

SAUDADE

The Culture And Security Of Eurasian
Communities In Southeast Asia

Antonio L Rappa

Saudade: The Culture And Security Of Eurasian Communities In Southeast Asia

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Wee Kim Wee Centre

FOREWORD

Barry Desker

The study of colonial history has evolved from an analysis of the motives and rationale for imperial expeditions and the creation of a colonial order to a focus increasingly on the impact of colonialism on local communities and their reaction and response to the changes wrought by colonial rule. One of the consequences of the era of European colonialism right from the beginning of the early 16th century Portuguese expansion into the Americas, Africa and Asia was the inter-action of the new European arrivals with vibrant existing societies. This led to the creation of Mestiço communities and societies around the globe, by birth or cultural integration. In Southeast Asia, these Mestiço communities were known as Eurasians.

The end of the colonial era after World War Two resulted in a significant diminution in the numbers identifying themselves as Eurasians in Southeast Asia because of migration or assimilation into the dominant communities. However, compared to Indonesia and Myanmar, the Eurasian communities of Singapore and Malaysia have been able to retain a separate identity. Although there was very significant emigration, those who remained in Singapore and Malaysia have demonstrated a continuing interest in their cultural heritage while developing strong loyalties to the new post-independence states. Indeed, the emphasis on ethnicity by the governments of both states has led to a renewal of the interest of Eurasians in their heritage. This trend has been accompanied by the revival of community associations and the building of new social networks within the Eurasian communities in Singapore and Malaysia, especially in the context of the development of community self-help programs.

Although the study of such hybrid communities could provide significant insights into the changing structure, function, identity and outlook of post-colonial states, there has been a lack of attention to this phenomenon by serious scholars trained in the social sciences. The tendency has been to focus on issues, which were perceived as central to the emergence of post-colonial states and societies such as the rise of dominant groups within these states, critical fault lines in these societies as well as the role of these new states in a globalized environment. However, the analysis of marginal communities such as the Eurasians could provide interesting insights into the evolution of the post-colonial states as well as broaden our understanding of the relationship between dominant communities and others who make up the *mélange* found in these new states.

Antonio L. Rappa's study captures the essence of being Eurasian in colonial, and postcolonial as well as contemporary Singapore and Malaysia. He locates the subject of his study in the larger framework of the Eurasian relationship with the post-colonial states in Singapore and Malaysia, highlighting the burdens of adjustment as well as the opportunities afforded by the opening of space since independence. In the process, he raises important issues related to political hegemony, ethnic identity and social class in contemporary Singapore and Malaysia.

While he recognizes the existence of globalized Eurasians resulting from the current intermingling of peoples and cultures in an increasingly open and globalized world as well as the inclusion of Eurasians who identify colonial Dutch or British roots, Rappa's focus is on the security and cultural survival of the Eurasian communities in Singapore and Malaysia. He provides interesting insights and explanations for the persistence of such identification, even though the Portuguese rule in Malacca lasted only from 1511 to 1641. One important aspect of this study is the attention paid to the diverse Asian roots of these Eurasian communities, in particular their Chinese and Indian roots, as the tendency has been to focus on their European roots in earlier studies. He also discusses the persistence of the Portuguese two-class system throughout the colonial era, colloquially

known as the Upper Ten and Lower Six, which forms the backdrop to current efforts by Eurasian self-help groups to improve the educational performance and support the welfare needs of disadvantaged Eurasians.

As a numerically small ethnic group, the Eurasians of Singapore and Malaysia highlight the existence of multiple identities among the citizens of these new states. The vitality of Eurasian community associations and self-help groups in Singapore and Malaysia suggests that the communities discussed in this study are not merely a historical footnote but form part of a vibrant future. The study provides evidence of nostalgia for a remembered past, the management of current challenges as well as indications of hope for a future in lands that are home to them.

For my sons,
George & Quentin

PREFACE

Saudade is a Portuguese idiom that symbolizes a sense of belonging; a special feeling of attachment to a time and place, as well as a desire to retain its memories and hopes. For many Portuguese Eurasians, their *Saudade* was medieval Portugal and it became ironic when most Eurasians of Portuguese descent in Southeast Asia eventually never saw Portugal itself. *Saudade* is the result of the mixture of European and Asian traditions. The experience of *Saudade* is also found in Portuguese Eurasian songs and dances, and speech. It is from these explanations of *Saudade* that this book takes its title. This work is about the culture and security of Eurasian communities in Southeast Asia with a focus on Singapore and Malaysia.

But I had been searching for many years to read more about the Eurasians and my ancestors in Southeast Asian cities. I looked through university libraries and bookstores, used book stores, personal collections and archives across Singapore, Malaysia, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Chiang Mai and of course Penang and Malacca. The most important work for scholars interested in Eurasian identity remains Armando Cortesao (1891-1977)'s 1944 translation of a codex that contained the work of an apothecary named Tomé Pires. Pires wrote the magnificent *Suma Oriental: An Account of the East from the Red Sea to China*. Cortesao also translated Ferdinand Rodrigues' (Rois) *The Book: Pilot Major of the Armada that Discovered Banda and the Moluccas* for the Hakluyt Society. The codex could not be found in the Library of the National Assembly in Paris or the Bibliothèque nationale de France. Nevertheless, after his discovery, Cortesao painfully translated the different parts of the 178 folios that made up the MSS. The other being Fernão Mendes Pinto's *Peregrinação de Fernam Mendez Pinto* (1641).

