



SELLING DREAMS

Early Advertising in Singapore

From now till 24 February 2019

EXHIBITION GUIDE



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Singapore



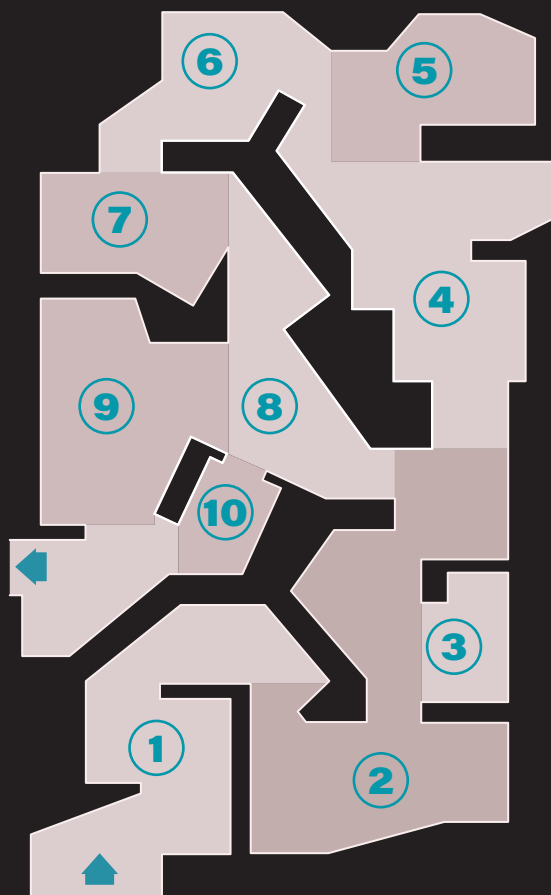
SELLING DREAMS

Early Advertising in Singapore

Apart from promoting goods and services, advertisements often tug at our heartstrings by appealing to our hopes and fears, needs and wants, and ideals and aspirations – in other words, they sell us the notion that our dreams can come true.

This exhibition aims to uncover the desires and aspirations of people as revealed through Singapore's early advertisements. Drawing from the National Library's rich collection of print materials from the 1830s to 1960s, on display are ads from newspapers, magazines, periodicals, ephemera and other publications. The exhibition is modelled after a department store, where visitors can discover ads for various goods and services across 10 'departments'.

Happy 'shopping'!



EXHIBITION LAYOUT

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1 INTRODUCTION: A RICH ADVERTISING HERITAGE

In Singapore, newspapers and printed publications were the most prevalent advertising media from the early 19th century to the 1960s. Published in various languages, printed media from this period contain extremely rich advertising materials.

Singapore has a rich advertising history. Advertising agents first appeared locally around the 1910s. The 1920s economic boom fostered a thriving advertising industry. Before World War II, there were already at least 20 advertising firms in Singapore and Malaya, some of which were full-fledged agencies, such as Warin Publicity Services founded by William Joseph Warin in 1932.



Singapore Chronicle and Commercial Register 21 March 1833

Singapore: Singapore Chronicle Press

Singapore Chronicle was first published in 1824 with the aim of disseminating commercial information and news. It contained government notices, advertisements, reports of local events, international news, as well as listings of imports and exports. As the first and only newspaper in Singapore until 1835, it had a monopoly on advertising.

Most of the ads in this issue are shipping notices, except for one on 'theatrical amusements'. The detailed programme of plays, singing and poetry recitals provides a glimpse into evening entertainment for Europeans in 1830s Singapore.

Album of Page Boy Cigarette Cards

Publisher unknown, c. 1930s
Henry Er Collection

Some ephemeral publications are unique advertising materials, such as this album of cigarette cards, which were used to stiffen cigarette boxes. They were usually printed with colourful images and were a collector's item that perpetuated the brand's name.

This album contains 97 cards featuring Hollywood movie stars from the 1930s. On the left page are two Malayan Patriotic Fund stamps that were sold in Singapore and Malaya from 1940 to 1941 to raise funds for Britain's war efforts.



