

D E D I C A T I O N

The concise articles contained herein are dedicated especially to Senhor Jose Blanco, Administrador, Fundacao Calouste Gulbenkian, and the people of Portugal. It is my sincere hope that those who have the opportunity to read this booklet may have some idea of the 'Jenti Cristang' community of Malacca, its language, culture, customs and traditions, inherited to a certain extent from the illustrious sons of Portugal who lived in Malacca from 1511-1641.

This booklet is compiled also as a token of appreciation to the Fundacao Calouste Gulbenkian, whose benevolence permitted Mr. Michael Young, the Regedor of the Portuguese Settlement, Malacca, and myself, the rare opportunity of this trip to Portugal - the land of our forefathers.

Mutu Grande Merce.

Com Saudade,  
  
Patrick de Silva,  
G, Eredia Road,  
Portuguese Settlement,  
Malacca,  
West Malaysia.  
May, 1981.

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## M A L A Y S I A

Malaysia was formed in 1963 by the merger of four states, Malaya, Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak. Malaya was already an independent country having gained independence from the British on 31st August, 1957, while the states of Singapore, and the Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak were British colonies desiring independence.

The formation of Malaysia accelerated the independence of Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak, giving birth to a new country - Malaysia. The state of Singapore lies at the tip of Malaya, while Sabah and Sarawak are separated from Malaya by three hundred miles of the South China Sea. The Borneo states are known as East Malaysia, while Peninsular Malaya is known as West Malaysia. Singapore broke away from Malaysia on 9th August, 1965, and became an independent sovereign state.

These territories cover an area of approximately 128,000 square miles: Malaya covers 50,694 square miles, Sabah 29,388 square miles and Sarawak has an area of 48,250 square miles. The population is approximately twelve million. Malaya is the most populous with a population of about ten million, Sabah has 656,000 and Sarawak has a population of 975,000. The population comprises various racial groups namely, Malays, Chinese, Indians, Dayaks, Kadazans and others. The population of Peninsular Malaysia is made up chiefly of Malays, Chinese, Indians. Apart from these there are minority groups such as the Sikhs, Ceylonese and Eurasians. The population of Sabah is made up chiefly of Chinese, Ibans, Dayaks, and Eurasians; while Sarawak's population is made up of Ibans, Dayaks, Chinese, and Eurasians. The Malays account for about fifty percent of the total population of Malaysia.

Malaysia is basically an agricultural country, producing primary products for export to the industrialised countries. Its main produces are rubber, tin, palm oil, timber, spices and of late, petroleum. The bulk of the of the country's revenue is derived from the export of these commodities.

Malaysia practices parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarch as head of state instead of a president. Elections are held every five years and all adults of twenty-one years are eligible to vote. The Monarch is elected from the rulers of those states that have Sultans, and serves for a five year term. There are thirteen states: Johore, Kedah, Kelantan, Malacca, Negri Sembilan, Pahang, Penang, Perak, Perlis, Selangor, Trengganu, Sabah and Sarawak. Excepting the states of Malacca, Penang, Sabah and Sarawak, all the other states have sultans. The functions of head of state for those without a sultan are performed by Governors appointed by the Constitutional Monarch who is known as 'The Duli Yang Maha Mulia Seri Paduka Baginda Yang Di Pertuan Agong.

Islam is the State Religion. Freedom of worship for other faiths is enshrined in the Constitution. The Malays are Islam to a man, while the non-Malays are generally non-Muslims.

## M A L A C C A

Malacca covers an area of approximately 640 square miles and is the third smallest state after Perlis and Penang. It is situated on the south-west coast of Peninsular Malaysia along the Straits of Malacca. More popularly known as the 'Sleepy Hollow' Malacca can take pride in being the most historical state in Malaysia, possessing monuments of past colonisations and rich in culture and traditions. It has been the melting pot of various cultures and traditions and living testimony remains to the present day.

Here in Malacca we find the decedents of the Chinese princess Hang Li Po and her hand-maidens who were given to Sultan Mansor Shah as a gift from the Emperor of China. They are known as the 'Babas' or 'Peranakan', manifesting Chinese features and practising Chinese customs and traditions but unable to speak Chinese. They speak Malay instead and their food is cooked in the Malay fashion. The traditional area of the Babas is Heeren Street better known as Kampong Belanda (Dutch village). Two of the most prominent sons of the Babas are Tun Tan Siew Sin who served as the Malaysian Minister of Finance for almost twenty years and the late Tun Leong Yew Koh who was the first governor of Malacca.

Another good example is that of the Malacca Chetty Community found mainly at Gajah Berang in Malacca. They are Indian in appearance, practice Indian customs and traditions, Hindu by religion, but adopted the Malay language as their 'lingua franca'.

Apart from the aforesaid ethnic groups, various other groups evolved in the rich and colourful history of Malacca. Among them are the Portuguese-Eurasians, Dutch-Eurasians and the Anglo-Eurasians.

The Dutch Eurasians of Malacca account for very small group with Dutch surnames and in many instances have fairer complexion than the Portuguese-Eurasians. However, it is surprising that although Dutch colonisation came much later than the Portuguese, most of the Dutch Eurasians in Malacca belong to the Roman Catholic Church and to a greater extent adopted 'Papia Cristang' as their own language. It clearly portrays the steadfastness in faith and language of the Portuguese Eurasians of Malacca.

The Anglo-Eurasians are the product of intermarriages between the British and the locals. Many of these marriages were between British men and Eurasian women (notably Portuguese and Dutch Eurasians). This group is very British in outlook and tries to imitate the British in their way of life. The majority speak English while some speak Cristang. There is also a tendency for this group to look down upon the Portuguese Eurasians, commonly perhaps because of their pigmentation or social status. The Portuguese Eurasians in turn despise them and refer to them as the 'upper tens'.

EVOLUTION OF THE MALACCA PORTUGUESE  
COMMUNITY  
( JENTI CRISTANG )

The evolution of the Portuguese-Eurasians would be incomplete without retracing our steps to the Portuguese era. It was in the month of September, 1509, when Diogo Lopez de Sequeira, the Portuguese Admiral arrived at Malacca. His was the first European fleet whose keels cleaved Malacca waters.