Cortésao tells us that Pires made his observations between when he sailed from Cochin to Malacca in April or May of 1512 on the *Santo Andre* with the *Santo Christo* as a scrivener and controller of drugs. But would eventually write that famous phrase, “whomever is the Lord of Malacca has his hand on the throat of Venice for in Malacca they prize garlic and onions more than musk, benzoin and other precious things...of which gold is the least prized of the merchandise”. Pires’ description of things and people, of the sandalwood spices, the people and places, the local women who look like Spanish women, the River of Kedah, the King of Siam, and “pleated Chinese skirts” are remarkable, simple and vivid at least because Cortésao had made it clear for us. Pires continued to make his observations in Malacca till 1515 where he lived before he was appointed First Portuguese Ambassador to China. Pires died in 1640 some 13 years after the death of Pinto. He was the architect of Portuguese Eurasianism and their eventual unions with Asian women.

Cortésao’s translations, despite the war time hardships he faced, motivated me to write a book that would in a fractal manner attempt to connect the 1500s with the 21st century across 10,849 km, from London to Singapore. Alas, I have not been able to achieve that goal but at least have carved out a small inch of tropical beach while thinking on my Eurasians.

After 1641, the year Portuguese colonial rule ended in Malacca, only several thousand Portuguese Mestiço (the first Eurasians) were left. The Dutch siege and months of fighting left only about 3,000 Portuguese and Mestiço alive. This core of Mestiço forms the main life-stem of Eurasians in Singapore and Malaysia. The Mestiço married other Europeans, Asians, and as well as other Eurasians to form the first Eurasian communities. These first Eurasian communities formed the basis of the ancestors of today’s Eurasians in Southeast Asia. Despite having more than three-quarters of their population destroyed in 1641, the surviving Mestiço gradually adapted to life under the Dutch and British colonial eras. Evidence from family-tree experts will eventually make our understanding of this main life-stem more meaningful and accurate. However, the

process of family-tree making is onerous and time-consuming. Very often, more questions are raised than answers discovered while searching through the ancestral forest. For example, some Eurasians in Malaysia have been unable to trace their ancestral trees beyond four generations; while a few Eurasians have been able to trace their Eurasian and European ancestry back for nine generations. By trace I mean being able to account for one’s ancestral claims by documentary proof. Examples of such proof includes personal correspondence, birth certificates, marriage certificates, death certificates, baptism and confirmation certificates, official letters, signed bills of lading and other commercial correspondence, notary letters, legal documents, civilian and military awards, decorations, letters of appointment, tombstones, photographs and records in other media formats. The destruction of evidence during the wars, poor record-keeping, missing and lost information are just some examples of major impediments in tracing ancestral roots. Available proof comes from family records, church registers, government archives, libraries, religious writings, memoirs and oral histories. Clearly, when discussing Eurasian communities in Singapore and Malaysia, the book must include all possible European and Asian ancestors. This book adds emphasis to the fact that the Chinese, Dutch, English, Indian, and Malay ethnic communities also became part of Eurasian family life and social activities.

The book recounts the patron-client security culture of the medieval Portuguese that began with the European Age of Discovery. This is the Age that came much later than the Asian Age of Discovery. But for all intents and purposes, we begin the book with the Europeans in general and the Portuguese in particular. The book guides the reader through a complex network of roots that go back to at least the early 1400s when Portugal first began their curious expeditions after defeating the Moors in the Iberian Peninsula. The work focuses on Eurasian adaptability through the colonial and post-independence eras as it highlights important activities, contributions, and lives while debunking various myths that have emerged over time.

A Eurasian is defined a person who has both European and Asian ancestry. For good reasons, Eurasian researchers often rely on the last names of Eurasians to make sense of their roots. For example, the medieval Portuguese name Teixeira evolved into Theseira; Aroujou became Arroyo/Aroozoo; while D'Aranjo, Sousa and Pereira remained unchanged. The problem with research that is based on last names is that these names could be acquired in more ways than just being the descendant of a European or Eurasian man. When the Portuguese, Dutch and British were in power, having a relevant name would increase social mobility and occupational mobility. This was common practice under the British Raj and the other colonies. Some people change their names to get a job, conceal the past, hide from persecution, or begin a new life.

The book also examines the meaning of “first mover” security status. The Portuguese were considered first movers because they were the first Europeans to make contact with the Asians in Southeast Asia. The Portuguese employed hundreds of soldiers and sailors from Goa, India, in the 1511 attack. Many of these soldiers and sailors returned to India after the attack, but many also remained in Malacca. The Portuguese together with the Indian soldiers and sailors who remained in Malacca benefitted from being first movers in the new colony. More Portuguese and Indian soldiers would eventually settle in Malacca and in other parts of the Malay world. They had offspring with Malays, Chinese and other Natives too. They also had offspring with the Chinese in Malacca, Penang, Kedah, and Phuket (Thailand). Many Portuguese soldiers and sailors also brought Portuguese women and other European women to settle in the new colony. Malacca’s medieval history also reveals that European women themselves arrived in Malacca over the many decades of Portuguese control. The European wives of the colonial masters could survive in Malacca because of the privileges that such “high-born” women were accorded. Their relative lives of comfort and luxury became more pronounced (centuries later) during the Dutch and British periods.