Warin Publicity Services

The Straits Times Annual, 1939
Singapore: Straits Times Press

Warin Studios was a leading ad agency in 1930s Singapore. Its British founder William Joseph Warin (1894–1950) first came to Malaya in 1915 as a rubber planter and set up Warin Studios in 1932. Business took off and it was renamed Warin Publicity Services (WPS) in 1937. Among its clients were major corporations and import houses in Malaya.

Ads by WPS were frequently published in newspapers and magazines. They usually featured colourful, attractive illustrations. The company's signature, 'Warins' or 'WPS' always appeared in its ads, proudly identifying their provenance.

2 FOOD ADS: MODERNISING FOOD IN MALAYA

Throughout the 19th century, meat and produce consumed in Singapore were sourced locally and from around the region. However, in the early 20th century, food technology such as aerated water, preservatives, refrigeration and, in particular, tinned food became mainstream. By the turn of the century, residents in Singapore were able to procure meats, fruits, dairy, and vegetables from overseas that were previously unavailable locally. This explosion of new foods in the market meant that these new imported ingredients could now be incorporated into local dishes.

Advertising for food products became common, particularly in publications such as *Her World*, which catered to women, who were traditionally in charge of home cooking. Most of these ads sought to build brand trust by emphasising family-friendliness, economy, and health in an effort to position their products as household staples, to ensure an enduring consumer base.



Planta

Her World, December 1969
Singapore: Straits Times Press

Now a household name, margarine brand Planta originated from the Netherlands during the 1870s. It was the first-ever margarine imported to Malaya, and quickly became the country's most popular brand, used in all kinds of cooking as well as a spread. Malaysia and Singapore remain its largest market to this day.

This ad for Planta shows a scrumptious family feast, promising consumers that they, too, could cook delectable dishes for their families with the use of Planta.

Cold Storage

Straits Times Annual, 1970
Singapore: Straits Times Press

The first supermarkets in Singapore emerged from the demand by Westerners on the island for fresh and frozen foods from overseas, as they were unaccustomed to locally sourced foods and longed for meats such as fresh mutton and beef, which were largely unavailable in Singapore for most of the 19th century. The emergence of food refrigeration and supermarkets fulfilled this demand.

While Cold Storage, Singapore's first supermarket, may have originally been primarily catered to Europeans living in Singapore, it soon expanded its clientele to include locals. Even in the 1970s, supermarket shopping largely remained the province of the middle and upper classes, as illustrated by this ad that promised value for money when one shopped at Cold Storage.





Lactogen

Her World, April 1966
Singapore: Straits Times Press

An increase in health consciousness went hand-in-hand with the growing concern for infant care and health. Throughout the early 20th century, a large proportion of ads were for canned and powdered milk, which suggests that infant nutrition was a major concern. Many ads leveraged on parents' love and care, as well as their worries and insecurities over the proper provision of nutrition for their children.

Brands such as Lactogen sought to build the public's trust in the company and its products by demonstrating care for the health of families.

3 MEDICAL ADS: KEEP THE DOCTOR AWAY

With limited access to medical services, traditional medication, home remedies, and self-medication were common throughout the 19th and 20th centuries in Singapore. Until the 1950s, there was little to no advertising regulation, which allowed medical advertisers to make bold and, sometimes, outrageous claims about the efficacy of their products. Brands routinely promised quick fixes and cure-alls alongside public health warnings, playing on both the public's desire for good health and fear of illness.

Besides curing illnesses, the medical industry promoted a healthy lifestyle as the way to stay healthy. There was no shortage of ads for supplements, tonics and tablets that promised to keep the body functioning healthily. Other promised benefits were youthfulness, fitness and vitality, with advertisers claiming that those who did not take advantage of supplements were missing out on a better life.

Vikelp

Straits Times Annual, 1937
Singapore: Straits Times Press

This ad for Vikelp's Health and Body Building Tablets posited that glandular control was the key to good health and weight. Through a concoction of vitamins and minerals, the ad promised to solve the problems of those who were 'too thin', 'weak and sickly', 'too fat', or 'nervous and irritable'.