Having obtained permission to land, he sent ashore Captain Jeronimo Texeira and a large party with presents and a letter from King Dom Manuel for Sultan Mahmud Shah. The vast crowd that welcomed them was awed by their appearance thinking them to be 'white bengalis'. Unknown to Sequeira and his men, treachery awaited them. He was invited to a banquet, but was advised by a Javanese girl of the Sultan's plot to sieze him and his party. Subsequently, he sent Captain Texeira and thirty men ashore. They were set upon by the Malays whereby many perished and nineteen were taken prisoners. Sequeira and the remaining crew, however, escaped from Malacca after a brief skirmish with the Malays.

This dastardly act finally brought the great Alfonso de Albuquerque to Malacca two years later, with one thousand four hundred men comprised of white Portuguese and natives. He subdued Malacca on the eight of August, 1511. Malacca remained in the hands of the Portuguese until 1641.

During the one hundred and thirty years of Portuguese colonisation in Malacca there evolved a new race of people called 'Cristang' which actually signifies Christian, the religion of this new race up to the present time.

Alfonso de Albuquerque left Malacca with one hundred men leaving the rest behind. As a natural consequence, these lonely sailors married the local maidens, most of whom were Malays and Javanese. The off-springs of these first marriages gave birth to the new Cristang race (Portuguese-Eurasians). This new generation in turn intermarried within as well as outside the community, thus further increasing the population. Moreover, it was the policy of the Portuguese to encourage fraternization with the local population with the hope of establishing loyal local subjects. In fact by the year 1561 most of the wives of the Portuguese were mestizos. Moreover, more than eight thousand Portuguese maidens were sent to Goa and the East to marry local men, but the number that arrived at Malacca cannot be ascertained. These courageous young girls were known as 'Orphans of the Queen'. Given the two way intercourse, the Cristang population could have numbered several thousands by the year 1561, fifty years after the arrival of the Portuguese.

It must also be borne in mind that those marrying Portuguese were converted to Christianity and given Portuguese names. Moreover, whomsoever was converted was assimilated into the Portuguese mainstream. The Cristang community therefore did not evolve chiefly through intermarriage between the Portuguese and the locals but also between the locals themselves who embraced Christianity.



So by the second generation the local Portuguese population began to look more pigmented. By the time the Dutch captured Malacca it could be assumed that the Portuguese-Eurasians resembled more native than white. This perhaps accounts for the brown pigmentation which is characteristic of the Christang of today, so much so that they are often mistaken for Malays and at times for Indians.

The Portuguese and their families were predominantly found in four main areas namely: Tranqueira, Ilir, Bunga Raya and Kubu. Tranqueira used to be the commercial centre while at Ilir lived the farmers and fishermen. The residents of Ilir or Bandar Hilir, as it is known today, were still mainly fishermen until as recent as thirty years ago.

Tranqueira and Bunga Raya have suffered a severe loss of the Portuguese-Eurasian population due to migration to other states (notably Singapore and Kuala Lumpur) or through removal to other areas, so much so that Bunga Raya does not have a single Portuguese-Eurasian family today, while only one family remains at Kubu and Tranqueira has less than ten families. The two main areas with significant numbers of Portuguese-Eurasians settlers are along the Bandar Hilir coast and the Portuguese Settlement where more one thousand live.

## THE PORTUGUESE SETTLEMENT

The concept of setting up a Portuguese Settlement in Malacca was first mooted by a French Missionary, Reverend Father Jules Pierre Francois, in response to appeals by the Portuguese-Eurasians community of Praya Lane and other areas where the land was being eroded by the sea and houses collapsing. As the residents in these areas were traditionally fishermen, they were poor and could not afford to build their own houses. Father Francois took the initiative of meeting the British Resident Commissioner of Malacca, Mr. Reginald Crichton. Having been made aware of the people's plight, Mr. Crichton was moved to say "No doubt that this community is going downhill. Something must be done to help them and put them in a place where they can be safeguarded for future generations".

Mr. Crichton's words were translated into deeds when the British Government acquired twenty-five plots of land totalling 28 acres from Malay owners for the sum of M\$30,000.00 in 1926. The acquired land was swampy and the Public Works Department was entrusted with the task of draining and filling up the area. The name Portuguese Eurasian Settlement was originally shown in the survey plan pertaining to the acquired area. However, it was later called Portuguese Settlement, or better known as

Padre sa Chang 'The priest's land' to the Portuguese-Eurasians.

This was due to a misconception of the community thinking that the land belonged to the priest. (In fact the true status would not have surfaced had not the land been investigated at a much later date to ascertain ownership)

The twenty-five lots acquired were amalgamated into one main lot with the title number 248 given. The condition of the land was freehold which was similar to the ones before that. By 1935 the land had been prepared and ready for the first settlers to move in. There was an initial reluctance to shift to the newly-created Portuguese Settlement. However, through the friendly persuasion of Father Alvaro Coroado, a Portuguese priest, the first few families moved in. The pioneer was Mr. Joseph Lowe, followed closely by Me. Peter Pereira and Jorge Alcantra. The first houses were situated along Texeira Road and were built at their owners' expense. Similarly, a few more families moved in later building their own houses.

After this initial encouraging response there seemed to be lull and the hope of attracting more settlers gred dim. The main reason being the lack of finance of those willing to settle at the Portuguese Settlement, for it must be remembered that those affected were mainly fishermen. Here again the benevolence of the British Government was evident. To overcome the problem the government initially built ten houses as a pilot project. These houses were situated along Texeira Road and were let out at nominal rents.



This incentive proved very appealing and they were soon occupied. Having achieved the objectives the Government built more such houses until finally there were 68.

The houses are spread out in neat rows, each with its little compound. Narrow streets divide these rows of houses. As the people are mainly of Portuguese descent it was found appropriate to name most of the streets with honoured Portuguese names.

Approaching the Settlement from Ujong Pasir we are greeted by the road sign D'Albuquerque Road - the main street of the Portuguese Settlement. It is named after the great Alfonso de Albuquerque who laid the foundations of the Portuguese eastern empire.

