

Singapore Siu Dai 3

The SG Conversation

DABAO!

By Felix Cheong
Illustrations by PMan



“It’s like reading five years’ worth of social media’s greatest posts about Singaporeans: addictive, and without ads!”

—Otto Fong, author of *Sir Fong’s Adventures In Science*

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By The Same Author

Poetry

Temptation and Other Poems (1998)

I Watch the Stars Go Out (1999)

Broken by the Rain (2003)

Sudden in Youth: New and Selected Poems (2009)

Young adult fiction

The Call from Crying House (2006)

The Woman in the Last Carriage (2007)

Fiction

Vanishing Point (2012)

Singapore Siu Dai: The SG Conversation in a Cup (2014)

Singapore Siu Dai 2: The SG Conversation Upsize! (2014)

Non-fiction

Different (2005)

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Twilight Years I

Mr Pioneer Goh didn't mind his wife being a backseat driver – as long as she did it in someone else's car. And not when he had already installed a GPS and gotten used to its crisp American voice that reminded him sometimes of Marilyn Monroe.

“I tell you how many times already. Left, left, left. You suddenly deaf ah?” Mrs Goh said.

“But GPS said go straight,” he said.

“You married me or GPS?” Mrs Goh retorted.

Mr Goh sighed as he gripped the steering wheel and picked up speed. Luckily, traffic at this hour wasn't too bad.

“Turn right, turn right here!” Mrs Goh suddenly shrieked, pointing at the turning he had just missed. Right at the same moment, Marilyn, calm as the clear blue sky, said, “Go straight fifty metres.”

In that confusion, something had to give. And it turned out to be the car, which Mr Goh drove into a drain by the side of the road.

“You have arrived at your destination,” Marilyn said.

Mr Goh quickly turned it off. “Are you ok?” he said, turning to his wife.

Mrs Goh, rubbing a bump on her forehead, screamed, “Told you not to listen to that angmoh ♣ woman!”

Performance Assessment Day I

I find your conduct in the office inappropriate.

No, inappropriate.

I'm glad you agree. And you're disrespectful...

You mean disrespectful?

That's what I just said. Don't disrupt me...

Interrupt.

Why are you interpeating me?

Repeat.

Why are you interpeating me?

When Gen-Y Finally Celebrates SG100 II

Prime Minister,
I need more money
for the defence
budget this year.

Why? You
expecting an
attack from our
neighbours?



We don't have
enough fighter
jets to form
1-0-0 for NDP.

???



by Pman

The Model Family I

If you had ever wanted a poster-friendly family that cut the Singapore Core to the, well, core, you could do no worse than take a look at the Tang family.

Up-close, they resembled a standee of that sitcom family in *Under One Roof*: cardboard-hard, daisy-fresh. Not a string and strand out of place, as reel as they came. Except that the Tangs often took themselves seriously. Whatever laughter there was in the house was probably echoes from the family next door. Or whatever was on TV at that hour which, invariably, was tuned to Government broadcasts.

Mr Tang was a plumber by inclination who specialised in traditional Chinese medicine. Both trades involved clearing blockages to improve circulation, so it was not that much of a challenge for him to switch from one to the other. Mrs Tang found her calling as a clerk but became well-known as an accountant who solemnised marriages and delivered babies (sometimes at the same time, for shotgun marriages. Extra charges applied; three weeks' notification required).

In their mid-twenties, the couple had already internalised the Government's mantra to upgrade their skills. Times were good; the country, no longer in denial

it was part of a larger hole, was pulling itself up by its short bootstrap and so were the Tangs. Poverty was no longer an option or a matter of opinion. Before long, the Tangs breezed into their first three-room HDB flat in Queenstown and immediately, if not sooner, had three children. The triplets arrived one after another, two boys and a girl separated by minutes.

“We’re contributing two boys to national service!” Mr Tang said proudly, wiping the blood of his newborns on his pants. The campaign to save water was flooding the airwaves at that time, so it would not do to wash his hands irresponsibly.

The couple could not be happier. In fact, they were even featured once on national television as a model family, as young in prospects as the country, and just as eager to prosper. The good life was beckoning from the distance and collectively, they were hurtling themselves headlong towards it.

When the ‘Stop at Two’ population policy came into force in the 1970s, the Tangs were initially disoriented. In one bureaucratic stroke, they were suddenly rendered imperfect, no longer a model family toeing the national line.

“What do we do?” Mrs Tang asked in her reed-thin voice.

Mr Tang thought long and hard. It was not long before his instinct as a plumber kicked in. It was simple. The blockage simply had to be cleared, he decided. It would not do to disobey the Prime Minister. He had a

way of reaching into the TV with his eyes and throttling you from a distance. Even in black-and-white, he was fearsome, matched by a formidable voice that could cut you down to your knees, often literally.

