

Contested Communities in Southeast Asia: The Law and the Singapore Eurasians

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Abstract

This paper describes about what makes the Singapore Eurasians a contested community and why has it been neglected by scholars? There are many ways to define the concept and application of the 'Eurasian' concept. The written Constitution and the EAS publications online and in hardcopy are considered the most official source for the Eurasians in Singapore. However, the cultural preferences have also revealed certain anachronisms such as "marital union" and 'Native Christians' or "Indo-Britons".

Keywords: Contested communities; Southeast Asia; Law; Singapore; Eurasians

Introduction

Singapore celebrated 50 years of its legal tradition in 2015. It is now planning to celebrate SG100 in the year 2115. While most of us will not be alive to make it to that celebration, there remains something to be written about one of the contested communities in Singapore. What makes the Singapore Eurasians a contested community and why has it been neglected by scholars? Firstly, publication houses, journals and presses tend to print works that can reap profits. Many so-called academic journals appear to adopt an intellectual approach and professional review process, yet they are mainly motivated by their bottom line and a desire to make money. This is why scholars who work on Eurasian identity, security and culture often do not find it easy to publish their work since there is a small market for those interested in Eurasian matters. Another reason why scholars tend not to be able to publish in this area is because many of the academic journals only publish scholars with famous names from prestigious Western universities. Many scholars who are able to publish in Top Tier journals also only achieve this with the help and network of their famous and highly published doctoral supervisors¹. Since the academic interest in Eurasian communities ranks low on the profit and money scale, it remains difficult if not impossible to publish with "so-called" international publishers. Another reason is that there is little funding for research on Eurasians because the number of Eurasians is comparatively miniscule. No money and no markets leave little room for the scholar of Eurasians to publish².

The first legally documented case of a Eurasian in Singapore was in the early 19th century. By World War I, there were approximately 5,000 Eurasians living and working in Singapore. This number would rise to over 35,000 in the 1950s but with the exodus to Australia and Canada, the numbers dwindled to around 15,000-18,000. This fact can

¹ This is of course not a generalization. Neither is it the case for all scholars. At the University of Hawaii at Manoa for example, none of the famous political scientists used their networks in publishing to assist their doctoral students get published. In fact, across the world, many political scientists refuse to write letters of recommendation for graduates simply because the students were not in the right circle of followers and supporters.

² Another avenue is to publish by paying the journal. In academic terms, this is not considered meritorious since if it were, it would be published free of charge. Also, there are unethical publishing companies that front as reputable conference organizers and journal publishers but in fact are scams to charge exorbitant fees to scholars. The scholars are not aware of the hidden costs and fees and hence think that their work is being published on merit only to discover that someone from somewhere suddenly demands payment. There are several high profile court cases where no agreement was reached but demands for payment were made. Such cases often end in the scamming publishers sued for legal costs and damage to scholarly reputation.

be corroborated with the work of scholars such as Myrna Braga-Blake and Christina De Souza. There are also resources in the Singapore National Archives and the Arkib Negara of Malaysia as well as the Oral History Departments in both countries.

The State commemorated fifty years of Singaporean achievements and contributions to national identity, national development and nation-building. This would include about 18,000 Eurasians. This article summarizes the ways in which the Eurasian Community as a whole has developed and how Eurasian personalities contributed in significant ways to the building of Singapore over the past five decades. This chapter is written in a semi-scholarly style very much like Myrna Blake's pamphlet *Kampong Eurasians in Singapore* [1] and Myrna Braga-Blake and Ann Ebert-Oehlers (eds.) *Eurasians of Singapore: Memories and Hopes* [2,3]³. Most other Eurasian books have been written as stories, poems, descriptions, photographs or fictional works. Some pamphlets have cartoons and reduce the ethnic identity to silly caricatures. One thing is sure; the Eurasians banded together to object to the adoption of one of Catherine Lim's simplistic novels that depicted one of her characters as a "good time Charlie". The implication was that all Eurasian boys and men fit this stereotype which is the furthest from the truth. Lim herself may not have had such an intention but to caricature a Eurasian man or boy as such for a minority community can cause unnecessary emotional damage and widespread dissent. Fortunately the authorities came to their senses and the book was eventually removed from the alleged bookshelves. The entire episode showed that Eurasians take such offences seriously and can bond quickly to face a common threat. Since then, Lim – who