However, the majority of Mestiço, Dutch Burghers and Eurasians had to choose wives from among the local women. Since there were more Asians than Europeans to choose from, it was logical for more Eurasians to marry other Eurasians and other Asians. To some extent, choice became necessity. This is part of the reason why the Eurasians of Singapore and Malaysia tend to look more Asian than European. By the end of the Dutch and British eras, large numbers of Eurasians were found strewn across Southeast Asia.

The two world wars reduced the numbers of Eurasians in this region; while decolonization resulted in the assimilation of Eurasians into the larger ethnic and national communities. Naturally, such assimilation of minority communities occurred all over Southeast Asia and not to Eurasians alone. The Eurasians who immigrated to predominantly Anglo-countries in the 1960s would also be assimilated into the larger ethnic majority of these countries. This would make it difficult for such overseas “Eurasians” to maintain their ethnic identity as Eurasians. Some Eurasians managed to cling to their “Eurasianess” and returned to Southeast Asia for work, vacations and social visits.

The Eurasian communities of Singapore and Malaysia have remained intact because of two main factors. Firstly, it was there was willingness in the new post-independence states to keep and maintain the use of the word “Eurasian”. Secondly, despite their relatively small numbers, the Eurasians who remained in Singapore and Malaysia made important contributions to these new fledgling states.

The contributions of the Eurasians are marked by Eurasian street names and the names of buildings named after or owned by Eurasians. But perhaps the best examples of the cultural vibrancy of Eurasian communities are in the Eurasian names. Eurasian names stand out uniquely in Singapore and Malaysia.

However, one should not be deceived into thinking that there are only as many Eurasian last names as the famous street names found in Penang, Malacca and Singapore. There are many more Eurasian names than meets the eye as the book reveals. It would also appear that many Eurasian names may sound Portuguese but are not. We also know that those with the last names Alcantra, Aroozoo, de Conceicao, Danker, Desker, Grosse, Monteiro, Pereira, Pestana, Rappa, and Sequeira (Sequerah) are likely to have Portuguese and, or, Italian ancestors. Those with the last names of Ariola/Aryola, De Souza, Ess, Lazaroo, Rezel, and Thomasz are likely to have more South Asian ancestry. Mathieu is French. Cornelius, DeWitt, Martens, Palmer, Sheares, Shearer, Shelley, Tessensohn, and Van Cuylenberg are likely to have Dutch and English ancestry.

The exercise of tracing ancestral roots is a very imprecise science, if one can call it a science in the first place. Therefore the research had to be supplemented with focus group discussions, secondary readings, cross-comparisons of data, and hard physical evidence. The cemeteries in Malaysia for example provide proof but it is difficult to identify tombstones dating back earlier than the late 1700s. For general records of the Portuguese in Malacca, researchers ought to study the *Suma Oriental*, Barretto de Resende's "Account of Malacca" (Maxwell), Wilkinson's "Capture of Malacca", Boxer's "The Achinese Attack on Malacca in 1629", and Villiers' "Portuguese Malacca and Spanish Manila: Two Concepts of Empire" at the very least.

This book refers to relevant scholarly works, some by Eurasians, and others by non-Eurasians. I have not included the works of novelists, writers of fiction, and other "story-book" writers. While these fictional works and works of entertainment certainly add to the flavor of Eurasianess, they do not add fact. And indeed, such "entertaining works" often distort fact and cause more confusion and create more harm than good for the serious scholar of ethnic culture and ethnic security.

Indeed, works of fiction often conflate facts in order to tell a good story. I also dispensed with works on Eurasians that were full of cartoons, chapters in books without original fieldwork, and works that reduced Eurasians to "caricatures of themselves".

I am thankful to the many Eurasian parents and families who willingly discussed their lives and shared their meals with me in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Penang, Padang, Malacca and Singapore as well as Jakarta in Indonesia as well as Phuket, Ao Nang, Krabi, and Bangkok, Thailand

Saudade is a rendition of what it means to belong to a Eurasian community. Eurasians know that sooner or later someone is going to inquire about their ethnic roots, be they Portuguese, Asian or other European. It is indeed a proud tradition. Eurasians as a whole are really no different from any other ethnic community. "We are all made by God", as a Kuala Lumpur Eurasian elder once reported, "and therefore just as imperfect as the next one". Most importantly, the existence of marginal, fringe communities such as the Eurasians of Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand represent the security litmus test of inter-ethnic relations in the late modernity of Southeast Asia.

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CHAPTER ONE

Security And Survival

The word Eurasian was not used by the Medieval Portuguese in Malacca. It may come as a surprise to some, but English was never used in daily life for over 130 years of Portuguese rule in Malacca (1511-1641). This was because Malacca was considered part of the *Lusaphone* world for over 13 decades. The British would only arrive much later, and only after the long Dutch period. So the early Eurasians were known by another name.

