Chee Chin Seong was a technician who was on the same plane to Germany as Chong and returned to set up another shutter production line. Some supervisors, he remembered, attempted to enforce National Service-style discipline on the operators, showing the line to be a site of contestation between official and worker notions of productivity.<sup>27</sup> The former was important to the company. As Mr. Lim recalled, at his flashlight control department, there were literally ‘4,000 orders’ to meet every night.<sup>28</sup>

There was, however, another side to history. The oral history of Ms. Maryati, an ex-Rollei operator, stands in productive tension to the memories of the supervisors. She was

<sup>25</sup> Loh Kah Seng’s interview with Chong Nam Soy, August 10, 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Chong Nam Soy at ‘Memories of Rollei Singapore’.

<sup>27</sup> Loh Kah Seng’s interview with Chee Chin Seong, August 10, 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Lim Hong Hin at ‘Memories of Rollei Singapore’.

19 years old, having just completed her secondary education, when she applied for a job at the Rollei factory in Chai Chee in 1973. She lived nearby, a short bus ride away, as did many women employed in light industries in the 1970s. Compared to the German-trained technicians, it was a mundane start to working life for Maryati.

As she conceded in her oral history, Maryati was 'playful' when she first started work in the final control department, which conducted quality-checks of the cameras. Discipline at Rollei was strict, and she was sent down to a shutter production line as a result (although she did not know Chong or Chee). She married four years later, after which she became more serious in her work and earned promotion to a lead girl, overseeing a group of 15 operators. In 1979, she was selected to go to Germany for a training course, which she turned down as she was pregnant.

This narrative arc appears to parallel Chong's but has crucial differences. Maryati emphasized that she did not enjoy production work, which she found to be dull. She remained at Rollei (until it closed) only because of her colleagues, who became her close friends. She mentioned a particular Patricia, with whom she has unfortunately lost touch. For Maryati and possibly other 'girls' on the line, social relations underpinned, rather than hampered, productivity.<sup>29</sup>

At Rollei, Maryati met her future husband Mr. Hassan Abdullah, a security guard. Interviewing them together was fruitful, as they weaved together an oral history account which transcended the accepted conception of work. Hassan had numerous stories of Rollei Singapore, having worked in

the different factories. As Maryati pointed out, while operators knew production, security guards knew the people. Hassan told me about checking employees' bags for items and other interesting incidents in the factories.<sup>30</sup> But some of them were personal or sensitive, so the couple asked me not to divulge these stories. This limitation of oral history highlights its nature as a public narrative.

Most other aspects of employment at Rollei Singapore unrelated to production were remembered without issue. At the sharing, Mr. Kamarudin, a member of the planning department, highlighted the role of sports and cross-cultural relations. While, as he said, 'the Germans were very serious, work-wise they were serious', they regarded football to be as important. Kamarudin was a member of his department's football team, which had German players and played hard against teams from other departments of Rollei and other companies. Sports were part of the corporate culture nurtured by big companies in Singapore. But, as Kamarudin related, locals also invited their German colleagues to their homes during Hari Raya.<sup>31</sup>



*Ms. Maryati with colleagues at Rollei. Courtesy of Ms. Maryati.*

<sup>29</sup> Loh Kah Seng's interview with Maryati, August 27, 2017.

<sup>30</sup> Loh Kah Seng's interview with Hassan Abdullah, August

27, 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Kamarudin at 'Memories of Rollei Singapore'.



*The 'girls' (and many 'boys') of Rollei Singapore at the Alexandra factory. Photograph: courtesy of Lim Hong Hin.*



*The Planning Department's football team. Photograph: Courtesy of Mr. Kamarudin.*



*Singaporean Rollei employees with a German colleague. Photograph: Courtesy of Lim Hong Hin.*

### Closure and Aftermath

Mr. Chong left Rollei Singapore in 1977 to become a training officer at the German-Singapore Institute of Production Technology and the Brown Boveri-Government Training Centre (successor to the Rollei-Government Training Centre), using his technical knowledge to train skilled workers and craftsmen.<sup>32</sup> Of Rollei's closure, he mused, 'I felt sad for Rollei but I didn't feel sad'. The company, he explained, produced many entrepreneurs, sometimes inadvertently: former employees bought standing and moulding machines from Rollei to set up a successful plastic moulding company.<sup>33</sup>

His colleague, Mr. Chee, remained with the company till it folded. As he related, it was 'very easy to find a job', almost akin to being jobless for only a day. He became a supervisor at General Electric's factory in Kallang, which made resistors and transistors — quite a change from camera shutters. A year later, he moved to Tandon, where he set up a production line for floppy disks, which heralded the birth of the disk drive industry in Singapore.<sup>34</sup> As Chee and Chong pointed out, while the industry might be different, the technical processes were the same.

The experience of abrupt unemployment did not seem to have troubled the other interviewees. Maryati left Rollei when she had a child. Years later, she joined Seagate, another company in the disk drive industry. She worked long hours under strict discipline on the production floor.<sup>35</sup> Her husband Hassan, the security guard, remained with Rollei till the end when it sold off its assets. He was not overly worried

<sup>32</sup> Loh Kah Seng's interview with Chong Nam Soy, August 10, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Kamarudin at 'Memories of Rollei Singapore'.