Sequeira Road enshrines the memory of Diogo Lopez de Sequeira, the Portuguese Admiral commanding the first European fleet in Malayan waters. Another road bears the name of Texeira. It honours Captain Jeronimo Texeira, the officer sent ashore by Sequeira to deliver a letter and presents from the King of Portugal to the Malacca Sultan. Arango Road honours Ruy de Arango who was taken prisoner in Malacca when the Sultan attacked Sequeira's fleet. Eredia Road esteems a famous Portuguese-Eurasian writer: Manuel Godinho de Eredia who wrote the history of Malacca which was published in 1615. Crichton Road honours Mr. Reginald Crichton, the British Resident Commissioner of Malacca responsible for the creation of the Portuguese Settlement. Day Road is also named after a British Resident Commissioner.

The original houses were wooden with attap roofs and earthen floors. They were small consisting of a narrow verandah, a sitting room, one bedroom, a kitchen and a tiny bathroom. Toilets were originally shared by several houses until much later, when each house was provided with the facility. They were of the bucket type and have been replaced by water closets very recently as a result of a new by-law of the Malacca Municipality. There was no running water. Water was supplied by stand pipes available at every street. Electric supply was non-available.

The above poor conditions prevailed until the early fifties. Improvements were made during the tenure of the then Regedor the late Mr. Paul de Silva, who was the Headman from 1953 until 1973, and the then Secretary Mr. G.B. Lazaroo. Through their efforts the attap roofs were replaced by zinc and the earthen floors cemented on a self-help basis with the Government providing the necessary materials while the tenants did the labour. The main streets were provided with street lights. With the nearness of electricity the people began to avail themselves of the facility. Similarly, water supply crept into the houses. A community hall was constructed on a self-help basis supported by a Government grant. The Telecoms Department installed a telephone booth and the Portuguese Settlement emerged into a new era.



The Portuguese Settlement may be divided into two sections: the old and the new. The old area is where the first residents built their houses and where the first houses built by the Government were situated. This area accounted for most of the houses and population until about 1970. The original houses remain in the same state and size except where lean-tos have been added. The new sector which was quite vacant until recently contains more houses now. With the exception of the original Government-built houses, most of those built by the tenants are comfortable and modern. The new area was vacant owing to the fact that most of those Portuguese-Eurasians residing away from the Settlement were ashamed to be identified with it and shied away. Many of them were finally forced by circumstances to move into the Settlement because of the high cost of land elsewhere. Moreover, the Portuguese Settlement is an ideal area for the retired seeking peace, quiet and the security of being among their own kind.

There is a marked difference between the old and the new areas which may be summarised as follows:

- a) Most of the houses are larger , comfortable and modern.
- b) There are more automobiles in the new sector.
- c) The residents are better-off economically than those in the old area. Most of those in white-collar jobs are to be found in this area.
- d) The surroundings are relatively more peaceful and quiet.
- e) The houses are comfortable, while those in the old area are occupied by two or more families, lacking facilities for relaxation and privacy. These conditions could be attributed to the following factors:
  - i) Most of those in the old area are either employed as manual workers, factory hands or fishermen. Their incomes are usually low.
  - ii) Single breadwinners having to support large families.
  - iii) Insufficient academic achievement resulting in securing low paying jobs.
  - iv) The tendency for children to remain with parents even after marriage.
  - v) Insufficient income to secure a house away from the Portuguese Settlement.
  - vi) The tendency for job seekers not willing to work outside Malacca especially those likely to secure low-paying employment. Those who venture away often do not return to their jobs once they come home for Christmas. This could be attributed to the lack of exposure to the outside world, creating a sense of insecurity when away from their own environment.



History of The Portuguese Settlement Land

- 1 9 2 6      Acquisition of 25 plots of land totalling twenty-eight acres from Malay owners for the creation of a Portuguese-Eurasian Settlement.
- 1 9 3 1      Amalgamation of the lots into a single lot No. 248 with freehold title.
- 1 9 3 5      The first families moved into the newly created Settlement.
- 1 9 4 9      In response to a request for a school by the residents of the Portuguese Settlement, the Government subdivided the parent land, giving approximately two acres to the Cannosian Convent. With this alienation the original lot 248 was rescinded and replaced with two lot numbers: Lot No. 287 was given to the Convent land on a 99 year lease, while the remaining Portuguese Settlement land was given a new number No. 288 with freehold status. However, when the then District Officer realised the anomaly of the titles he cancelled the freehold status of the Portuguese Settlement land and reverted it to Crown Land. Subsequently, the tenants were issued with Temporary Occupation Licences for which a nominal fee of M\$1.00 was levied.
- 1 9 5 3      The Federal Government built the Customs Quarters on part of the Portuguese Settlement land measuring three quarters of an acre thus, reducing the area of the land further.
- 1 9 6 2      A further alienation of land was made whereby approximately an acre was given to the LaSallian Brothers on a 99 years lease with a lot No. 422. The alienation was made to enable the Brothers to build a school. However, the land remains idle up to the present day.
- 1 9 6 4      Yet another sub-division took place. This time it was alienated to the Fisheries Department for the construction of crew quarters. The area involved measures 14,424 square feet. It was a State grant with title number SG. 388.

The twenty eight acres which was purchased for the Portuguese-Eurasians so that they and their culture might be preserved for future generations had in the span of fifty years been alienated and sub-divided. However, the unkindest cut of all was the reversion to Crown Land which remained so until the Government finally decided to grant 99 year leases to all those who applied. More than sixty percent of people have taken advantage of this offer. The rest did not apply most probably due to confusion in certain quarters and also because many were disappointed with the offer, expecting a more permanent tenure.

Apart from education, land and housing remain two of the most pressing problems. A survey conducted at the end of 1979 showed a population of 1,013 people embracing one hundred and sixty seven families. Since there are only 110 houses in the Portuguese Settlement it is apparent that more than sixty percent of the houses are occupied by at least two families. There are several houses which are occupied by three or even four families. As most of these houses are small there is acute congestion. Owing to the various parcellings of land there remains no more land whereby the residents could build any houses. Considering the low income level of the people, the possibility of owning even a small house away from the Settlement is beyond the reach of the majority, if not impossible. Appeals were directed to the State as well as the Federal Governments for the return of the Custom's land but to no avail. The LeSallian Brothers too have not been very cooperative in returning the land which continues to remain idle. The problem of lack of accommodation shall remain as long as these lands are not returned for the people to build houses.