This book is more than about the security and survival of Eurasian communities in Singapore and Malaysia's late modernity. It also encompasses some aspects of other Eurasian communities in Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Brunei. But time and space considerations as well as limited resources have made the focus on Singapore and Malaysia more manageable and realistic. However, the Eurasian identity appears to be the strongest, most easily traceable and defined in Singapore and Malaysia, with the limited resources available to the writer. Hopefully, more Eurasian scholars will be able to write at length and in-depth about the Eurasian communities in Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, East Timor and Brunei.

Saudade focuses on the cultural security and history of the evolution of Portuguese Eurasians in Malacca and examines the political, social and economic changes that had emerged when these first Eurasians came into contact with other Europeans and Asians. The Portuguese had their own name for the offspring of unions between Portuguese men and Asian women. They called these Eurasian offspring Mestiço. However for all

CHAPTER FOUR

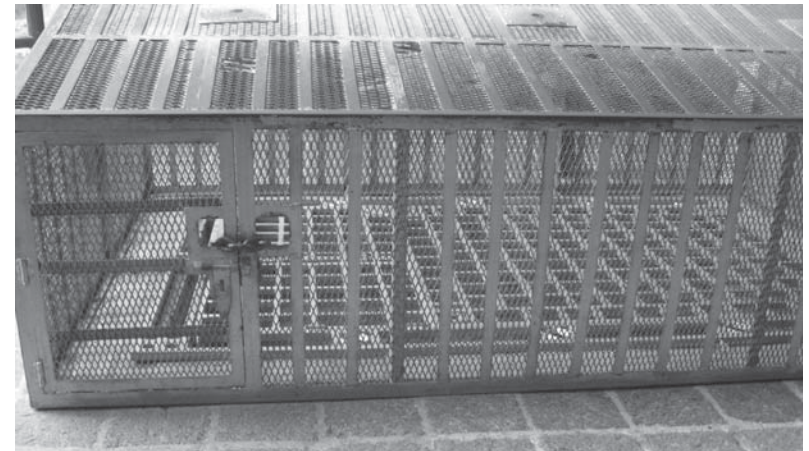
Myth



It is a myth to think that the Eurasians did not fight in World War II. The British needed all the Native help they could get to fight the Japanese. An original army uniform used by Eurasian soldiers against the Japanese Imperial Army in World War II. The soldiers belonged to the Singapore Volunteer Force Company D (Eurasians) that helped defend Singapore. Picture courtesy of the Eurasian Association, Singapore ©2003-2012 Eurasian Association of Singapore.

Myths emerge out of social narratives. Sometimes, myths arise out of fear, mistrust or frustration. Indeed, there are myths that emerge because it is easier to believe in a given narrative rather than in discovering the truth. Not all myths are bad or negative. Some are merely stories based

partly on fact and partly on fiction. Myths also arise out of a misreading of a given community. For example, some people believe that there are many more Eurasians than there actually are. Some believe that no Eurasian ever fought in World War II. Still some believe that all Eurasians are Catholic or that the only Eurasians in Southeast Asia are the ones commonly described. This chapter examines a few myths about Eurasians in Singapore and Malaysia.



The famous padlocked cage in the Nosa Senora da Assumpção with the new steel grids. The body of St. Francis Xavier was interred here for nine months after his death during the Portuguese era. Local Malays advise tourists to tread cautiously because his ghost is believed to appear at night. This is by far untrue as far as the members of the Malacca Portuguese Eurasian community is concerned. ©2004, Antonio L. Rappa

MYTH 1: THE SIZE OF THE EURASIAN POPULATION.

Wikipedia is a free internet-based glossary and dictionary that is becoming increasingly popular with web-surfers who desire a quick answer to a question about virtually any topic. But as the Wikipedia itself warns its users of its limitations, some users who are in a hurry may not read or understand the impact of its various warnings and regulations. For

example, internet users who searched for “Eurasians” and read Wikipedia [[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurasian_\(mixed_ancestry\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurasian_(mixed_ancestry))] on February 16 2008, will discover that there are 44,000 Eurasians in Singapore and 48,000 in Malaysia. This is a myth. There are approximately 30,000 Eurasians in Malaysia, with about 10 percent in Malacca. There are between 15,000 and 18,000 Eurasians in Singapore. Those interested in the exact number must also consider other factors such as (1) the immigration and emigration of Eurasians; (2) number of new births to parents of European and Asian descent; (3) the overall natural rates of increase and natural decrease (mortality rates); and (4) the impact of Singapore and Malaysian government policies on Eurasian permanent residents and naturalized citizens.

MYTH 2: EURASIAN POLITICAL REPRESENTATION?