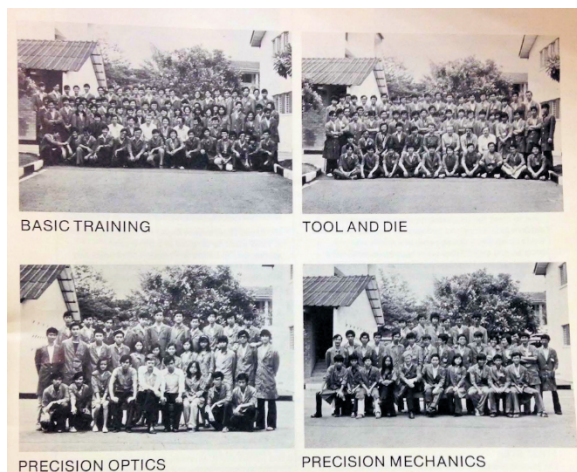
<sup>34</sup> Loh Kah Seng's interview with Chee Chin Seong, August 10, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Loh Kah Seng's interview with Maryati, August 27, 2017.

about employment, becoming a delivery driver afterwards.<sup>36</sup>

Mr. Kamarudin from the Planning Department found a new job at inventory control in Micropolis, another disk drive company; having Rollei on his CV helped, he said. But Kamarudin's oral history also pointed to a different slice of history:

*"When we heard that Rollei was in the Court of Liquidation, everyone was shocked. It was announced after lunchtime. Girls were crying."<sup>37</sup>*



*Trainees of the Rollei-Government Training Centre in 1975, from Rollei-Government Training Centre, Annual (Singapore: Rollei-Government Training Centre, 1975).*



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*Auction Notice, from Rollei Singapore ephemera collection of the National Library Board.*

### Conclusion

Oral history tells us much about history and memory. Three themes in the oral histories of Rollei Singapore stand out. First, like those of deindustrialization elsewhere, the oral histories contain diverse recollections. For the technicians, the opportunity to train abroad was careerdefining. Returning to Singapore, they implemented a demanding work schedule which encountered practices on the factory floor. Chong would likely have found Ms. Maryati's initially unserious, talkative behavior at work annoying, but the social buzz and closeness between female operators, engaged in what was otherwise mundane work, was an important pillar of productivity in the Singapore context.

The second theme is connected to the first: if the work was unremarkable, Rollei Singapore nonetheless formed a vibrant theatre of memory. Maryati's chats and gossip with fellow workers come to mind, but also important was Mr. Hassan, her husband, a key person in the company despite his lowly occupation. He was someone who knew people well and has numerous stories to tell today (though some

<sup>36</sup> Loh Kah Seng's interview with Hassan Abdullah, August 27, 2017.

<sup>37</sup> Kamarudin at 'Memories of Rollei Singapore'.

he would only do so privately). These small tales of people and incidents may not impinge on the big history of Rollei, but are central to its role as a memory site. The same applies to Mr. Kamarudin's recollections of football and Hari Raya with German colleagues. Such memories of fraternity cultivated a continuing attachment to Rollei Singapore long after the company closed down. We hope Ms. Maryati will find her lost friend, Patricia.

Finally, oral history offers insights into what and how people remember. Singaporeans often tell the history of the nation and the state when they narrate their own stories.<sup>38</sup> The ex-Rolleians often returned to the theme of productivity. But our interviewees were also able to convey other narratives of work, friendship, play, and departure; humorously, Mr. Lim subverted our assumptions of how the past would be remembered, much to the joy of the audience at the National Museum. The official and personal stories could largely co-exist. The familiar tropes in the Singapore Story are perhaps not so much boxes into which Singaporeans have to fit their stories, but scaffoldings by which they can find ways to recall their memories alongside the official narrative.

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<sup>38</sup> Loh, Kah Seng 2013, *Squatters into citizens: the 1961 Bukit Ho Swee fire and the making of modern Singapore*, NUS Press,

Singapore.



## Article

### ENCOUNTERING COMMUNISM IN A COSMOPOLITAN CITY: THE DUCROUX CASE IN THE EYES OF THE SINGAPORE PRESS

Kankan Xie<sup>1</sup> (Peking University)

*“From the very outset, subversive activities in Malaya were due to outside influences. There was no irritant within Malaya to give rise to such a reaction (to communism). There was no organization within Malaya which was capable of producing such clever political propaganda. All of it came from China! It was smuggled in a variety of ways, re-adapted for local consumption, and secretly distributed. This was not an unconnected or individual effort confined to Malaya alone. It was part of a coordinated Far Eastern plan. Its main object was to create local Communist Parties, each able to stand on their own. It made special use of popular movements such as patriotic boycotts or local wage disputes to increase the difficulties of and discontent against local authorities, and to gain sympathy and fresh adherents for the Party.”<sup>2</sup>*

The sensational remark above comes from the memoir of Rene Onraet, who served as the director of the Criminal Intelligence Department (CID) of the Straits Settlements Police from 1922 to 1935, and as the Inspector-General between 1935 and 1939.

