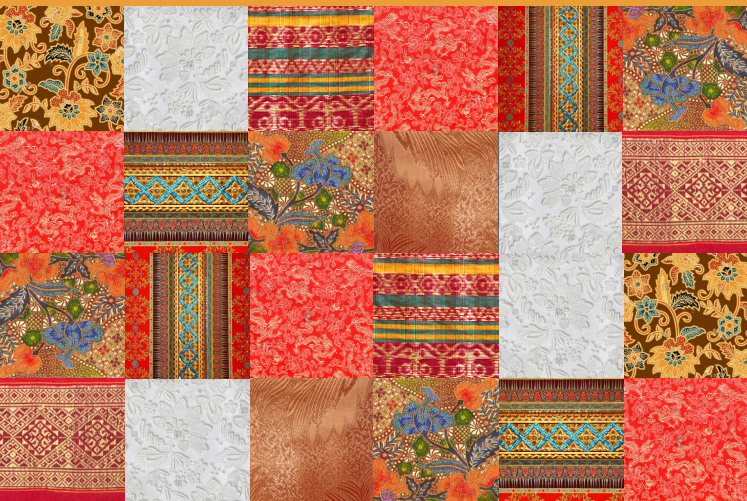


CELEBRATING OUR ETHNIC IDENTITIES

Singaporeans are generally classified through the typical CMIO framework: you are either Chinese, Malay, Indian or Others (which refers to any other race outside of the former groups). This classification actually came from the British colonial administration, but was later adapted by the government. In reality, we all know Singaporeans are made of much more than just CMIO. You could really actually be Hokkien, Gujarati, Minangkabau, Eurasian, or a mix of any of the above! All these different ethnic communities form what is essentially our Singaporean identity.



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INTERPERSONAL VALUES

Our values are central to our belief systems and how we lead our lives. Understanding the unique values of other cultures can help us know and accept how and why some ethnic communities behave a certain way, and appreciate them for it.

GOTONG ROYONG SPIRIT

WHAT IS IT?

Gotong royong refers to the spirit of mutual assistance.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Malay culture places importance upon maintaining social bonds and obligations. It therefore thrives on the concept of mutual aid and reciprocity within the family and kin system. *Gotong royong* helps to represent these important cultural values.

GOTONG ROYONG IN THE PAST

In the past, one could witness the *gotong royong* spirit in *kenduri*, which are occasions to mark special events like births, marriages and deaths. The act of helping out during these occasions is called *rewang*, and it can range from cooking and serving food to preparing gifts or even washing dishes.



GOTONG ROYONG TODAY

These days, *rewang* is not so common. Still, the spirit of *gotong royong* lives on in the community through daily interactions and acts of neighbourliness. For example, the *mak cik* next door who offers you *kuih* sometimes? That's *gotong royong* spirit!



2

LANGUAGES & COMMUNITIES

For larger communities like the Chinese, dialects keep ethnic communities rooted to their cultures and family. Within smaller communities like the Eurasians and Peranakans, language is a reflection of their past cultural influences.

KRISTANG & THE EURASIAN COMMUNITY

Unlike Singapore's other ethnic communities, it is difficult to classify cultural practices that are quintessentially "Eurasian", as much of what is practised today (such as speaking English and wearing Western or European clothing) has evolved to become part of the overall Singaporean culture. This is why Eurasians decided to officially reinvigorate their ethnic cultural heritage in the 1980s and 1990s, and the Eurasian Association saw a surge of membership. The ensuing endeavour saw, among many things, the opening of the Eurasian Heritage Centre in 2003 at the Eurasian Community House, the popularising of Eurasian cuisine, the resurgence of folk dances like the branyo, and the revival of the Kristang language.



An evolved combination of ancient Portuguese and Malay, the language Kristang is rarely spoken in Singapore but is far more commonly spoken among the Portuguese Eurasians of Malacca. The term *Kristang* means Christians and used to refer to the Malaccan Eurasians. In Singapore, Kristang is best appreciated as a heritage language which Eurasians can use to trace back their ancestry to Malacca.

GUAN XI & XIN YONG

Guan xi means personal connections and *xin yong* refers to personal trust. These are highly valued by the Chinese in Singapore, especially in business. *Guan xi* is established based on the people you know, whether they are your family or friends. On the other hand, *xin yong* is based on honesty and reliability between two parties.



All content extracted from "The Singapore Ethnic Mosaic: Many Cultures, One People"

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CHINESE DIALECT GROUPS

The Chinese community in Singapore constitutes the largest ethnic group in Singapore, accounting for about 74 per cent of Singapore's population, with 5 major dialect sub-groups.