This is an interesting myth. The popular Minister for Law, E. W. Barker, was a keen sportsman as well as a Cambridge-trained, Queens Scholar. He certainly represented the Eurasian views in Cabinet until his retirement in 1988. After Barkers retirement, the PAP could not find a suitable Eurasian candidate, or perhaps those who were offered to stand on the PAP ticket declined. Nevertheless, the Singapore Foreign Minister, George Yeo, represents Eurasians in Cabinet. Minister Yeo agreed because of his long-standing interest in the Eurasian community. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong’s government brought in two Eurasians into Parliament. However, it would be incorrect to think that the two new Eurasian Members of Parliament (MPs) only represent Eurasians in Parliament. The Eurasian community in Singapore is well aware that these two Eurasian MPs have not waved the Eurasian Flag since they took office. Certainly if a question were raised about Eurasians or the Eurasian community, they would be called upon to answer. There has not been one, except for the question that arose outside Parliament about Palmer. Both Christopher

De Souza and Michael Palmer were elected based on their own merit.⁸⁸ As elected politicians, both PAP MPs are directly answerable to the people who elected them, i.e. their own political constituents. In a sense, they are not even answerable to the Eurasian community as a whole. Yet neither can run away from the fact that they are Eurasians in Singapore. Some Eurasians believe that it is nonetheless better for the Eurasian community to have a few good men and women in Parliament than none at all. There are many other minority MPs in the Singapore Parliament including Sikhs, Tamils, and Malays. On the other side of the causeway in Malaysia, the situation is different when one considers the composition of the Dewan Rakyat and the Dewan Negara. There are no Eurasian MPs in Malaysia at this point in time although there was at least one Portuguese Eurasian MP in the past. There are no Eurasian/Hawaiian-Hapa-Haole politicians in the US Congress. Neither are there MPs or senators who are luk kreung in the Thai Parliament. Singapore appears to be the only place where Eurasians are represented in politics. But with the loss of George Yeo and the resignation of Michael Palmer, only Christopher De Souza is left at the time of printing. The question remains as to whether there will ever be substantial and sustained representation of Eurasian communities outside of Singapore, in Southeast Asia and the rest of the world?

⁸⁸ Like his father, Lt-Col. Timothy De Souza, the young Christopher De Souza has a very impressive record as a Eurasian Scholar-Officer. He won the prestigious Sword-of-Honor at OCS-SAFI. Michael Palmer, a lawyer in private practice like the younger De Souza, also has an impressive record. Palmer is a man of few words but he is well-liked by his constituents. Both men do occasional volunteer work at the EA but do not make a big show out of it. Unfortunately, in 2013, Michael Palmer who had risen to the post of the Speaker of Parliament of Singapore brought much disgrace to the House and to the Eurasian community as a whole. He still has not apologized to the Singapore Eurasians for his part in an extra-marital affair with a young Chinese Singaporean woman who used to work for the People’s Association. See Judith Tan, “SMSes reveal Michael Palmer Affair” *The New Paper* December 15, 2012.



The statue of Jesuit priest, St. Francis Xavier, who eventually died in China. The same hand that was cut off his corpse and sent to Rome for inspection before canonization was broken-off on the marble statue itself during a tropical thunderstorm in Malacca ©2008 Antonio L. Rappa

MYTH 3: ALL EURASIANS HAVE PORTUGUESE BLOOD AND MALAY BLOOD.

Firstly, it is a myth that all Eurasians in Singapore and Malaysia have Portuguese roots. Secondly, it is another myth that all Eurasians in Singapore and Malaysia have Malay roots. Existing statistics and family histories clearly show that there are many Eurasians in Singapore and Malaysia today who have other, non-Portuguese, European roots with no Malay ancestors. Many are considered New Eurasians. There are also many Eurasians in Singapore and Malaysia who have no roots in Malacca at all. The term “Eurasian” was a colonial category used by the British since the late 17th century in India. That ethnic label was then adopted by the Straits Settlements in Malaya. There were many British officers, soldiers, artisans, traders and travelers who married local women and became part of Kampong Serani in Singapore. Many did not marry Eurasians with Portuguese ancestry and instead married local Chinese and Indians.



Still standing: the Nosa Senora da Assumpção built, enlarged and consecrated by the Catholic Portuguese between 1521 and 1528. The original building witnessed the bombings and canon-fire in the town below for over 487 years. Note the British lighthouse tower (white). The Malay girl in a tudong entering the old church in the bottom right quadrant gives some perspective of its relative size ©2003 Antonio L. Rappa

MYTH 4: ALL EURASIANS ARE CATHOLIC.

This is a myth because not all are Catholic and many consider themselves Anglican, Protestant Christian, or even Muslim. Some do not practice their faith even if their identity cards describe that they have one. There is a sizeable number of Eurasians in Singapore and Malaysia who have married Muslims.⁸⁹ Also, Eurasians like Barker who has British-English descent are Anglican. The nationally popular radio DJ Mark Anthony Van Cuylenberg may be of Dutch Eurasian extraction but he is Catholic not Dutch-Presbyterian. Thus one cannot always tell a Eurasian persons religion by the religion espoused by their European progenitors.

⁸⁹ State Plans Panel to Study Status of *Portuguese Bernama/Straits Times*, 11 March 1993.

MYTH 5: TOPASSÉ EURASIANS WERE SUPERNATURAL BEINGS.

There are great differences in Eurasian communities across the world and in Southeast Asia too. Various colonial sources describe the Topassé as forbidding warriors. The Topassé are not directly related to the descendants of Portuguese Mestiços but they may share common Portuguese ancestors. This is because the same ancestor who had offspring in one part of Southeast Asia may have had offspring in other parts of Asia too.