Similar to many colonial administrators of his time, Onraet believed that British Malaya’s primary security challenges originated from not within but outside of the colony. Due to Malaya’s sizable immigrant population, the British authorities considered the Chinese community as prone to receiving various political influences from China. Particularly threatening was international communism coordinated by the Moscow-based Communist International (Comintern), which provided anti-colonial movements across the globe with both coherent theoretical guidance and an extensive organizational network.

Scholars commonly regard the Comintern as having played a critical role in the emergence of the communist movement in late-colonial Malaya.<sup>3</sup> When discussing the Comintern’s early influence, existing scholarships often use the arrest of Joseph Ducroux — alias Serge Lefranc, a French agent of the Comintern — in Singapore in June 1931 to illustrate the Comintern-China-Malaya connection.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, historians have attached special meanings to the Ducroux Case, primarily because of the more significant repercussions it caused internationally. With the information obtained in this operation, the British colonial authorities managed to apprehend Hilaire Noulens, a high-ranking official of Comintern’s Far East Bureau (FEB) in Shanghai on June 15, 1931, as well as Nguyen Ai Quoc (later known as Ho Chi

<sup>1</sup> Kankan Xie is an assistant professor in the Department of Southeast Asian Studies, Peking University, China. He conducted this research under the Lee Kong Chian Research Fellowship provided by the National Library Board of Singapore.

<sup>2</sup> Onraet, René 1947, *Singapore: A Police Background*, Dorothy Crisp & Co., London, p. 109.

<sup>3</sup> Kheng, Cheah Boon 1992, *From PKI to the Comintern, 1924-1941: The Apprenticeship of the Malayan Communist*

*Party: Selected Documents and Discussion*, SEAP, Southeast Asia Program, Ithaca, N.Y., pp. 15-17.

<sup>4</sup> Streets-Salter, Heather 2014, ‘The Noulens Affair in East and Southeast Asia’, *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, vol. 21, no. 4, pp. 397-398; C. F. Yong, *The Origins of Malayan Communism* (Singapore: South Seas Society, 1997), xv.

Minh) in Hong Kong on 6 July 1931.<sup>56</sup> Using both official records and Ducroux's diary, Laurent Metzger has conducted detailed research on Ducroux's arrest in and eventual exile from Singapore between 1931 and 1932.<sup>7</sup> While such an account is useful in demonstrating the incident's international significance, little is known as to what immediate impression it created in the cosmopolitan port city. Moreover, it is also unclear how Singapore's general public perceived communism when communist organizations had yet firmly established themselves in the British colony. This article seeks to make sense of such issues by investigating how the Singapore press reported on the Ducroux Case.

### Historical Background

The Comintern played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 1921 and was deeply involved in formation of the alliance between the CPC and the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) during the Chinese Revolution of the mid-1920s, whose anti-imperialist campaigns posed unprecedented threats to British interests in the Far East. Despite the collapse of the KMT-CPC alliance in 1927, followed by the nationwide anti-communist purge by the KMT leader Chiang Kai-shek, the Comintern kept its operations in China by moving to Shanghai's International Settlement, where its Western agents could enjoy the protection of extraterritoriality.<sup>8</sup> Comprised of the Far East Bureau (FEB) and the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat

(PPTUS), the Comintern's Shanghai headquarters made various efforts in promoting communist movements across East and Southeast Asia and connecting them into a giant liaison network. The two organizations' tasks included, but were not limited to, allocating funds, dispatching couriers, recruiting and training new agents, as well as helping them to go to Moscow.<sup>9</sup>

As a result, the British kept a vigilant attitude towards the rapidly changing political situation in China and its potential ramifications in Malaya. With the increase of subversive activities and the constant influx of Chinese immigrants, British authorities adopted stringent measures to nip the communist threat in the bud, which thoroughly paralyzed early communist organizations in the colony. The Malayan Communist Party (MCP) was founded in 1930, but communist movement remained weak under the British rule. It was only during the World War II that the MCP gained more substantial influence through guerrilla warfare against Japan.

### The Surveillance

In April 1931, the FEB sent Ducroux to Singapore in hopes of connecting local communist organizations in Malaya to movements elsewhere in Asia. Using a counterfeit passport under the name of Serge Lefranc, Ducroux disguised himself as a businessman representing French hardware and wine companies. A few days after his arrival, Ducroux rented an office at Winchester House, hiring only one Indian

<sup>5</sup> Litten, Frederick S. 1994, 'The Noulens Affair', *The China Quarterly*, vol. 138, p. 494.

<sup>6</sup> 'Notorious French Communist Sentenced' 1931, *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, June 23.

<sup>7</sup> Metzger, Laurent 1996, 'Joseph Ducroux, a French Agent of the Comintern in Singapore (1931-1932)', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 69, no. 1, pp. 1-20.