Eng Aun Tong Tiger Brand Medications

Malaya Merdeka Album, 1957

Singapore: Sin Chew Jit Poh Press

The Tiger Brand from Eng Aun Tong company, now a regional household name, was heavily advertised across all kinds of publications. This particular advertisement was printed on the back cover of *Malaya Merdeka Album*, a souvenir publication commemorating the Federation of Malaya's independence from the British Empire. It reads 'Merdeka! Bringing Malaya independence and freedom!', and 'Eng Aun Tong Tiger Brand's five major medications eliminate numerous diseases, bringing people health and happiness!', framing Eng Aun Tong as a Malayan brand and implying that the use of Tiger Brand products was the key to a happy and healthy nation.



Medical Office Poster

c. 1930s

Medical Office was established on North Bridge Road in 1866 by German nationals and later bought over by Singapore's first local Chinese pharmacist Foo Khee How and his partners in 1916. Foo ran the hall as a Western drugstore and pharmacy with services such as medical consultations. He also produced supplements, which are still sold in Singapore and the region today.

This poster is in the Shanghai 'picture calendar' style that was highly popular in China and overseas Chinese communities from the 1920s to 1940s.



4 HOUSEHOLD ADS: MODERNISING THE MALAYAN HOME

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, modern utilities and amenities such as gas, electricity and piped water revolutionised domestic life across the world. Singapore was no exception. Along with such modern amenities, a vast array of appliances appeared on the market, radically changing the way people cooked, cleaned and entertained themselves at home.

The introduction of electricity into the home created a consumer market for household goods and entertainment, resulting in a flood of new appliances from the United States, Europe and, later, Japan. These products started to become heavily advertised from the early 20th century.

Home appliances were often marketed as essential to the 'modern home'. The 'ideal household' was an idea that existed long before home gadgets, but in early 20th-century advertising, it came to refer to a home fully equipped with modern conveniences and entertainment.



Osram

The General Electric Co. Ltd.
The Straits Times Annual, 1941
Singapore: Straits Times Press

This Osram advertisement for fluorescent lighting must have looked like a futuristic fantasy when it was published in the 1940s. The illustration captured the ideal of the modern home and office, implying that fluorescent bulbs were the future of lighting. Osram was not wrong. Fluorescent lighting would go on to become a staple in homes and offices around the world.

Kelvinator Refrigerators

The Straits Times Annual, 1940
Singapore: Straits Times Press

Kelvinator described its refrigerators as 'A Woman's Dream'. This eye-catching illustration was produced by Singapore's Warin Studios, an agency known for its dramatic advertising artwork.



Kelvinator Refrigerators

The East Asiatic Co. Ltd.
The Straits Times Annual, 1956
Singapore: Straits Times Press

Most household advertisements featured women looking put-together and fashionable, even while doing their chores. This particular ad paints the picture of the ideal home kitchen: roomy and clean, with a fridge full of fresh, delicious food.



Grundig Record Players

Nanyang Monthly, Vol. 37, July 1960
Singapore: Nanyang Printers

The newfound ability to instantaneously access local and global news and entertainment gave rise to home entertainment products and, by extension, advertisements that promoted them. Radios and record players were considered fairly pricey luxuries then, and many advertisements bolstered the perception of radio ownership as a privilege and sign of wealth.

In this ad, Grundig's record player and recorder is set within a very stylish modern home, complete with air conditioning, blinds and chic mid-century modern furniture. The models are dressed in high-quality traditional and Western outfits. Everything in this photograph exudes home luxury, and Grundig built the ownership of their record players into that ideal.

5 AUTOMOBILE ADS: HAVE CAR, WILL TRAVEL

The first motorcar brought in to Singapore was a single-cylinder, 5-horsepower Benz. The Katz Brothers, a general goods importer, imported the car on behalf of a Mr B. Frost of the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company in 1894. At the time, cars were considered the latest technology, but production was limited and prices were exorbitant, making them available to only the wealthiest members of society.

Cars would eventually enter the mainstream consumer market in the 1920s, after the introduction of assembly plants that were capable of mass-producing vehicles, significantly reducing manufacturing costs.

As a result of more affordable car prices, advertising for cars changed to reflect the idea that with smart financing, almost anyone with a middling income could potentially own a car. The dream of car ownership had become much closer to reality.