This is less discernible in homogenous societies. Eurasians look different because of the heterogeneous qualities of European and Asian mixture. Naturally, the Topassé illustrate the magnitude of the Portuguese influence in Southeast Asia. The Topassé were created by the Portuguese colonial masters to buffer the Portuguese political and military control over the Spice Islands. The offspring of Portuguese merchants, soldiers, sailors and artisans, the Topassé came to control the local spice trade in Kepulauan Sunda Kecil. Some scholars view them as a kind of Eurasian underclass. But this view is not widely shared among those who have heard of the Topassé. The Dutch colonialists and Dutch Eurasians in Indonesia called the Topassé the Dark Portuguese. Sometimes they were also called the Black Portuguese.

The myth of the Topassé or Dark Portuguese or Black Portuguese was reinforced by the belief that real power could only emerge from Darkness and the unknown and unseen realms. On the other hand, the Europeans were considered bearers of Light and Good. Hence the unions between White European men and Dark Native women were seen as unnatural ones that bred powerful beings.

The French colonialists who were also familiar with the power of the Topassé called them *Larantuqoir* and *le Tupassi*. Another reason why they were called the Dark Portuguese or Black Portuguese may have been because the Topassé traditionally wore black hats while in battle or during ceremonies.

ANNEX A

Interview With A Eurasian (By Research Assistants, Jack Lai Kuo Yen And Esther Sng, 1999-2000) 17 Jan 1999, 2.45pm to 4pm

INTERVIEWERS: What is your full name Sir?

HM: Okay my full name, Harold E.A Mathieu.

INTERVIEWERS: Yes Sir.

HM: Egbert, Arthur Mathieu...That's a French spelling you know, by the Eurasians, so what else you need to know?

INTERVIEWERS: Where were you born?

HM: I was born in Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia. The town is Ipoh, the State is Perak.

INTERVIEWERS: Who was the physician [who delivered you at birth]?

HM: The physician...I think it was a Dr. Kathigasu.

INTERVIEWERS: An Indian doctor?

HM: Lady doctor...well this doctor became quite famous, you may not know anything about her. During the Japanese occupation, she was tortured by the Japanese, overnight became a heroine. I have a feeling that you might have heard about her.

INTERVIEWERS: What were your parents' names?

HM: My parents name....Father was Arthur Rene with an accent on it, never mind the accent. Mathieu, same spelling....French.

INTERVIEWERS: Your mother?

HM: Mother...Mrs. Ivy Violet Mathieu. Maiden name u want? Holmberg, Irish. She has got Irish ancestry.

INTERVIEWERS: Your father is French?

HM: My father is French, my mother actually is a Eurasian in the sense that she has got Irish-Dutch blood plus sort of the local Malacca Eurasian blood comes in there. That's why she.....that's Eurasian. So....ok....so you can say she was Eurasian. Correct? Maybe wrong I think. But my Irish grandmother on my mother's side was pure Irish.

INTERVIEWERS: Any other information that you feel like furnishing?

HM: Irish grandmother was named McManus.

INTERVIEWERS: Grandfathers name?

HM: Ah....Grandfather was Hugh Bartholomew

INTERVIEWERS: Irish also?

HM: No, this one was Dutch side, Dutch ancestry, but he was not pure Dutch. My Grandfather on my father's side was Eugene Mathieu. He was French, pure French, came down from France actually. And his wife, that is my grandmother, is Florence Mathieu. Nee, her maiden name was Hardouin. French. So they are pure French.

INTERVIEWERS: Can you name your siblings and who they are married to?

HM: Eldest brother is Charles Mathieu, married...a Miss Anita Jacob. They have two children, now grown up of course la huh.

INTERVIEWERS: Ms. Jacob was a Eurasian?

HM: Eurasian...yes Eurasian now living in Sydney, Australia. I have got another brother, Stephen. A retired teacher now living in Penang. My sister, June is the youngest, number four in other words. She married a

man whose surname is Wassung. Afrikaans. English educated, lived in Malaysia and all that but was an Afrikaan. They both lived in England.

INTERVIEWERS: Is Stephen married?

HM: No, bachelor.

INTERVIEWERS: And your spouse?

HM: My spouse, Mrs. Marie Louise Dragon, a Eurasian, from Penang. She originated in Penang but got cousins all here in Singapore and all that kind of thing la ok? A retired teacher.

INTERVIEWERS: Describe where you lived during the war.

HM: Estate, a rubber estate. We were living in I don't know whether... I will give you the name of the area... it was called the Dindings. To be exact was in Perak of course, the estate was called Segari. If you want to know where this area is, they are not far from a place called Lumut islands. We were not taken prisoners primarily because my father and my uncle who lived together were French. Because at that point in time, I cant tell you the year I am not too sure, France was not in war in WW2, France was neutral. I am not sure of the year although I did history in my university also. But France was neutral so on those grounds the Japanese did not take us in, they allowed us to remain free. Ok? But when we lived on the estate, we became very friendly with in fact, you may have heard of the terrorists that lived then. They were called guerillas, they were pro-British but they lived in the jungles...You know after the war you've heard of the emergency in Malaysia. The emergency period.

INTERVIEWERS: Communist.