<sup>8</sup> Lethbridge, Henry J. 1991, *All about Shanghai: A Standard Guidebook*, Oxford University Press, Hong Kong, p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> Onimaru, Takeshi 2016, 'Shanghai Connection: The Construction and Collapse of the Comintern Network in East and Southeast Asia', *Southeast Asian Studies* vol. 5, no. 1, p. 116.

servant. Having received intelligence, the police deployed two agents to keep watch on the Frenchman from an office nearby.<sup>10</sup> The agents reported that Ducroux only left his office for lunch and did not seem to be working at all except receiving occasional visitors behind a locked door. Ducroux's odd behavior and his frequent contact with Chinese communist suspects confirmed police suspicions.<sup>11</sup>

On 22 May, the police intercepted a letter that Ducroux wrote to a Shanghai address before it reached the post office. Written in mixed French and cipher, the unsigned letter mentioned a number of places in Malaya such as Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Malacca, Ipoh, and Terengganu. Five days later, the police intercepted a second letter to the same address in Shanghai. Although the letter was insufficient for the police to proceed against Ducroux, a particular sentence caught the attention of the authorities. The sentence read, "we are about to organize," and the words were followed by ciphers.<sup>12</sup> The CID chief René Onraet inferred with the use of other evidence that the letter contained information on activities of communist organizations. To prevent Ducroux from noticing the interception, the police passed on the original letters to Shanghai after making copies of the two letters.<sup>13</sup>

### The Arrest

The Straits Settlements authorities finally took action against Ducroux on 1 June. After Fu Tai-keng and Wong Muk-han, the Frenchman's two Chinese visitors left the room, the police broke into the office and

arrested him. Besides a small amount of money and common office necessities, a "highly seditious" book entitled "Workers of the Whole World Unite" was found in the pocket of Ducroux's pants.<sup>14</sup> More importantly, the police discovered a contact book that included addresses of his contacts in Shanghai and Hong Kong. Subsequently, Ducroux was taken to his boarding house, where the police confiscated more of his money in American travelers' checks amounting to \$12,000.<sup>15</sup> While the purpose of the funds was unclear, the authority found two unsigned letters in Ducroux's mailbox, which further corroborated suspicions of his connections to communist organizations in Shanghai.<sup>16</sup>

The incident also dealt a crushing blow to local communist organizations. Rai Bahadur Prithvi Chand, the Chief Inspector of the CID, identified one of Ducroux's two Chinese visitors arrested on the spot as local communist leader Wong Muk-han, who had been charged for his involvement in a communist bomb factory on Balestier Road and subsequently banished from the colony in 1929.<sup>17</sup> With the information discovered in Ducroux's address book, the police raided several houses across Singapore in the following few hours. In Lorong 30 Geylang, the authority discovered a secretary office of the Communist Party, where various propaganda literature was brought to light. Among various documents seized was a letter in English from the Communist Party of India in Calcutta, which congratulated their Chinese comrades in Malaya for their

<sup>10</sup> 'Alleged Communistic Activities' 1931, *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, June 20.

<sup>11</sup> '18 Months for Ducroux' 1931, *The Straits Times*, June 23.

<sup>12</sup> 'Alleged 'Reds' on Trial' 1931, *The Straits Times*, June 20.

<sup>13</sup> 'Alleged Communistic Activities' 1931, *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, June 20.

<sup>14</sup> 'Alleged 'Reds' on Trial' 1931, *The Straits Times*, June 20.

<sup>15</sup> 'Red Movement in Far East' 1931, *Malaya Tribune*, July

<sup>16</sup> 'European Red Sent to Prison: Probability of an Appeal' 1931, *Malaya Tribune*, June 23.

<sup>17</sup> 'Alleged 'Reds' on Trial' 1931, *The Straits Times*, June 20.

success in carrying out propaganda campaigns.<sup>18</sup>

Shortly after, the police searched a house in the nearby Sims Avenue that Wong Muk-han frequented after visiting Ducroux's office at Winchester. The detectives found a complete set of printing equipment as well as numerous copies of a red newspaper entitled "Malayan Worker."<sup>19</sup> The police continued by storming the servants' quarters attached to a European's house on Cairnhill Road. As a result, the detectives found more "seditious publications" by the Communist Party and associated organizations such as the Singapore Trades Union, the Singapore General Labour Union and the Anti-Imperialist League.<sup>20</sup> In addition to the seizure of communist propaganda materials, a number of communist suspects were apprehended in a series of police operations. Following Ducroux's arrest, 16 Chinese, including a Cantonese girl, and an Indian named Saminathan Amalu, were taken into custody.<sup>21</sup>

### The Trial and Sentence

Ducroux and 15 other communist suspects were brought to court on 18 June, which captured unexpected attention from the public. *The Straits Times* called the Ducroux Case "one of the most startling political trials which has ever taken place in Singapore."<sup>22</sup> The authorities withdrew the charge against Wong Muk-han — who had initially been marked as the third accused — by establishing a separate case for him, since Wong was both a convicted communist and returned banishee.<sup>23</sup> Another Chinese

suspect managed to escape a week before the commencement of the trial while being transferred from the Police Court to the Central Police Station. Among all the accused, only Ducroux was legally represented, by a lawyer named M.C. Johannes who had been chosen by the French Consulate in Singapore.<sup>24</sup> Fu Tai-keng and Saminathan Amalu, numbered as the second and the 17th accused respectively, spoke English in the court and required no interpreter.<sup>25</sup>

As the chief witness, CID Director René Onraet supplied various pieces of evidence in court that the police had collected through surveillance and raid operations against Ducroux. Ahmad bin Swahim, a Malay tailor from Geylang, testified as the second witness that he had known Fu Tai-keng since 1929 through a Javanese communist agent named Ali Majid. While working as Ali's secretary, Ahmad "learned about capitalism, imperialism, and the 'wickedness of the world'."<sup>26</sup> They also had many opportunities to meet Fu, whom Ali identified as a leader, in various local communist meetings. The police captured Ahmad and Ali successively in a series of anti-communist operations, which ultimately led to the latter's banishment from the Straits Settlements. However, Ahmad's understanding of communism appeared to be quite shallow, which was vividly reflected by a conversation of his in the court:

J (Judge): *What is the object of the Communist Party?*

<sup>18</sup> 'Alleged Communistic Activities' 1931, *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, June 20.