Swift Cars

Guthrie & Co. Ltd.
The Straits Times Annual, 1907
Singapore: Straits Times Press

In the early 20th century, personal car ownership would have been unattainable for most locals in Singapore. Companies dedicated to importing automobiles did not emerge until the mid-20th century. Until then, cars were brought into Singapore by general importers such as Guthrie & Co.

The ad features beautifully detailed illustrations likely provided by Swift for its overseas importers.



Morris Cars

Malayan Motors
Her World, November 1960
Singapore: Straits Times Press

This ad by Morris portrays car ownership as an ideal of a happy family, with a picture-perfect modern family surrounding their brand new Morris motorcar. The ad goes on to expound on the virtues of Morris cars as safe, roomy, affordable and fuel-efficient.



Benz & Co. Horseless Carriages

Katz Brothers
The Straits Times, 29 August 1896
Singapore: Straits Times Press

This ad features the first car imported to Singapore – a Benz & Co. two-cylinder motorcar. Describing the car as a horseless carriage, the ad expounds on the benefits of the Benz car, assuring safe ignition and braking, as well as economical oil consumption at ½ penny a mile. It even boasts of speeds of 10 to 15 miles an hour (15 to 25 kilometres an hour) and proclaims the car's 'quite silent' motor, which might have been a slight exaggeration.



6 TRAVEL ADS: EPIC JOURNEYS

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, which halved the duration of ship passage between Europe and Asia, marked the beginning of world tourism. Singapore, a major port of call and coaling station from the late 19th century until World War II, was on the itinerary of round-the-world tours. Advertising was used to promote tourism to British Malaya – the colony was portrayed as an exotic, tropical country, rich in natural resources and business opportunities.

As leisure travel became more popular, tourism ads increased in print media, revealing the travel options and destinations of the time. Ads also reflected travel conditions, for instance, ads of ocean liners showed that the well-heeled tourist travelled in luxury from one port to the next.

(top)

Sketch Map of Federated Malay States Railways

Singapore: Dolores Jackson, 1917

(bottom)

Federated Malay States Railways, Siamese State Railways

The Annual of the East (1932-33)

London: Alabaster, Passmore & Sons

The first railway line in Malaya was built in 1885 to service the mining industry, and later, the rubber industry. The Federated Malay States Railways (FMSR) was established in 1901 to unite the different railway lines in Malaya and to construct a railway system in Singapore. It was a boon to tourism as it made various parts of Malaya accessible to visitors.

The cover and back of the folded map are full of ads for various products – food and beverages, building materials, car accessories, household goods and more. Ads also appear on the right side of the map. The advertisers very likely sponsored the printing of this map, which would have been very useful to railway passengers, similar to the free tourist maps that continue to be distributed today.

In 1918, FMSR was connected to the Siamese State Railways. Passengers could travel from Singapore to Bangkok via Penang and Padang Besar on the border, where the two railways were linked. The ads for the two railways sought to entice travellers with exotic and romantic images of Malaya and Siam (now Thailand).



Een Reis Naar Oost-Azie (A Trip to East Asia)

Bremen: Norddeutscher Lloyd, date unknown

Donated by John Koh

Founded in 1857, Norddeutscher Lloyd (North German Lloyd) was one of the most prominent shipping companies worldwide in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. By the early 1900s, its shipping routes had expanded to Asia.

This Dutch-language brochure publicised its passenger and freight services to East Asia. These pages, showing the dining and smoking rooms of the ships, give clues to the extent of their luxury. The exquisitely printed brochure with illustrations of exotic oriental scenes evokes the romance of cruise liner travel.



7 HOSPITALITY ADS: LIVING IT UP IN SINGAPORE

By the turn of the 20th century, Singapore was home to several luxury hotels of international renown such as Hotel de l'Europe, Adelphi Hotel and Raffles Hotel. They belonged to the league of grand hotels – luxurious accommodation with excellent cuisine and impeccable service – that started in Europe, America and other parts of the world in the late 19th century, catering to wealthy leisure travellers. Housed in magnificent buildings with modern amenities, these early premier hotels were also centres of social life for the who's who in Singapore.