As the saying goes 'It never rains, but pours'. That is what is happening to the fortunes of the Portuguese Settlement. The sea which provides subsistence to the fishermen and an additional income to those in the lower income group, is to be reclaimed. It will result in a great loss of income for the fishermen and a significant loss those for those in the lower income bracket. This will have serious repercussion for many families and will contribute to a further internal social problems for the Portuguese Settlement.

The origins of the economic plight of the community may be sought in the period of the Dutch occupation. To a lesser extent other circumstances have also made their contribution.

The Dutch occupation saw the persecution of the Catholics, the majority of whom were Portuguese-Eurasians. The intensity of it drove many into the jungles and hinterland. Education was disrupted, and many were made slaves and taken to Indonesia and other places. The denial of religious liberty, coupled with the deprivation of employment especially, contributed to the economic



deterioration of the Portuguese-Eurasians, the effects of which remain to the present day.

If we take into consideration a span of one hundred and fifty years of such deprivation, it is a miracle that the community has been able to survive without losing its language, religion and traditions. It also may account for the absence of Cristang literature and records of that period; and for the large numbers that took to fishing for a livelihood, a tradition visible to the present day. Apart from religious persecution and job deprivation, the Dutch forbade the Portuguese-Eurasians land ownership. This factor accounts for the Portuguese-Eurasians being landless up to now.

On the other hand, the British were more liberal towards the Portuguese-Eurasians and Eurasians in general. It was they who gave the Eurasians more job opportunities than their numbers merited. Although the presence of Portuguese-Eurasians in the civil service became evident for the majority fishing remained their basic occupation. It is, however, regrettable to mention that those who were able to help were not very helpful in finding employment for the less fortunate ones. In time a new class of Eurasians was created - the white collar class who began to imitate their English masters by speaking more English than Papia Cristang.

The Church and Christian schools were not much help either. Many were disappointed with the religious because most of those belonging to church organisations were the white collar class. Many a time priests were accused of favouring the rich and not caring for the poor. It must be said with due fairness that assistance in various little forms was given to the needy but this benefitted few really.

Most of the Portuguese-Eurasian children were poorly dressed, and often went to school without shoes, pocket-money and even books. Many parents were in arrears of school fees also. The Christian schools aggravated the plight of these students by sending them home with the warning that they were not to return unless they brought along the fees. Many went and never returned. Most of these became fishermen at the tender age of twelve or thirteen years. This viciousness persisted until quite recently.

[illegible]

## R E L I G I O N

The population of Malacca was reduced from twenty thousand to three thousand when the Dutch captured it from the Portuguese in 1641. Of these approximately one thousand six hundred were of Portuguese stock the so-called 'Black Christians'.

The Catholics were persecuted from the outset of the Dutch occupation. Many of the Portuguese-Eurasians who could afford it left Malacca for Siam, Laos, Cochin, Hainan and Cambodia; only the poor remained behind. Apart from being persecuted they were expected to man the Dutch garrisons. Marriage between the Dutch and the Portuguese-Eurasians were frequent. An Italian visitor to Malacca in 1695 noted that some of the Dutch Malaccans who had taken Portuguese-Eurasian wives and mistresses had themselves become converted by them to Catholicism. This portrays vividly the steadfastness of the Portuguese-Eurasians who continue to remain true to the Roman Catholic Faith up to the present time.

The Portuguese-Eurasians were responsible for the construction of Saint Peter's Church in 1710. It is the oldest existing Catholic Church in Malaysia. Its parishioners were solely Portuguese-Eurasians until quite recently, a fact which is mainly due to conversions of non-Catholics, notably Chinese and Indians. The one hundred and thirty years of Catholic upbringing instilled a deep attachment to certain devotions, especially the devotion to the Holy Rosary introduced by the Dominicans and the devotion to the Holy Passion introduced by the Augustinians.

The devotion to the Holy Rosary is very much alive today. A group recitation of the rosary or 'Block Rosary' is still in rotation in the Portuguese Settlement where a tridium is held in each home. This cycle takes exactly one year to complete in the Settlement itself.

The Confraternity of the Holy Rosary, 'The Irmang de Greza' was founded by the Dominican Fathers and still exist today. It is the oldest church organisation in this part of the world. The preservation of the faith during the Dutch persecution is attributed to this organisation. The Irmang de Greza have been responsible for organising the Holy Week ceremonies since time immemorial: the Palm Sunday procession whereby the statue of the 'Sinyur Murto' (Dead Lord) is taken in procession. Members of the Irmang de Greza have traditionally been fishermen and this is evident to the present day. Very often in the past conflicts have arisen between the Irmang de Greza and the church wardens, who were normally people held in good social standing. The conflict arose mainly through the supposed interference in the traditional privileges of the Irmang de Greza.

<sup>1</sup> Hancock I. F. 'Malacca Creole Portuguese.  
A brief transformational outline "



Apart from the Holy Week privileges, the Irmang de Greza have always been favoured with leading the processions of other important feast days.

The Catholic religion has always remained strong in Malacca, particularly among the Portuguese-Eurasians. Marriages contracted outside the church are rare. Mixed marriages are often discouraged. Cases of Portuguese-Eurasians embracing other faiths were, and are still extremely rare. Those that do are often ridiculed and shunned.

Religion is the decisive factor which could either continue to hold the Portuguese-Eurasians together or disintegrate them altogether and make them disappear into the Malaysian mainstream. God willing let us hope and pray that the Portuguese-Eurasians persevere in the footsteps of their forefathers and continue to to remain steadfast in their religion.

## L A N G U A G E

The survivors of the Portuguese conquistadores who captured Malacca in 1511 have over the years evolved a language of their own called 'Papia Cristang', with elements of sixteenth century Portuguese, Malay, English, Dutch as well as other languages. The Malay and English languages exert the strongest influence on the language today.

Many Portuguese-Eurasians believe that Papia Cristang is a debased language, a broken form of standard Portuguese. This in fact is very far from the truth. Papia Cristang, along with other Portuguese derived creole languages, such as, for example those of Cabo Verde and Guinea Bissau, may have descended from a contact variety of 15th century Portuguese. This simplified Portuguese was used by seamen and settlers on the West African coast. With Portuguese maritime expansion this language was carried to both hemispheres. In some cases where European Portuguese were in the minority, it became the community language through large scale intermarriages with the local population

In time, the Portuguese in various parts of the world developed its own characteristics according to the influence of other languages in its environment and isolation. Notwithstanding, the Creole Portuguese languages of the East and the West bear strong resemblances. Thus Papia Cristang may be said to be European, African and Asian in origin.