<sup>19</sup> 'Alleged 'Reds' on Trial' 1931, *The Straits Times*, June 20.

<sup>20</sup> 'Joseph Ducroux, Alias Serge Lefranc, Is Unmasked' 1939, *The Straits Times*, March 12.

<sup>21</sup> '18 Months for Ducroux' 1931, *The Straits Times*, June 23.

<sup>22</sup> '18 Months for Ducroux' 1931, *The Straits Times*, June 23.

<sup>23</sup> 'Alleged Communistic Activities' 1931, *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, June 20.

<sup>24</sup> 'Alleged 'Reds' on Trial' 1931, *The Straits Times*, June 20.

<sup>25</sup> "Alleged Communistic Activities," *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, June 20, 1931.

<sup>26</sup> 'Alleged Communistic Activities' 1931, *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, June 20.

A (Ahmad): *To follow Soviet Russia*

J: *What is Soviet Russia?*

A: *The Soviets destroyed the Russian Government and were against Imperialists.*

J: *Who are the Imperialists?*

A: *All the Europeans here are Imperialists.*

J: *Even Mr. Ducroux?*

A: *Yes.*<sup>27</sup>

Ducroux's Indian servant, who turned out to be working for the CID's surveillance mission, appeared in court as the third witness. Although only receiving meager incentives from the police, the servant kept good records of Ducroux and his visitors' activities in Winchester House. In addition to surveillance, he also seamlessly passed Ducroux's letters to the police without his French boss realizing. The servant's testimony in court further substantiated Onraet's claims against the accused.<sup>28</sup>

Ducroux's lawyer protested that there should have been a separate trial, as he suggested that evidence presented against other accused might prejudice his client. The judge rejected the proposal on the ground that Fu Tai-keng and Wong Muk-han's frequent visits to Winchester House were indeed relevant to Ducroux's case.<sup>29</sup> In his statement, Ducroux repudiated the credibility of the letters reproduced by the police and asserted that his correspondence to the Shanghai address was for purely

business purposes. The Frenchman also denied his connection to local communist organizations, as he spoke neither Chinese nor Malay. He further claimed that Fu and Wong were seeking employment at his office. Although Ducroux admitted that he engaged in lengthy conversations with Fu and Wong on business and local situations, sometimes they ran into difficulties in understanding each other, as the two Chinese visitors did not speak English fluently.<sup>30</sup>

Despite Ducroux's denial of the charges, the court eventually sentenced him to 18 months of rigorous imprisonment.<sup>31</sup> It turned out that not only did the authorities collect ample information through well-planned surveillance and raid missions in Singapore, but they also received useful intelligence from their counterparts abroad. Sufficient evidence indicated that Ducroux had become a militant communist in France since 1923.<sup>32</sup> Before his arrest in Singapore, Ducroux had visited Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Saigon under the pseudonym Serge Lefranc.<sup>33</sup> It was revealed later that Ducroux's long-term assignment from Comintern was actually to organize a communist movement in India. Although he was trying to build connections to local communist organizations, the primary purpose of Ducroux's stay in Singapore was to get the visa to proceed to his main destination.<sup>34</sup>

In sharp contrast to local media's detailed coverage of Ducroux's story, the other

<sup>27</sup> 'Alleged Communistic Activities' 1931, *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, June 20.

<sup>28</sup> Alleged 'Reds' on Trial' 1931, *The Straits Times*, June 20.

<sup>29</sup> 'Notorious French Communist Sentenced' 1931, *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, June 23.

<sup>30</sup> 'Notorious French Communist Sentenced' 1931, *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, June 23.

<sup>31</sup> '18 Months for Ducroux' 1931, *The Straits Times*, June 23.

<sup>32</sup> 'Notorious French Communist Sentenced' 1931, *The*

*Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, June 23.

<sup>33</sup> Metzger, Laurent 1996, 'Joseph Ducroux, a French Agent of the Comintern in Singapore (1931-1932)', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 69, no. 1, pp. 3-4.