Raffles Hotel

The Straits Times Annual, 1906
Singapore: Straits Times Press
Singapore Press Holdings Collection

Once the largest hotel in the Straits Settlements, the Raffles was one of the first buildings in Singapore to have electric lights and appliances. This ad proudly proclaimed it 'the Savoy of Singapore', 'renowned for its all-round modern comforts'. Some 'notable patrons' are listed, among whom were royalties, aristocrats and dignitaries.

The ad also boasts of the hotel's cuisine, which was prepared under the supervision of European chefs. 'Guest Nights Every Saturday' with 'Band and Skating' refers to the Skating Dinner where guests could roller-skate in the hotel's hall to live music performed by an orchestra!



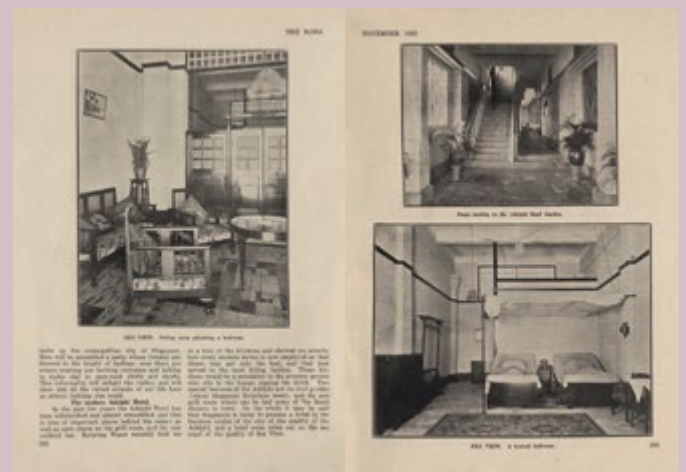
The Roda: Magazine of the [Rotary] Clubs of Malaya and Siam, Vol. 5, No. 53 (November 1935)

Singapore: Roda

In this magazine feature in *The Roda, Where to Stay in Malaya*, the writer describes his experience at Sea View Hotel:

There is the sound of the sea continually in one's ears. One can bathe in the large pagar in complete safety. One can sun bathe on the lawn under ideal conditions...there is abundance of hot and cold fresh water at all times of the day and night. This is still a comparative luxury in Malaya... each bedroom has attached bath room.

The hotel was apparently a good place for people watching. On a Sunday morning, one could 'see social Singapore at its most varied and interesting' as well as women 'dressed in the height of fashion'.



8 ENTERTAINMENT ADS: HAVING FUN IN MODERN TIMES

Innovations in technology and shifts in leisure trends at the turn of the 20th century ushered in a new era of entertainment in the West, which Singapore quickly embraced. The cinematograph, or films, arrived in Singapore shortly after its first screening in Paris in 1895. Movie theatres soon sprouted and advertisements of cinemas and movies proliferated in print media in the following decades.

Another innovation in entertainment in the early 20th century was the amusement park. Singapore's three amusement parks, New World (1923), Great World (1932) and Happy World (1937, later Gay World), were highly popular leisure spaces where people from all social classes could enjoy a myriad of entertainment, from traditional theatre performances to boxing matches and cabarets.



Capitol Theatre

British Malayan Annual, 1929

Julius S. Fisher (Ed)

Singapore: Fishers

'Picture palaces' – movie theatres renowned for their luxury and modernity – emerged in the West in the 1910s and 1920s with New York's Roxy Theatre (1927) being a prime example. Singapore's own picture palace was Capitol Theatre, which opened to great fanfare in 1930.

Published just before Capitol's opening, this ad captures the state-of-the-art features of the cinema, such as 'a fanless cooling system ensuring a complete change of air every six minutes', two lifts, a sliding roof, the same seats as Roxy Theatre, and a posh restaurant and café.

