

Foreword

When we first issued *Cultural Connections* in May 2016, it was the Culture Academy's maiden effort at publishing an annual journal. Its objectives are to share perspectives to enrich our collective understanding of Singapore's distinctive arts and heritage which shape our cultural identity.

Over the past three years, the journal has published pieces from Singapore's thought leaders including diplomats, academics and researchers, as well as contributions from colleagues in the culture sector. We have had encouraging response from readers and received requests for additional copies from within and outside the arts and culture sector. Last year's edition to commemorate Singapore's chairmanship of ASEAN was particularly well-received by our missions overseas and organisers of key ASEAN meetings in Singapore. This is very heartening for us and we will endeavour to improve on the quality of the publication.

As Singapore is commemorating her bicentennial this year, this fourth volume of *Cultural Connections* focuses on themes which are relevant to our cultural development over the past 200 years. The bicentennial is an opportunity to reflect on the founding and progress of modern Singapore since 1819, in the context of a rich history spanning more than 700 years. As we participate in the many commemorative activities, exhibitions and programmes that have been lined up this year, it is also a time for us to reflect on how far we have come as a nation and honour the memories of the many men and women who have toiled hard to create the Singapore we live in today.

The articles in this issue remind us of how fast and far we have progressed from our early colonial days to a modern and liveable cosmopolitan nation which is rooted in its multicultural heritage. I am pleased to note that the essays took on varied perspectives as they tell the story of Singapore's history and heritage using artefacts and objects from our national collection. Perhaps a lesser-known fact is that 2019 is also the 60th anniversary of Singapore's self-government (1959 before our independence in 1965). To commemorate this historic event in our history, we have used 60 objects from our national collections to retell the history of Singapore.

I hope you will enjoy reading the essays that will take you back to before 1819 and bring you on an intellectually stimulating journey of Singapore's history and heritage and its progress till today.

Rosa Daniel (Mrs)
Deputy Secretary (Culture)
Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth

Editor-in-Chief's Note

Two centuries ago, Sir Stamford Raffles landed on the island of Singapore, setting the foundation of modern Singapore. 200 years on, as we commemorate the bicentennial of this historic event, it is also an opportune time to reflect on our journey since, and how far we have come as a people.

This fourth edition of *Cultural Connections* thus explores the bicentennial through an exciting collection of essays, contributed by notable personalities and culture professionals. Born in the pre-war years, Professor Tommy Koh, ambassador-at-large, opens the journal with his musings on what it means to be a Singaporean, against the backdrop of having had to take on four “identities”. Novelist Dr Meira Chand wraps up the collection with her thoughts on the contents and discontents of being an immigrant, and finding a sense of home in Singapore, a nation built on immigrant cultures.

Professor Bernard Tan, physicist by day and music composer by night, and Phan Ming Yen, CEO of Global Cultural Alliance, contributed two illuminating pieces on the music of our nation. The first traces the evolution of the national anthem as Professor Tan attempts to hunt down the original manuscript. The second leads us to contemplate upon the question of music and its role in nostalgia, and the making of home and national identity.

For a visual treat, look out for the wonderfully curated journey by Director of Asian Civilisations Museum Kennie Ting. Through a careful selection of objects and images, Ting's piece showcases the stars, the lesser-knowns and the quirky from our national collections, weaving a diverse, rich tapestry of Singapore's stories. Besides this visual treat, we have another black and white spread by the curatorial team from the National Museum of Singapore who looks at the development of Singapore's entrepôt over the years through photographs and paintings from the museum's collection.

200 years on, the question of “What makes a Singaporean?” has become increasingly pertinent. Professor Lily Kong's chapter talks about the role of food in the making of the Singaporean identity. The question of place, sites and identity is explored from various perspectives by our essayists from various MCCY institutions and Centre for Liveable Cities.

Putting together this edition has been an enriching, rewarding experience for the editorial team at Culture Academy. We hope it brings you as much pleasure as it has for us.

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Editor-in-Chief