<sup>34</sup> Metzger, Laurent 1996, 'Joseph Ducroux, a French Agent of the Comintern in Singapore (1931-1932)', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 69, no. 1, p. 10.

accused received very little attention. Their names were either mentioned only briefly or not talked about at all, despite their possibly more prominent roles in local communist organizations. In a separate trial, Wong Muk-han was sentenced to lifelong imprisonment for breaching the Banishment Ordinance and eventually died of illness in jail in 1932.<sup>35</sup> Fu Tai-keng, whose information had already been well known to the police before Ducroux's arrival, was sentenced to six months of imprisonment.<sup>36</sup> Although the police initially suspected Saminathan Amalu of being connected to the Indian Communist Party, the court discharged him together with five others for lack of evidence.<sup>37</sup> The rest were given relatively lenient sentences of two months in prison.<sup>38</sup>

### The Aftermath

The address book found in Ducroux's office ultimately caused the capture of several highly ranked communist agents. Among the important ones were Hilaire Noulens (Jakob Rudnik) in Shanghai and Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh) in Hong Kong — both exerted profound impacts on communist movements across East Asia and beyond.<sup>39</sup> After conducting intensive investigations into Noulens' case, the British-led Shanghai Municipal Police revealed that Noulens was leading the Comintern's Far East Bureau, which aimed to oversee and coordinate communist activities in China, Burma,

Malaya, French Indochina, and the Dutch East Indies.<sup>40</sup> While the arrest severely weakened the FEB's organizational network, influential figures such as Albert Einstein, H.G. Wells, and Madame Soong Ching-ling became actively involved in an international committee to defend Noulens and his wife. The case was also brought into discussions at the British House of Commons and the United States Senates.<sup>41</sup>

In his memoir *Singapore: A Police Background*, Onraet wrote about the Ducroux Case in great detail and proudly admitted its significance to his career.<sup>42</sup> When Onraet retired as the Inspector-General of the Straits Settlement Police in March 1939, an article in *The Straits Times* honored him as "hav(ing) more to do than any other man in the Force with the disruption of communism in Malaya."<sup>43</sup> To illustrate Onraet's prominence, the article related the story of Ducroux's arrest and referred to the event as the officer's greatest success in his three decades of service in the Singapore police. According to the same article, the communist influence in Malaya was almost negligible towards the end of the 1930s as a result of this effective police action.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Metzger, Laurent 1996, 'Joseph Ducroux, a French Agent of the Comintern in Singapore (1931-1932)', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 69, no. 1, p. 11.

<sup>36</sup> 'Notorious French Communist Sentenced' 1931, *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, June 23.

<sup>37</sup> 'Alleged 'Reds' on Trial' 1931, *The Straits Times*, June 20.

<sup>38</sup> 'Notorious French Communist Sentenced' 1931, *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, June 23.

<sup>39</sup> 'Joseph Ducroux, Alias Serge Lefranc, Is Unmasked' 1939,

*The Straits Times*, March 12.

<sup>40</sup> Litten, Frederick S. 1994, 'The Noulens Affair', *The China Quarterly*, vol. 138, p. 492.

<sup>41</sup> Litten, Frederick S. 1994, 'The Noulens Affair', *The China Quarterly*, vol. 138, p. 496.

<sup>42</sup> Onraet, René 1947, *Singapore: A Police Background*, Dorothy Crisp & Co., London, pp. 88-107.

<sup>43</sup> 'Joseph Ducroux, Alias Serge Lefranc, Is Unmasked' 1939, *The Straits Times*, March 12.

<sup>44</sup> 'Joseph Ducroux, Alias Serge Lefranc, Is Unmasked' 1939, *The Straits Times*, March 12.

## MSB Studies News

### *Guangxi University for Nationalities (GXUN) establishes China's first Brunei Studies Center*

Established in 2016, the Brunei Research Center at Guangxi University for Nationalities (GXUN) is the first Brunei Studies center in Mainland China. And it was listed as one of the priority research bases at GXUN in June 2018. The Center's vision is to build an outstanding platform for conducting academic research on Brunei society, cultivating talents, serving Chinese society in relevant policy advice, and strengthening academic cooperation and communication with universities in Brunei and other countries.

Four teachers and postgraduate students from the College of ASEAN Studies of GXUN first visited Brunei in July 2017, interested in studying Brunei-born Chinese people, or what GXUN scholars refer to as the "overseas Chinese" in Brunei. Now a team of researchers specializing in Brunei Studies is being created and their diverse research topics include fields such as religion and beliefs, Chinese schools, Chinese associations and the history of overseas Chinese in Brunei.

A small conference on "Research on Overseas Chinese in Brunei: Theory, Method and Practices" was held at the College of ASEAN Studies on December 22, 2018. Dr. Pan Yanqin, director of the Brunei Research Center, gave a keynote speech on "Research Exploration and Practices in Brunei". She discussed fieldwork studies in Brunei and the nature of research in a small country with few historical documents and little existing scholarship. She emphasized

that anthropological fieldwork, oral history and historical document collection is very important for doing research on Brunei. Four postgraduate students, Zhao Kaili, Ma Lili, Wei Jingying and Gu Xiangyin gave presentations separately on their preliminary studies in Brunei. Their presentations focused on the Tengyun Temple in Bandar Seri Begawan and its historical and contemporary connection with China; the development of Chinese schools; Chinese Hainan people's livelihood; and the history of the New Village (called kampong perpindahan by the Brunei government) built for new settlers in Seria in 1960s.