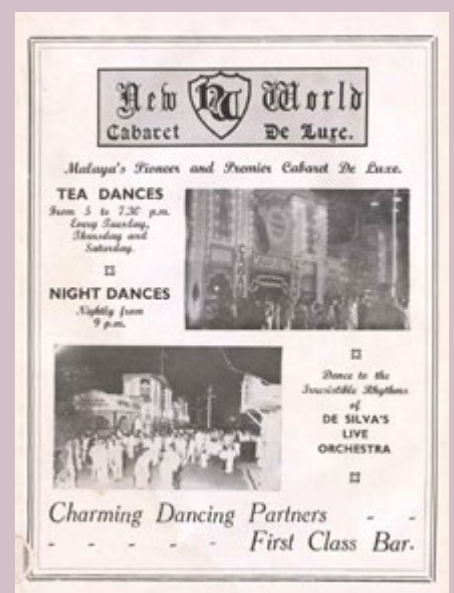
New World Cabaret

Come to Malaya, February 1938

Singapore: East Indies Publishing Co.

Cabarets were a key attraction of amusement parks. Their ads invariably highlighted beautiful dance hostesses, or 'taxi-dancers', to entice male customers. Patrons could buy dance coupons – a dollar for three – that entitled them to a dance with the girls of their choice. Live music and singing were also performed at the cabarets.

While dance hostesses were the main draw of the cabarets, another key element was the live band that played swing, jazz or even *kronchong* music. As the energy of a live band did much to enhance the enjoyment of patrons, skilled musicians were highly sought after by the cabarets. This New World ad features De Silva's Live Orchestra, referring to the famous band led by A. M. De Silva, a veteran musician who played at leading hotels and cinemas.



9 RETAIL ADS: EMPORIUMS OF THE EAST

Retail advertising in Singapore from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries was dominated by a few department stores such as John Little, Robinsons and Whiteaway Laidlaw. The department store was a mid-19th century innovation that came about as a result of the Industrial Revolution in Europe. It created a new retail culture in which shopping, once a mundane task, was elevated to a social and leisure activity. Department stores in Singapore and Malaya emerged around the same time, modelling themselves after their British counterparts. The ads of these stores often boasted of their endless array of merchandise, as well as their luxurious and modern amenities. They enticed consumers with material richness and a pleasurable shopping experience.

Views of Singapore

Singapore: John Little & Co., c. 1910s

John Little, Singapore's oldest department store, was founded in 1845 as a retailer and auctioneer. By the 1900s, the store had become one of the foremost retail establishments in Asia. In 1910, John Little's new building at Raffles Place was completed. Its ads proudly declared it 'the Finest Store East of Suez', and it was an attraction for both well-heeled residents and tourists.

This pictorial book features photographs of landmarks and scenery in Singapore with captions in English, French and German. It contains several exterior and interior shots of the new John Little building, showcasing its grandeur and elegance.



This is Robinson's Reporting from Singapore

December 1959
Singapore: Robinson & Co.

Robinsons was established in 1858 as a family warehouse at Commercial Square (now Raffles Place) selling European groceries. By the 1900s, Robinsons had become one of the leading department stores in Singapore, comprising over 20 departments.

Before the days of the Robinsons Sale, the 'Big Sale' was the store's annual special sale in the 1950s. As advertised here, the sale lasted for 18 days and promised substantial discounts storewide. The ad for womenswear promised discounts of more than 40 percent.

THIS IS Robinson's Reporting FROM SINGAPORE

MARCH 2nd, 1959 No. 11

HERE'S NEWS FOR ALL BARGAIN HUNTERS

IT'S BIG SALE TIME!

FROM MARCH 25 TO APRIL 11

SOFT FURNISHING DEPARTMENT

PRINTED LINEN FURNISHING MATERIAL

12" wide Usually \$4.50 p. yd. **NOW \$2.00 p. yd.**

CONTINENTAL BROCADES

Usually \$ 4.50 to \$9.50 p. yd. **NOW \$2.50 p. yd.**

FINE QUALITY AMERICAN PRINTED COTTONS

Usually \$4.50 to \$9.50 p. yd. **NOW \$2.50 p. yd.**

Printed in John Little's Building

10 FASHION ADS: FASHIONING IDENTITIES

Before the early 20th century, Singapore's various communities followed the dressing conventions of their cultures, which were an integral part of their identities. The 1910s witnessed major changes in the fashions of Europe, America and China. Singapore, being at the crossroads of East and West, showcased these fashion trends as reflected in local advertisements of the same period. The ads also revealed the unique phenomenon of the 'colonial outfit' – Western dress adapted in design and material for Europeans in tropical colonies. In the post-World War II era, parallel to Malaya's independence and growing national identity, advertising and print media showed new style trends where indigenous costumes, in particular, the *sarong kebaya*, became in vogue and entered the hallowed halls of high fashion.