Papia Cristang is widely spoken in daily communication among the members of the community, especially at the Portuguese Settlement. It is also spoken by the older Portuguese-Eurasians residing outside Malacca, particularly in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. However, owing to the dispersion of the community in these states there is a lack of communication and thus the language will probably disappear with the older generation. The general tendency among the younger generation to disregard the language as a medium of communication further contributes to its deterioration. The decline may already be evident in the way the pronunciation of certain words is changing for example: porta is now pronounced as potra, carangeiso as cangreso and dormi as dromi.

Although Papia Cristang has a limited vocabulary, we are proud of the fact that it has helped to enrich our own National Language by more than four hundred words. Besides that it also gives us a distinct identity, even though we are classified under the wider term 'Eurasians' in this country (Malaysia). This term embraces everyone of European-Asian descent be it Dutch, English or Burmese. These Eurasians do not have a distinct identity and have made English their 'lingua franca', whereas the Portuguese-Eurasians have maintained their identity up to the present day by speaking Cristang.

<sup>1</sup> Hancock, I. F.

"Malacca Creole Portuguese: Asian, African or European?".  
Anthropological Linguistics Vol 17, No 5 1975



We are proud to have been the first Eurasians or Portuguese-Eurasians in this country - a new race unique in many aspects. We have remained steadfast in retaining our traditions and language while others have lost theirs. We must take pride in this precious heritage. We must make an effort to impart it to our children and future generations, lest we suffer the fate of the Dutch language in Malacca. The writing is on the wall. Many Cristang words spoken even a generation ago are no more remembered, but substituted by Malay or English words instead.

The general tendency of the younger generation in giving wider use to English at home as well as outside has contributed further towards its decline, so much so that many are either unable to speak at all or speak Cristang rather poorly.

A concerted effort must be made to document all the existing vocabulary as well as that which has already been lost. All idioms, literature if any and stories must be recorded while there are old people still living who are familiar with the language heritage. The community's traditions must be documented before they die off. A Papia Cristang dictionary should be produced now for the benefit of the present and future generations. Should the language and other heritage be lost and forgotten, we shall bear the guilt, and no amount of remorse will restore them.

Appended are examples of Papia Cristang words absorbed into the Malay Language, the National Language of Malaysia:

Papia Cristang

Malay

Meza	Meja	Table
Garfu	Garpu	Fork
Banco	Bangku	Bench
Jendela	Jendela	Window
Baranda	Berandah	Verandah
Sapatu	Sepatu	Shoe
Mantega	Mentega	Butter

Papia Cristang

Malay

Roda	Roda	Wheel
'Scola	Sekolah	School
Greza	Greja	Church

Examples of Malay, Dutch and English words absorbed into the Papia Cristang Language:

Malay

Dutch

English.

Pun	(also)	Kakus	(lavatory)	Pencil
Sama	(same, equal)	Kalkun	(turkey)	Ruler
Bagi	(share, divide)	Kookis	(cakes)	Brown
Kate	(short, stunted)	Kelda	(monument)	Bear



## C U L T U R E

The Portuguese-Eurasian is a minority group, one of several which forms the multi-racial plural society which is truly Malaysian. Their roots extend far back into early Malaysian history. Their impact on present day Malay speech, songs and dances is undeniably considerable.

During the one hundred and thirty years of Portuguese rule, the Portuguese-Eurasian community inherited a precious jewel, a heritage beyond monetary value - the local Cristang culture. This was brought about through the assimilation of the Portuguese with the indigenous people. The 'Branyo' is apparently of Cristang origin and has inexplicable similarities with the Malay ronggeng. Keroncong originated from the Cristangs living in Java, Indonesia, who were once from Malacca. The song 'Jinglee Nona' has always been associated with the Portuguese-Eurasians of Malacca, and the 'Mata Cantiga' is similar to the Malay pantuns.

The Branyo and the Mata Cantiga are a traditional part of weddings, parties and other celebrations. Mata Cantiga is the singing of rhyming verses by a duo, usually a man and a woman. It is sung in turns, one verse at a time. Each verse sung must be responded by a counter verse by the opponent. The response must come within seconds of each other. A well-matched pair is able to go on for hours, each trying to 'kill' his opponent's verse. It ends when there is no more response or counter verse. Although Mata Cantiga is very popular at most gatherings of the Portuguese-Eurasians, it appears to be on the wane. It is usually the older people who are able to participate in it. It is feared that unless this trend is arrested in time, the community will suffer a further loss of its already diminishing traditions.

One method of achieving this is to organise competitions and attractive prizes offered as an incentive for the younger generation to participate. The young in particular must be made aware of the imminent loss faced by the community, so that a sense of awareness might be aroused in them.

### MATA CANTIGA

Nona minha Nona

Nona de minha corasang

Si Nona rosto benfeta

Eo ja cai na afesang

} This verse is sung by a man

Baba minha Baba

Baba de minha corasang

Di eo caza com Baba

Dessa caza outro nasang

} Counter verse sung by a woman

## I N T R U D U

INTRUDU, which is also a Portuguese heritage is celebrated in Malacca on the Sunday preceding Ash Wednesday. There is however, one marked difference - namely the day. In Portugal the Sunday preceding Ash Wednesday is known as 'Domingo Gordo' while Intrudu is celebrated on Tuesday. How this came about cannot be ascertained.

The Malacca Portuguese-Eurasians used to celebrate Intrudu by going about in fancy attires and splashing water at whoever they meet. Even those at home were not spared the drenching. The merry-makers would visit those at home and drench the occupants as soon as the door opened. After this the merry-makers would offer a drink. (spirits usually) In the faternoon men dressed as ladies and ladies dressed as men would go house to house selling cakes. These cakes were usually sold at a higher price than usual and the people did not mind because of Intrudu.

The highlight of the celebration was in the evening when the 'Branyo Rudia' (Moving Branyo) was held. This branyo did not remain stationary, but moved from one village to another. All the participants would use fancy dress. A musical group headed the branyo which would gather momentum as it moved along the route from one village to another. There would be dancing, singing and drinking all along the route. At times this branyo would be invited to a home where the 'Dono de Casa' entertained with food and drink. It was considered prestigious to be able to entertain such a branyo, as a consequence the 'Dono de Casa' gained much respect.