The Brunei Research Center seeks to enhance its academic cooperation with the University Brunei Darussalam (UBD). Dr. Pan Yanqin visited Centre for Advanced Research (CARE) at UBD and discussed further research cooperation and communication between the two sides in July 2017. Dr. Abby Tan, the vice president of UBD, and Dr. Chang-Yau Hoon, the director of CARE, were invited to attend the third China-ASEAN Higher Education Cooperation Forum held at GXUN and gave lectures in the university in 2018. Two postgraduate students, Ma Lili and Zhao Kaili, visited UBD for three months for internships from September to November 2018.



*Teachers and students from the College of ASEAN Studies of GXUN visited Chinese residents in Brunei*



*Teachers and students from the College of ASEAN Studies of GXUN visited a Malay family along with several Chinese residents of Brunei.*



*Dr. Pan Yanqin visited the Center for Advanced Research (CARE) at UBD. In the middle: CARE Director Dr. Hoon Chang Yau.*

### **About Dr. Pan Yanqin:**

Dr. Pan Yanqin, Director of the Brunei Research Center, is a research associate at College of ASEAN Studies, Guangxi University for Nationalities. She received her PhD in Anthropology in Hong Kong University of Science and Technology in 2014. Her research interests include Brunei society, overseas Chinese, and ethnic minorities on the Sino-Vietnamese border area.

### **Publications**

**Special Issue: “The Bureaucratization of Religion in Southeast Asia”** (ed. Mirjam Künkler), *Journal of Law and Religion*, **33(2)**, 2018.

The special issue includes research articles by MSB members Kikue Hamayotsu (“The Political Origins of Islamic Courts in Divided Societies; The Case of Malaysia”) and Dominik Müller (“Bureaucratic Islam Compared: Classificatory Power and State-ified Religious Meaning-Making in Brunei and Singapore”). More details: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-law-and-religion/latest-issue>

### **Job Opportunities**

**University of California, Berkeley:**  
**Assistant Professor – Southeast Asian Studies in the Modern or Pre-Modern Period**

The Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies at the University of California, Berkeley invites applications for an Assistant Professor in Southeast Asian Studies, tenure track, with an expected start date of July 1, 2019. Closing date is January 25, 2019. Further details: <https://aprecruit.berkeley.edu/apply/JPF01897>



***Stanford University / National University of Singapore: Lee Kong Chian NUS-Stanford Fellowship on Southeast Asia***

The Lee Kong Chian Fellowship is the core of the Lee Kong Chian NUS-Stanford Initiative on Southeast Asia, a joint effort established in 2007 by the National University of Singapore and Stanford University to raise the visibility, extent, and quality of scholarship on contemporary Southeast Asia. The infrastructure for research pursued through the fellowship is provided by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at NUS and the Southeast Asia Program in the Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center (Shorenstein APARC) at Stanford. Lee Kong Chian NUS-Stanford fellows spend two to four months at NUS and two to four months at Stanford, writing and conducting research on, or related to, contemporary Southeast Asia. One or two candidates may be awarded fellowships each year.

Closing date is March 1, 2019. Further details:

<https://aparc.fsi.stanford.edu/education/fellowship-and-training-opportunities/nus-stanford-fellowship-southeast-asia>

***Harvard University, Asia Center: Post-Doctoral Fellowships***

The Asia Center Postdoctoral Fellowship is available to recent Ph.D. graduates who engage seriously with at least two Asian countries. In the case of Southeast Asia, research may be on a single country, although preference will be given to applicants with comparative or cross-border projects. Closing date is January 25, 2019. Further details:

<https://asiacenter.harvard.edu/opportunities/asia-center-postdoctoral-fellowships-5a2fe933b4cd405568ef9539>

***Harvard University, Islamic Legal Studies Program: Law and Social Change (ILSP: LSC) Visiting Fellowships***

Harvard Law School's Islamic Legal Studies Program: Law and Social Change invites applications for Visiting Fellowships for the 2019-2020 academic year. This fellowship provides opportunities for outstanding scholars and legal practitioners to undertake research, writing, and scholarly engagement on Islamic law and society. The program is particularly interested in applicants whose work focuses on human rights, women's rights, children's rights, minority rights, animal welfare and rights, constitutional law, food law, environmental law and climate change in particular, migration and refugee studies, LGBTQ issues, and related areas.

Closing date is February 1, 2019. Further details. <https://ilsp.law.harvard.edu/who-is-eligible/>

***Kyoto University – 2019 Postdoctoral Fellowship: Japan-ASEAN Platform for Transdisciplinary Studies***

The Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, invited applications for the 2019 Postdoctoral Fellowship: Japan-ASEAN Platform for Transdisciplinary Studies.