HM: Communist, what they call terrorist communist. At that time during Japanese occupation these were known as guerillas they were pro-British and they used to keep us informed whenever the Japanese were visiting the estate, they had all these intelligence service in the jungle. I was too little to know all that, but they kept in contact with us and my cousin who was very fair and beautiful, pretty girl la. When the Japanese would come in, these

Chinese guerillas will take my cousin and her brother into the Jungle to hide because they were very fair and they thought that the Japanese might take her away and you know what they will do to girls and all that. But at that time they were British sympathizers these guerillas. But after the war, war was over, apparently they were very unhappy because the British didn't keep promises to them. That's how the story goes ah. So the result was that they became...they remained in the Jungle. Remember they went round shooting the rubber planters and so that was how the emergency started. These people became terrorists. And their leader was eventually Chin Peng but at that time they were pro-British people. So, that's so much I can tell you...they wont come round the house freely but they would... one of them would come round to tell my cousins and people that the Japanese were coming to visit so we would be on our guard.

INTERVIEWERS: How many Eurasians in your estimation lived in Singapore between 1930-39.

HM: I wasn't in Singapore then, I lived in Malaysia. I wouldn't know.

INTERVIEWERS: Then in Perak, Malaysia how many Eurasians were there?

HM: Hard to say because it's not my era and I can't even hazard a guess but from what I can recall, there were Eurasians but very minimum in number. But I can't really give an answer cause I myself was too little.

INTERVIEWERS: At what age did you come over to Singapore?

HM: Erm, I came over after my "O" levels...1954.

INTERVIEWERS: After the war?

HM: Oh yes! Very much after the war, I grew up in Penang. From Ipoh we went to Penang and after the war that might have been 1946 I think. I did school in Penang, I did my "O" levels in Penang and came over to teach here, in Singapore.

INTERVIEWERS: What was the Eurasian life after the War?

...a lot of hardship. My father didn't have a job then because the Japanese came he lost his job and all that sort of things. So we had to make do with growing tapioca...and selling this tapioca at the market...he and a group of friends including my uncle, they would go hunting wild pigs as earlier on before the war they could carry guns, that was in Perak. When the Japanese came they couldnt so they go round spearing wild pigs to eat. To eat ok! And we had quite a number of dogs and the estate workers who went along. In fact there was a group that went hunting la. And that's how they survived la.

INTERVIEWERS: And during the time of David Marshall you were in Singapore?

HM: David Marshall...I just came to Singapore. I just come to Singapore. Yes, I just became a citizen also. It was easy to become a citizen then. I became a citizen in 1954.

Marshall...that time was Lim Yew Hock. I didn't know much about the politics but David Marshall became Chief Minister, that's right. A dynamic fellow.

INTERVIEWERS: What was the life for Eurasians like during that time?

HM: I would say Eurasians, again only my own impressions...they had a good life. You see again my impression but whether I am accurate or not, the Eurasians, the city council and many were working at the city council then and living in the community and they were English speaking so they were considered by them...this was before Singapore got independence, the English people were here and so on. They had...they held good positions jobs, u know? Like in banks, clerks or whatever, so they were considered upper end, so they themselves considered themselves to be like..ok, high in society that kind of thing ah. And they always thought pro-British, pro-English, always associated themselves with the English, European that kind of thing la. Honestly, I dont think I am wrong with this kind of interpretation, ok umm, that's one thing. But I also think there were different groups of Eurasians like for instance they come in Upper

Ten, Lower Sixes that's why...that's why in Singapore there still exist this feeling among the Eurasians that there are different communities..., Upper Ten.. the terms they use..Lower..er ...

INTERVIEWERS: Lower Sixes?

HM: Yes, that kind of thing, implying that er there are the haves and have-nots and the in-betweens and it is quite true in the Eurasian community there are poor Eurasians, there are comfortable Eurasians, economic monetary wise, and there are those who are...a number are well off right and again there are different categories of Eurasians, there are those who...whose education level is sometimes minimum, others at other times okay and there are some who have excelled and done well. Quite a number of prominent Eurasians la, but again here where education is concerned, there is a kind of feeling that exists among the Eurasians ... speaking very frankly you know, that you can put it down as complacency where education is concerned, there is a tendency to be complacent, primary school moving up performing reasonably well sixty seventy marks and parents seem to think oh my kid is ok, but because they are able to understand English they are able to absorb from the teacher. The higher they go, the test or grading comes when they enter Secondary school, if they don't apply themselves they start losing out. And one of the things that in fact we here are working to improve is the attitude to second language

Are you from ACS?

INTERVIEWERS: no.

HM: Ok, I am not criticizing ACS but I'd like to take ACS as an example, you see in ACS the boys are clever, the boys are brilliant and they perform. You notice the second language problem? Why? Attitude. Can we say that this is a problem with the English educated, among the Eurasians? I don't know, ACS may not be all Eurasians la but is this something like that I don't know but definitely where the Eurasians are concerned, there is this attitude that the second language is not very important. After all we are English speaking...which they must dismantle this, they have to get

rid of, that we are working against, quite a number have changed their attitude moving towards the better for that. We here in EA are trying to change that, we try to have seminars for parents to initiate them to this real outlook of the world of IT, information technology where you have to move with the times and don't just stay in complacency, that's the hardest job is to lift them out of the feeling that second language is not important.

INTERVIEWERS: Among the Eurasians there exists a complacency about education even till today?