《良友》 (*Liang You, The Young Companion*), No. 37 (July 1929)

Shanghai: 良友图书印刷有限公司
(*Liang you tu shu yin shua you xian gong si*)

Shanghai fashion was propagated in overseas Chinese communities through movies and popular magazines such as 《良友》 (*Liang You* or *The Young Companion*), which was also distributed in Singapore. The magazine typically featured Shanghai fashionistas or glamorous celebrities on its covers.

Fashion, various issues, 1961

Singapore: R. M. Yusoff Ahmad

The early 1960s issues of this popular Malay-language publication are replete with illustrations of the latest *sarong kebaya* designs. Many of them have regional influences but with modern twists. They show the endless possible variations of the traditional costume, making it a highly versatile dress and a Malayan fashion statement.



Robinson & Co.


The Straits Racing Calendar, 1911
 Singapore: The Straits Racing Association

Illustrated here is a man in a full morning suit from the Edwardian era, comprising a tailcoat, vest, striped trousers, bow tie, top hat and walking cane – more a fashion accessory than a mobility aid. Such attire was probably worn at horse races, where spectators would be dressed in finery. Racing apparel such as racing silks and breeches were also advertised, as horse racing was an important colonial sporting and social event.

ADVERTISEMENTS.

ROBINSON & Co.
 Civil and Military Tailors,
 SINGAPORE.

Tropical
Suits
in
Exclusive
Designs:
Latest and
Most
Fashionable
Styles.



A

Racing Silks
in all
Registered
Designs.
White
Cashmere
Racing
Breeches.
Fancy and
White Vestings.

Large Variety of Field and Race Glasses.

Prism Binoculars by ROSS, Ltd., and ZEISS
 Always in Stock.

WHITEAWAY, LAIDLAW & CO.

PITH HATS
WHITEAWAY, LAIDLAW & CO.'S



PIGSTICKER



SOLA HAT
 OUR CELEBRATED PITH HATS
 Shape like skotch. Very best materials used.
 Price \$3.50 each

THE IMPROVED CLUB HAT
 Similar to the Pigsticker but has crown ventilator.
 Price \$4.50 each

PLANTERS HATS
 Covered Khaki Drill with leather bound brim.
 Price \$3.25 each

New Braces
 The "Mikado" brace of strong web with elastic cable ends. A very strong brace.
 Prices 95 cts. & \$1.35 per pair
 Guyot's French Braces.
 Prices \$1.00, 1.15 & 1.30 per pair
 The Cheap CASH Drapery Store.



Alpine Shape Hats
 Similar to skotch.
 Price \$6.25 each.
 Pedal Straw Alpine Hats, very smart. Price \$6.75 each.
 Soft Felt Hats, narrow brims. Price \$4.25 each.
 Soft Felt Hats, wide brims. Price \$5.00 each.



STOCKINGS,
 with turn over tops.
 Good value in leather mixtures or grey.
 Price \$1.75 per pair.

FOR FOOTBALL, ETC.
 Plain navy blue stockings. Strong Foot Wear.
 Price \$1.85 per pair.

Whiteaway, Laidlaw & Co.

The Straits Chinese Magazine: A Quarterly Journal of Oriental and Occidental Culture, Vol. 8 (March, 1904)
 Singapore: Koh Yew Hean Press

This ad features hats and other menswear accessories. The pith hat, also known as the 'foreign service helmet', was an essential part of the colonial outfit. It was first developed around the mid-19th century as military headgear for use in the tropics. Made of pith (a plant tissue) covered in white cloth, it was designed to keep the sun out of its wearer's eyes.


Interestingly, this ad appeared in a magazine published exclusively for Peranakan men, who were early adopters of Western clothing.





Thank you

for visiting the exhibition

Checkout www.nlb.gov.sg/exhibitions/ for more information on our programmes, workshops and guided tours.

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