Closing date: January 31, 2019. Further details: [https://kyoto.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/2018/12/20181221/?fbclid=IwAR0SHU2bNnwBeK2cYspyV9qEkEPhyROLTNb\\_-j6D2T7ZcVBxQ-zDy--Ju70](https://kyoto.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/2018/12/20181221/?fbclid=IwAR0SHU2bNnwBeK2cYspyV9qEkEPhyROLTNb_-j6D2T7ZcVBxQ-zDy--Ju70)

## **Calls for Papers**

***The Singapore Economic Review: Special Issue Call for Papers: “The Political Economy of the Belt and Road Initiative - Perspectives from Southeast Asia”***

The Singapore Economic Review will publish a special issue on 'The Political Economy of the Belt and Road Initiative: Perspectives from Southeast Asia'. Professor Hong Liu (Nanyang Technological University), Professor Kong Yam Tan (Nanyang Technological University), Dr. Guanie Lim (Nanyang Technological University). Contributors should submit their manuscript in English by February 28, 2019. More details: <https://networks.h-net.org/node/73374/announcements/3409273/special-issue-call-paper-political-economy-belt-and-road>

### ***Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs***

JCSSA is a double-blind peer-reviewed academic journal published by the GIGA Institute of Asian Studies, Hamburg. Aside from the print edition, JCSAA is also available online as an open access journal. It presents key research and professional analyses on current political, economic, and social affairs in Southeast Asia, with listings in major indexes. It invites submissions for research articles, book reviews and special issue proposals. For further details see [www.CurrentSoutheastAsianAffairs.org](http://www.CurrentSoutheastAsianAffairs.org)

### **Call for Applications: Southeast Asian Studies Summer Institute**

The Southeast Asian Studies Summer Institute (SEASSI), University of Wisconsin-Madison, invites applications for SEASSI 2019 (July 17 to August 9, 2019).

SEASSI is an eight-week intensive language training program for undergraduates, graduate students and professionals. It has been held since 1983 and hosted by UW-

Madison in 1994-1995 and then since 2000. Instruction is offered for academic credit in eight languages at the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd year levels. Course instruction is offered in the following languages at the first, second- and third-year levels: Burmese, Hmong, Indonesian, Khmer, Lao, Tagalog, Thai and Vietnamese. More information: <https://seassi.wisc.edu>

### **Call for Applications: Monash University Malaysia**

#### **Invitation to Apply: Master of Arts and PhD in Arts at the School of Arts & Social Sciences, Monash University Malaysia**

The School of Arts & Social Sciences in Monash University Malaysia would like to invite qualified and motivated individuals to join us as graduate research students (Master of Arts or PhD in Arts) for the year 2019.

The School's research and its scholars are generally grouped according to four broad clusters:

- Communication, Media and Policy
- Culture, Religion and Gender
- Literature, cinema and Society
- Politics, Development and Governance

#### *Admission process:*

There is no firm deadline for a MA/PhD application. The process is rather simple and we will assist you. Applicants must obtain an "Invitation To Apply" by submitting an "Expression of Interest (EOI)". For details about the application process, eligibility criteria and English

language proficiency requirement, please click on and browse this link: <https://www.monash.edu.my/sass/future/postgraduate/postgraduate-research>. Potential candidates should plan and prepare their application documents, which include a research proposal, at least two to three months prior to submitting them.

*Submission of Expression of Interest (EOI):*

Candidates applying for research degrees at Monash University Malaysia must use this EOI form:

[https://arts.monash.edu/\\_\\_data/assets/word\\_doc/0009/1525824/monash-arts-graduate-research-eoi-form-12march18.doc](https://arts.monash.edu/__data/assets/word_doc/0009/1525824/monash-arts-graduate-research-eoi-form-12march18.doc).

For questions regarding application or any other research degree related matters, please contact Ms. Eswary Sivalingam via email ([eswary@monash.edu](mailto:eswary@monash.edu)). Applicants whose EOI is successful will then receive an invitation to apply, after which they can then initiate the application process.

*Supervision:*

Graduate research degrees involve the independent investigation of a research problem formulated by students in consultation with their supervisors (minimum two). Potential supervisors can be viewed using this link: <https://www.monash.edu.my/sass/research/staff-research-expertise>

*Monash University Malaysia Merit Scholarships* are available for applicants who hold an Honours degree with first class or equivalent qualifications.

## Member Profile

***Margaret John – Contributor to BERITA***

Margaret John has been the lead campaigner on Singapore and Malaysia for over forty years with Amnesty International Canada. A former high school French teacher, she was drawn to human rights work in reaction to the horrors of Latin American military coups during the 1970s. Very soon, she became immersed in Singapore and Malaysia concerns such as the death penalty and prisoners of conscience Chia Thye Poh (sometimes known as the "Mandela of SE Asia"), Anwar Ibrahim and many others. She counts among her many moving experiences a meeting with a former prisoner of conscience from Malaysia, who told her "Amnesty saved my life". Many Singapore-watchers are aware that former President Devan Nair had a late change of heart about the state of human rights in his country. He eventually chose to live in exile in Canada near Margaret, where they were in regular contact, making it clear he was a strong human rights advocate. She remains optimistic that change will come to both countries, the recent landmark election in Malaysia constituting an important starting point. There are now clear signs of human rights promotion by the reformist government there, with moves towards the abolition of the death penalty. Likewise, Singapore is surely facing a citizenry increasingly aware of the international human rights requirements of governments. At the same time, international pressure will continue as "ordinary" people from Amnesty International and other NGOs, Margaret John included, persist with the "extraordinary" actions for which they are known and respected. Margaret John received an honorary LL.D. from McMaster University for her volunteer human rights

work and has also been honored by Singapore's exile community.

## Editorial Information

BERITA is the official publication of the Malaysian/Singapore/Brunei (MSB) Studies Group. A part of the Association of Asian Studies, we are a cross-disciplinary network of scholars, students, and observers with research and other professional interests in Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei.

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