That night, the Tangs held a family conference as the TV news played softly in the background. The children, by then in primary one and already preparing for their PSLE, quickly understood why one of them had to be evicted. After all, they were all brought up on campaign taglines. It was simpler than living by the Bible. At least you did not have to plough through a thick book just to learn a few aphorisms. The good life could be summed up in one friendly image (colour was optional) and one snappy tagline (grammar was non-negotiable). The rest was just a matter of scrambling your brain to learn it well.

In fact, Gene, the eldest, said matter-of-factly, “If we don’t obey the Government, who will?”

Mr Tang nodded and smiled proudly. This boy would amount to something one day. Perhaps a politician. Or a bus conductor.

As it turned out, when the lots were drawn, it was Gene who ended up with the short stick. Quietly, he went to his room and packed his bag. There was neither a squeal nor a squeak. What would be the point?

Armed with ten dollars, a princely sum in those days, Gene hugged his siblings and kissed his parents one last time.

“I’ll be fine,” he said. “It’s all for our own good.”

And he was gone.

As the TV news continued humming about job creation, Mr and Mrs Tang let out a sigh of relief. Officially, they had now stopped at two. They could now re-register Eugene and Genette as twins and become, once again, the model family the campaign posters had always painted and promised.

I am NOT putting
on THIS VEST! It makes
me look FAT and
it's so LAST SEASON!



Grenade!

If truth be told, Mickey was already tired of their training. All they had been doing so far was run around like monkeys chasing their own tails. Two months into their careers as terrorists, sworn to *The Cause*, unable to talk or even text about it, they had yet to see any action.

Except, of course, Everest. In fact, he had seen so much action he had bruises like a travelling circus all over his body. Each time one healed, another would appear, almost overnight.

“Where you got that?” Wrestler had asked him that morning, pointing to a lump the size of a deflated ping pong ball on his forehead. “You got into a fight?”

Everest shook his head, which aggravated the swelling – you could almost hear the liquid inside sloshing around – and elicited a painful “Ouch!”

“You said, ‘Make sure no one follows you.’ So I kept looking behind me. Suddenly, this stupid pillar got in my way,” Everest said, gingerly rubbing the sore spot.

“The pillar never said, ‘Excuse me’ ah?” Mickey said, laughing.

Despite his stern demeanour, which he had to put on to maintain his status as Boss, Wrestler had to allow

himself to smile. Whatever Everest was good at – and he could count it on one finger of his left hand – he certainly balanced it off by his incompetence. At this stage of the operation, however, Wrestler needed as many foot soldiers on the ground as the Internet could throw up. He could be picky later, of course, when more people joined *The Cause*. Maybe he might even consider offering a scholarship, complete with a six-year bond, like how the Government trapped bright, gullible young people.

Wrestler now glanced at Mickey, whose hand was desperately trying to lob a one-kg brick, and failing at it. It flew no more than three metres. It was all part of his grenade-throwing training at the Bukit Gombak Xiao Guilin quarry.

“Throw harder lah!” Wrestler shouted. “No breakfast ah? Aim for that tree!”

That tree was a good twenty metres away.

Just as Mickey and Everest were about to launch their next projectile, a voice came behind them.

A little man, dressed like a park ranger. “No littering! Show me your IC.”

And so the trail of our fine trio ended, in a huff, a summon and a fine.

A Day at Public Speaking Class

The trainer looked gravely at the three candidates ducking behind their seats like, well, sitting ducks. They didn't look remotely ready for the campaigning; they were last-minute, pencilled additions to the roll-call. A few prominent names in the party had just sought political asylum in other parties after being denied the leadership posts.

Nomination Day was just a day away.

“Today, RP candidates, we're going to learn how to shout the party's name,” the trainer said. He had already wrung several candidates through his training regime at the last election and they had all come out the other end dry behind the ears, but unscathed. Having had their fill of publicity in the media, they cheerfully disappeared into the woodwork.

“Think very carefully about what you're going to say. Feel what the party means to you. Internalise what the party will do for you. Be convinced that the party will be an agent of change. This is not about shouting slogans but a clear shout from the heart.”

The three candidates stood up and nodded, somewhat ruefully.

“Ready? Take a deep breath now. At the count of three, pump your fist and shout the name of the party that matters most to you! One, two, three!”

“P-A-P!” ▼

At MP Candidates Interview II



Two years and a 2kg weight gain later, Felix Cheong is back with more *Siu Dai* stories. So much has happened, from SG50 to GE2015, as Singapore matures into a weirder society. And these short, short stories capture those funny moments.

Just remember not to laugh too loudly when you read them on the train!

“Felix writes great satire that hits home. Whether it’s about compliant, obedient Singaporeans who decide to have less or more children according to the national agenda or about senior citizens who struggle to keep up with the constant changes, or the complaint culture that is prevalent. He unravels the good, bad and ugly side of life in Singapore with humour, peppered with a dash of cynicism.”

—James Suresh, bestselling author
and co-creator of comic icon ‘Mr Kiasu’

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books™
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ISBN 978-981-09-8999-6



9 789810 989996

www.ethosbooks.com.sg