Alas! this tradition has been lost too during the last forty years, which is further example of cultural demise. An effort must be made to revive this tradition while there is still a little significance left, before it is completely forgotten.

Intrudu signifies the last day merriment before the commencement of Lent beginning on Ash Wednesday, and ending at Pasco (easter). The Cristang community of Malacca adheres to this period of penance, prayer and self-mortification as far as possible.



## H O L Y   W E E K   T R A D I T I O N S

The Augustinian Missionaries instilled in the Portuguese-Eurasian community in Malacca the devotion to the Holy Passion of Christ. For this reason the Palm Sunday and Good Friday processions held annually at Saint Peter's Church resemble those held in Malacca during the Portuguese era.

PALM SUNDAY or 'DOMINGO DE RAMO' is celebrated with a High Mass during which palms are distributed to the congregation as a sign of Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. All churches are full, while Saint Peter's Church enjoys the full attendance of its Portuguese-Eurasian parishioners. In the evening the Palm Sunday procession begins by the re-enacting of part of the Passion of Christ: the meeting with his Blessed Mother and the singing of the ancient hymn of sorrow by Veronica stirs the emotion. At Saint Peter's Church a life-size statue of Christ bearing a large wooden cross is carried in procession. The statue is dressed in a purple robe and wears a crown of thorns.

The bearers of this statue come out of the church first, step by step led by the Irmang de Greza and members of other church organizations. After this, the general congregation follows. As soon as the statue appears, the congregation kneel and as the statue passes, they follow the procession. When the statue is about halfway around the church compound, the statue of our Blessed Mother dressed in purple is borne out of the church and moves in the opposite direction around the church compound so that they will meet midway. When the statues meet the procession pauses. At this stage Veronica steps on a stage and sings the sorrowful hymn. At the same time she unfurls a kerchief with the facial impression of Christ, re-enacting the scene when Veronica wiped the face of Jesus on His route to Calvary. There is a sudden stillness as the crowd strains its ears to hear Veronica. This scene is very solemn and most touching.

The statue of Christ then continues the procession followed by his Mother back into the church. These statues are placed at the foot of the altar thus marking the end of the ceremony. However, because of the people's great devotion hundreds line up the aisle to kiss the feet of the statues while at the same time taking scented pandanus leaves which have been placed earlier by devotees. Many believe these leaves are beneficial especially for those in poor health.

MAUNDY THURSDAY re-enacts the scene of the washing of the feet. In the past this was the privilege of the Irmang de Greza, twelve of whom were selected for the ceremony. After the washing of the feet it was customary for the priest to give some silver coins to each of them. However, the one drawn to be Judas got double the amount. After the ceremony Judas is knocked on the head by the

others as well as by the priest. There is also the tradition where the Irmang de Greza keep night vigil and see to it that incense is burned throughout the night.

On the morning of Good Friday the Irmang de Greza wash the statue of the Sinyur Murtu with wine. The church doors are shut during this ceremony and no one is allowed inside the church. After the washing the wine is collected and distributed. Both Catholics and non-Catholics believe that this wine has healing powers. While the washing ceremony is in progress hundreds of people wait for the hour to kiss the Sinyur Murtu. This usually begins at ten in the morning, and the devotees have to queue up for their turn to kiss the statue. Candles of various sizes are brought by devotees and those fulfilling vows usually bring along candles of their own height (called *candia altura*) to be lighted in the parlour of the Dead Lord. There is usually a rush and church wardens and volunteers have to be mustered to control the crowd and at the same time light devotees' candles. Normally about a dozen persons are permitted to enter the chamber at a time and they are usually given about two or three minutes to pray and kiss the statue. This goes on unabated until the Station of the Cross begins in the evening at which time the doors to the chamber are closed.

The Good Friday liturgical ceremony commences at three o'clock in the afternoon and is very well attended. The traditional ceremonies are unique. They begin with the Way of the Cross at five o'clock followed by the traditional sermon on the Crucifixion of Christ. The main altar is screened by a black surtain and behind it stand the life-size statue of Christ crucified. By the foot of the cross are three young boys dressed in black, representing the three 'marias' of the Passion of Christ, clinging to the cross and expressing their grief and sorrow. They remain in that position throughout the sermon.

The drama is unveiled at the end of the sermon when the curtain is drawn back, suddenly revealing Christ's blood-stained figure sustained by the Passion. On beholding this the congregation automatically fall on their knees and start singing the hymn 'God of Mercy and Compassion'. This unveiling ceremony has a great effect on many repentant souls.

The figure of Christ is then taken down from the cross and placed on a bier for the procession around the church. At the head of the procession is the standard-bearer, followed by a cross-bearer with a white cloth hanging from his arms all stained with 'blood'.



The Irmang de Greza follow immediately in two rows dressed in their traditional costume, consisting of white cape reaching to their waist and over which a smaller black velvet cape. The leader of the Irmang de Greza holds a silver staff at the top of which is the emblem of the Confraternity. Then follow the various church organisations, after which the bier borne by the Irmang de Greza. Under the bier are the 'Tres Marias' singing the traditional sorrowful lamentations. This privilege belonged to a family by the name of Derrick from the Praya Lane community. The lamentations are sung in Latin at intervals for the duration of the procession. Incidentally, the same tune is also sung in Larantuka in Indonesia, where Good Friday is also celebrated in the same manner. This similarity is in part the result of the Portuguese-Eurasians who left Malacca when it fell to the Dutch in 1641.

The Portuguese-Eurasians, Saint Peter's Church and its parishioners should be deeply indebted to the Irmang de Greza who have been directly responsible in the preservation of a unique tradition which is truly Portuguese. The other contributing factor is the presence of a large number of Portuguese-Eurasians in Malacca who have traditionally belonged to the parish of Saint Peter. The Holy Week ceremonies in Malacca are owed largely to these people and to their forefathers.

F E S T A D E S A N J U A N G  
(Feast of Saint John)

Being a predominantly Catholic community, the cultural and traditional festivals of the Portuguese-Eurasians usually coincide with the feast of saints. A typical example is the Festa de San Juang or the Feast of Saint John the Baptist, which falls on the 23rd of June.