HM: No...no many have come out of this wreck, education to improve but the attitude to second language is still very ingrained, negative attitude which needs to change, alright?

And they always give this excuse, they tend to give this excuse "oh my child can't perform in second language because it is difficult, I think it's difficult." Got to apply yourself la to do it, if you change your attitude, things can change la, mind over matter. Anyway lets never go into all these...but that's ah...that's ah the real picture. Now am I answering the question or I...or whether I am moving away or what?

INTERVIEWERS: Who were the prominent Eurasians at the time that you can remember?

HM: Prominent Eurasians...lets say I am not very familiar but I would say Jenö Oehlers comes to mind, there were some others around at the city council, I don't know if I can recall, immediately I cant recall, if you say you wanted this info, I could have...dealt... I could have known if it comes to mind. Another prominent Eurasian was...what his position was I am not sure, held quite a good position, was Steward, the surname was Steward. Could have been Stanley Stewart.

INTERVIEWERS: What was their prominence based on?

HM: Their prominence.....proficiency in English, ability, intelligence, the ability to hold position and to administer their duties effectively, confidence, forward thinking people. These are definitely forward thinking

people, and they had achieved status in education. Basically capable people, not just moving up their positions through favoritism ah, capable, effective people.... English was the lingua franca of the times, at any rate, the English was a big language, the English were here and so on, that ... but I suppose, not looking at these people even other Eurasians holding positions in banks in whatever erm...by virtue of the fact that they were able to speak proficient English or speak English well would automa... automatically have been a cut above those who are not very proficient in English which is...the British would select accordingly, I mean lets face it, that was the truth.

INTERVIEWERS: How did the non-Eurasians like the Chinese/Malays/Tamils....treat the Eurasians in Singapore?

HM: Treat ah? Again from my point of view I would say Okay, got on well but how they regard them would be another point, different, another point, they probably regarded.. the general feeling was that Eurasians were a little more privileged because of the fact that they were able to speak the language that the Englishman spoke and things like that. But whether...I don't think they held any animosity towards the Eurasians but certainly would give the Chinese and the Indians and even the Malays credit for the fact that they themselves even at that time were keen to improve. You know for example the Chinese have already begin to get on....they are not complacent. So that probably put them in good stead, you take it today also...if you take on the average, the Chinese in fact even the Indians, even the Malays take them now and they go to higher if they have the quality to excel and improve. Invariably, unless the Eurasians were strong enough to have their right attitude, they would lose out...That's why I say, hopefully the attitude among Eurasians are improving but it will take some time before they can change their attitudes.

INTERVIEWERS: During that time, did all Eurasians come from the same class, e.g. lower, middle, upper?

HM: Oh varies, varies..

INTERVIEWERS: Even in 1950s?

HM: I would say there were Eurasians that were poor, there were Eurasians who were the middle class of society and there was some who are well off because then well off you see, but by and large, between the haves and the have-nots, I wouldn't say there was a big gap ok, from the social point of view, the Eurasians then were known to be fun-loving, you know when it comes to social functions, dancing and all that, lets face it, they were in the forefront, still are in the forefront but as we are working out in the society here, erm...being good social dancers and fun loving things...fun loving aspects the be all and the end all, education is being emphasized here, welfare is taken care of to uplift the life of the Eurasians, alright? So if I re...from the past come to present, I would say that over the last easily ten years or so the Eurasian Association has made striking improvement in working for the betterment of the Eurasians and trying to uplift them. The social side is still there, it's an important factor because that's cultural and so on but we try to impress upon the community that that's not all, ok? But definitely fun loving in the past, coming back to this feeling of between the haves and have-nots, its not bad in the sense that we were able to get on in social functions, nobody said you are drawing a bigger salary than me and so on and so forth, it was not this feeling that was so bad. Well maybe the gap was not so much of people who wantbut but today there is a difference. Today, erm there is this feeling among the Eurasian community, in the Eurasian community that the have-nots feel that the haves have got more privilege. So right or wrong I don't know, whether...some people got wealth, well off and all that, others have achieved through education others have not, maybe through their own fault, maybe not through their own means, so sometimes there is a minority, a very small group of...of Eurasian people here in Singapore who still feel that education isn't important and sometimes they hold their children back. Very small.. but you hear about it, very small, no cause for big concern...but certainly er...I know because I myselfwhen I worked for this community I was working in the Ministry of Education, I was helping the Eurasian community and I moved to visit the homes and we were able to get two children to go to school, they were not going to

About The Author



Antonio L. Rappa held a Singapore Armed Forces Overseas Training Award (New Zealand) in 1984 and a National University of Singapore Overseas Graduate Scholarship (Hawaii, Manoa) in 1994. He was Assistant Professor of Political Science at the NUS Department of Political Science, General Editor at the NUS-FASS Centre for Advanced Studies (CAS); and a Visiting Scholar at the Institute of Governmental Studies at UC Berkeley. He was a Visiting Assistant Professor of Political Science (Krieger School of Arts and Sciences, Johns Hopkins University), and a Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. He was a former Senior Fellow and Consultant to the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) at the S Rajaratnam School of International Affairs, Nanyang Technological University. Dr Rappa has written some articles and commentaries on Thai politics. He is Associate Professor and Head, Management and Security Studies, School of Business, SIM University.