HOKKIEN

Hokkien ancestors were one of the earliest Chinese migrants to make their way to Singapore, as merchants involved in the spice trade. Hokkien has become a unique dialect infused with loanwords from other languages like Malay. For example, *chopé* (to reserve) or *atas* (above).



MALAY COMMUNITIES

Malay cultural communities were created as a result of the migration of Malayan and Indonesian people to Singapore. The Malay language is largely spoken across its sub-communities, although languages like Javanese and Baweanese languages are still spoken today, especially among elders.

JAVANESE

The Javanese migration to Singapore occurred in phases over the years. Many settled in Kampong Java, which is now the area of Arab Street and Haji Lane. Many Javanese made up the crew for Arab-owned vessels that operated out of Java and Singapore.



CANTONESE

Contrary to other dialect groups, Cantonese women in the past were very much empowered to migrate and work. In Singapore, Cantonese *samsui* women were labourers in construction sites and an integral part of Singapore's development.

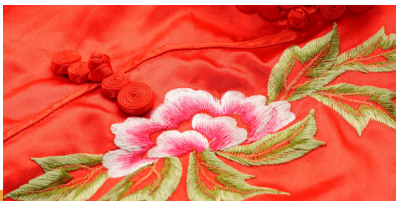
BUGIS

The Bugis were among the first to arrive in Singapore after the British established a trading settlement here. The early Bugis first settled along Kampong Glam and Rochor River in an area called Bugis town (where Bugis MRT station is today).



TEOCHEW

Historically, many Teochews made their living in the fishing industry, but also textiles and spices. As more migrants came to Singapore, Teochews started opening their own system of remittance and correspondence called *qiao pi* (Teochew letters).



MINANGKABAU

The Minangkabau are among the largest surviving matrilineal societies in the region, in which lineage and inheritance are passed down to the women in the family instead of men.

HAKKA

Hakka literally means "guest people". This name originated during the Ming Dynasty, when the provinces they settled in classified them as guest inhabitants. In Singapore, Hakka migrants were involved in agriculture, especially in the cultivation of pepper and gambier.

ARAB

Most of the Arabs of Singapore are descended from the Hadhramis of what is today Yemen. They are well known historically as merchants and were a dominant economic force in the 19th century. Although not ethnically Malay, many Arabs interact with the Malay community due to Islam as a shared religion.



HAINANESE

The Hainanese were among the last few groups to migrate from China. Due to their late arrival, the Hainanese mostly found work as labourers or servants for wealthy European and Peranakan households. They were particularly known as cooks, and opened many kopitiams after World War II.



BAWEANESE

The Baweanese believe in the tradition of *merantau*, where men leave home to work and earn money before they return to their homeland. Most of the Baweanese men who migrated to Singapore settled in *pondoks* (lodging houses) at Kampong Kapur.

INDIAN LANGUAGES & COMMUNITIES

Even within the same ethnic backgrounds you can find people who practise different religions, speak different languages and celebrate different festivals.

TAMIL

Tamils form the biggest segment of the South Indian community in Singapore. While the majority are Hindus, there are also Muslims and Christians. Tamil Hindus celebrate festivals such as Thaipusam and Thimithi (the fire-walking festival). They are also known for the ancient dance form Bharathanatyam.

MALAYALEE

Early Malayalee migrants first arrived in Singapore in the 1940s, working in professional, civil service, and clerical jobs. Malayalees speak Malayalam and practise Hinduism, Islam or Christianity, but celebrations like Onam, a harvest festival of abundance, transcend religion.



GUJARATI

The earliest Gujaratis from Northwestern India arrived here as merchants who saw Singapore as a strategic location for trade. There are Hindu, Jain, Muslim and Parsi Gujaratis. The Gujarati language comes in different dialects, from Surti and Kathiyawadi (spoken by Hindu and Jain Gujaratis) to Dawat-ni-Zaban (spoken by Muslim Gujaratis).

SIKH

The British believed that Sikhs were a martial race that made ideal soldiers and policemen, so the earliest recorded migration of Sikhs was in 1881 when 100 Sikhs arrived in Singapore as part of a police contingent in the Straits Settlement Police Force. Over the next few decades more Sikhs arrived independently. Besides the police and army, many were also employed as watchmen or security guards, often named *jaga* (guard in Malay), as well as other civil service jobs such as the postal service.



Other Indian communities:

- o Kannadiga
- o Bengali
- o Telugu
- o Sindi
- o Hindi, Marwari and Bihari-speaking communities