An unusual scene catches the eye of a visitor to the Portuguese Settlement during the Festa de San Juang. All the houses are lighted with candles at about six in the evening. The lighting of candles has a religious significance, reminding the people that Saint John came to preach about the 'Light of the World' - Jesus Christ.

It is the tradition of the Portuguese-Eurasians of Malacca to wear green clothes. Fishermen usually wear green pyjamas.

(It is of interest to record that the Portuguese-Eurasian fishermen normally wore pyjamas to church and other occasions until quite recently ).



## F E S T A D E S A N P E D R O

(Feast of Saint Peter)

The most popular and unique celebration of the Malacca Portuguese-Eurasian Community is the Festa de San Pedro - The Patron Saint of fishermen. It owes its origin to the Portuguese era in Malacca, and is an invaluable tradition inherited by the Portuguese-Eurasians. Its significance must have been very great indeed to have survived more than four centuries.

The Festa is celebrated on the 29th of June each year. It was previously held in the vicinity of the Assumption Church many years ago. It was a simple affair then, with the fishermen's boats lined up at the rear of the chapel to be blessed after the celebration of a special mass. Aside from the blessing there was also the Branyo. Previously, even this was on a modest scale, and very often the fishermen themselves had to make their own contribution for the Branyo. Past celebrations were known only to the local Portuguese-Eurasian population, and practically unheard of outside Malacca.

Festa de San Pedro is known throughout the country as well as Singapore these days. The present celebration has assumed a new magnitude since the late sixties. The Portuguese Settlement Committee is responsible for organising the celebration now in the Portuguese Settlement which, in fact, remains the only area where this tradition is being kept alive.

The Festa is usually celebrated for two or three days that is: either from the 27th to the 29th of June, or from the 28th to the 30th of June. Although the theme of the celebration is basically religious the social aspect is a new feature. The night's entertainment featuring talent time, comedy sketches, dances and other stage performances attracts thousands. The highlight of the night's entertainment is of course the cultural performance. Festa de San Pedro is so popular now that T.V Malaysia even records the event. Apart from the stage performances which takes place at night throughout the duration of the celebration, various other events are arranged for the day time. The central event is The Boat Decoration Competition which is held on the actual feast day, the 29th of June. Participation in this contest is keen because of the attractive prizes awarded to the winners. Moreover, each entry is given a subsidy of M\$10.00 for decoration. As a consequence the boats are elaborately decorated. The boats are blessed after the traditional Mass and a panel of non-residents judges the boats to decide the winners. Boat Racing is also very popular and cash awards made to the winners.

Apart from these, various other games and sports are organised to provide entertainment for the two or three day celebration. A Food and Fun Fair adds further attraction. The Food Fair is usually organised by the fishermen, and their families pay a small fee to cover lighting cost. As for the Fun Fair, it is at times run by the Committee itself or at times leased to others in order to raise funds for the celebration. The cost of running a successful Festa is M\$5,000.00 . The amount is realised from rents of stalls, sales of refreshments, sale of T-shirts, rosettes and badges, sale of raffles and contributions from friends and well-widhers.

The carnival spirit of the Festa de San Pedro attracts many visitors from far and wide to the Portuguese Settlement.



the groom-to-be. He was then brought in the girl's presence and would confirm that the 'cow' belonged to him and that he wanted it back. "No!" the Comadre would say, "you cannot have her unless you pay compensation". "Well" the boy would say, "what shall you have?" The Comadre would usually demand a bottle of brandy, which he must give before he was allowed to untie the girl. There would be much laughter, and the party would then be invited to the dinner known as 'Da Comi Noibo! (the bachelor's dinner).

On the wedding day - Tuesday, the bride would dress in a long white blouse called a cabaya and long silk skirt called the saia. She would wear beaded slippers. She was bedecked with jewelry and her plaited coiffure studded with semi-precious pins. Before the bride left the house those present were served cake and wine. The bride would kiss the hand of her parents and elders before she left for the church. This ceremony was known as 'Larga Noiba'. The bride would be accompanied to church by her father, the Comadre and the Mara Cronchi Feme (bridesmaid). Before the introduction of the automobile the mode of transport was the Gharry or horse carriage.

The bridegroom was dressed in a black suit with a white bow and wore a bowler or top hat. A ceremony similar to the 'Larga Noiba' called the 'Larga Noibo' took place prior to leaving for the church. The groom was escorted by his father, the Compadre and the 'Mara Cronchi Machu' (bestman). He had to be in church before the bride arrived. It would be an insult to arrive after the bride.

After the nuptial ceremony the couple would return home in the company of the bridesmaid and the bestman. When the vehicle was a short distance from the house it halted. The bride and the groom would alight and stand next to each other. The bridesmaid and the bestman would hurry to the house ; she to fetch the scented flowers and he the scented water called 'agu de stroi'. They would stand at the gate while the Cristang wedding march was being played. The groom would then take three steps forward and taking off his hat would salute his bride first and then the guests. The bridesmaid would then step forward and pin a cronchi (brooch) on the bride's cabaya signifying her virginity, a privilege which a widow does not enjoy on remarriage. She would then shake hands with the bride and groom and take her place next to the bestman. The married couple would then walk step by step towards the house. As soon as they started walking the bestman and the bridesmaid would simultaneously sprinkle the scented flowers and the fragrant water over the couple as well as the guests. This ceremony was called 'Recebe Noiba' or welcoming the bride.

On entering the house they would kiss the hands of their parents and elders after which they would receive congratulations from the guests. This was followed by a reception party where no toast was made. The toast was reserved for dinner time. After the reception the guests dispersed. Even the groom had to return home.



At four in the afternoon the bride dressed in her wedding garments sat on the centre chair which was placed during the 'Marra Strado' ceremony the previous evening. The Comadre sat on her right and the Mara Cronchi Feme sat on her left, awaiting the arrival of the guests for dinner. The groom and his entourage usually arrived at about five in the evening and dinner was immediately announced. The groom accompanied the bride to the table followed by the sponsors the bridesmaid and the bestman. By custom preference at the table was given to the parents and relatives of the groom. Otherwise it would be considered a lack of etiquette.

Drinks would be served before the dinner. In the course of the dinner numerous toasts would be proposed and honoured, commencing with the couple, their parents, relatives, the bridesmaid and bestman, the cooks and all helpers. It would be the duty of the Compadre to propose the opening toast to the bride and groom and to speak of their good qualities. The groom would honour the toast by thanking the sponsors. After all the required toasts were made, the guests would adjourn for the Branyo, drinks flowing freely until the early hours of the morning.

On the following morning the bride's mother would have to invite the groom's parents and relatives as well as the helpers to lunch and dinner. This is called 'Noiba Quarta Feira' (Wednesday bride). After lunch the guests would usually adjourn to card parties. Dinner would follow in the evening with the bride and groom waiting at table. This would be followed by the traditional Branyo. It was customary that the expenses for this occasion would be met by the groom. However, he usually paid a token sum only. This Branyo is called 'Branyo Quarta Feira'.

On the following Sunday the couple would attend Mass, after which they would pay their respects to their parents and personally thank all who assisted at their wedding. This tradition is known as 'Noiba Missa Greza'. If their parents were of sound finance, another dinner would follow ending with a Branyo. So concludes the ceremonies and felicitations of a traditional Portuguese-Eurasian wedding in Malacca.



## C H R I S T M A S

'Natal' or Christmas is by far the grandest celebration of the Malacca Portuguese-Eurasians especially in the Portuguese Settlement. No effort is spared for the event. The hustle and bustle of its preparation usually begins one month before the festival. A stranger walking through the Settlement would immediately notice the activities in almost every home. An aroma of fresh paint fills the air. Renovations and alterations seem to be the order of the day. Both young and old are fully occupied with painting, cleaning and tidying their house compounds and mending or erecting of new fences.

The nostalgic strains of carols booming from numerous record players fill the atmosphere with the Christmas spirit. Cakes and other delicacies are baked or prepared. New curtains, cushion covers and sheets are bought or stitched. Old furniture is replaced. New clothing and shoes are a must for the family. Housewives are kept very busy with the Christmas shopping and other household chores. Christmas trees are cut and decorated with fairy lights and glitters.

Everything must be spick and span and ready by the 24th of December, 'Bespa de Natal'. Housewives will however still be busy with the preparation of dishes for the night supper and for the next day.

Families welcome Christmas by attending the Midnight Mass or 'Missas de Gallo'. The Church seems somewhat like a big fashion show, with the ladies and men sporting the latest fashions. The night's service starts with a Nativity Play and carols until midnight when the Mass is celebrated. After the Mass greetings are briefly exchanged with friends before proceeding home. On arriving home it is a tradition for the children to greet their parents first by kissing their hands and saying 'Bong Natal'. The younger children must similarly wish the older ones after which the family supper is eaten.

On Christmas morning the family must pay its respects to the grandparents and other elders of the family. Christmas also brings greeting from friends of various races. Everyone keeps an open house during the Yuletide season. Visitors are served cakes, food and drinks while the children are given money.

Formerly, a 'Boboi' or swing was swung from a large tree during the Christmas season. The older ladies of the community would wake up early in the morning to sing the 'Boboi Nina' and carols while they swung along on the boboi.

D E A T H

Many in the Portuguese-Eurasian community believe that when a person is on the verge of death Saint Bartholomew will come and visit the dying to lead his soul to heaven. It is said that anyone who happens to stand in the doorway during his visit will be pushed aside. For this reason people are not allowed to stand in the doorway of a dying person's house. It is also the belief that the soul of the deceased makes a farewell visit to its family on the eighth day of death and touches his wife or one of his favourites. It is said that the atmosphere becomes chilly when the soul enters the house.

As soon as death occurs the corpse is washed and dressed in the best suit available. The feet are covered with stockings and tied together with a ribbon. If the deceased is a lady, she is dressed in a long white garment called 'mortala'. When a fisherman dies he is usually dressed in pyjamas, which is often his last wish. The corpse is then laid on a table in the sitting room and exposed for twenty-hours so that relatives and friends may pay their last respects.

Shortly after death occurs, the bereaved family sends a messenger to inform members of the community. It is customary especially in the Portuguese Settlement for people to keep night vigil. Prayers for the dead are offered every hour. Those paying respects are offered tea and biscuits or cakes during the day and coffee and cakes at night. Those keeping vigil are usually given 'papa galinha' (rice porridge with chicken). If the deceased is either a bachelor or spinster, cake and wine is served just before the cortege leaves the house.

It was and still is to a lesser extent, the practice for the cortege to be borne to church for the last rites before proceeding to the cemetery for burial. If the deceased is unmarried only bachelors are allowed to become pall-bearers. After the burial, brandy is served, especially to the pall-bearers, as a token of appreciation. Prayers for the dead are offered for eight days at the house of the deceased. On the eighth day of death the bereaved family visits the grave to light candles and pray.

The period of mourning for members of the immediate family is one year. Throughout this period the female members dress completely in black, while the male members wear black armband. Gold jewelry is discarded and the ladies refrain from using make up, parties will be avoided, marriage and engagement plans are put off until the period of mourning is over. Even Christmas will not be celebrated nor will greetings be extended to relatives and friends.



## C O N C L U S I O N

In the main the Portuguese-Eurasians can be identified by their language, religion, culture and traditions. Papia Cristang is the language of the Malacca Portuguese-Eurasians and is widely spoken in daily communication by the Jenti Cristang (Portuguese-Eurasians) of Praya Lane and the Portuguese Settlement Community. Religion on the other hand has always played a major role in the lives of the Portuguese-Eurasians, and is a contributing factor towards their solidarity. Cultural celebration is synonymous with religion, for example: the Festa de San Pedro and the Festa de San Juang celebrations. Tradition remains an integral aspect of the community. Apart from the Holy Week traditions inherited from the Portuguese, others were developed locally. A very good example is the engagement and wedding ceremony which is truly a local development. These factors distinguish the Portuguese-Eurasians from the other Eurasians in Malaysia.

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How long will these aspects continue to be the source of strength of the Portuguese-Eurasians is open to question. By the trend of events it will probably be able to withstand another generation. Marriage out of the community is another factor which will hasten the demise of the remaining heritage, and in the final analysis close the chapter on the Portuguese-Eurasians of Malacca.