³ I would like to offer my appreciation to my research assistants at NUS, who worked on a Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) research grant were Jack Lai Kuo Yen and Esther Sng. Lai and Sng both cross-checked the sources in Braga-Blake and Oehlers' work several times in the literature review. They discovered that the research method was not the typical or conventional social science approaches. Rather, the work is based on some participant observations and nostalgic storytelling which is a wonderful resource for those who can spare the leisure time to enjoy their work. However, the book is basically a coffee table book and should not be mistaken as an ethnographic, sociological or political science text.

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is a popular and outspoken critic of the PAP government especially under Goh Chok Tong – has spoken widely about many subjects but never about Eurasian men. Neither has she publicly apologised in any meaningful way about her caricature of Eurasians in Singapore.

The main language of the Eurasians today is English but this was not always the case. During the time of the Portuguese, the Eurasians spoke medieval Portuguese for over 180 years. The early Portuguese introduced their mestizo policy to create a loyal class of people to *Lisboa* [4]. They had introduced this mestizo policy in West Africa, the Suez and Goa. Later, the Portuguese would also include Malacca and Macao.

The question of what is a Eurasian begs a prior question. Who first came up with the idea of Eurasian and where did the word Eurasian come from? According to my own research the word Eurasian was invented only in the early to mid-19th century by a colonial civil servant based in India [4-7].

In those days, India was the jewel in the crown and the King of England was also the Emperor of India. The ravages of postcolonial cultural politics were teased out of the darkness and into the light by Antonio Gramsci, Franz Fanon, Edward Said, Anne McClintock, Partha Chatterjee, Gyan Prakash, Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Ranajit Guha and the Subaltern School, Dipesh Chakravorty, Ashis Nandy, and E. J. Hobsbawm. These scholars and hundreds of others made it clear how the British controlled their vast empire through many processes. One of those processes was through “ethnic enumeration” or categorizing people by color. Being superlative racists themselves, the colonial world of the British was black and white in their simplistic Hegelian dichotomy. People were either white (with power) or non-white (disempowered). McClintock and others mentioned how “one white soldier in the colonies could control 100 non-white subjects” or ten times the men. She observed how White people who were aged, dying and sick would be kept away from public view lest the subject races saw through the weaknesses of the White men. White men secretly despised Asian and non-White men for being unable to “protect and defend” their women. Asian women therefore became the orientalist subject of masculine control. This is why there remains a perception that European men and Eurasian men are able to easily win over Asian women in ways that non-Europeans and non-Eurasians are unable.

The off-spring of White European men and native, Asian women (which were usually the case) resulted in a category of people who belonged neither to the White nor Black / Native / Indian / Chinese / Malay categories. Hence a particularly clever bureaucrat decided to invent the word Eurasian. This is interesting because it only happened fairly recently. No one for example knows the etymology of non-Eurasian people like the Chinese, Indians, Europeans and Malays. By the late 1800s, the category of Eurasian was commonly used in the official documents of the Straits Settlements however in Goa and other parts of British colonial India, the word Eurasian was replaced with Anglo-Indian and Anglo-Chinese.

‘Who is a Eurasian?’

Singapore law derives from the Republic’s Constitution which was inherited from the British legal system. Taking the law into account, the Eurasian Association (Singapore) or EAS describes Eurasians as the “descendants of marital unions between Europeans and Asians. We are considered a living testimony to the first Europeans who married Asians between the 16th and 18th centuries over three distinct

colonial periods: Portuguese, Dutch and British. The Asian element in our heritage is either on the maternal side generations ago or the paternal one. Nonetheless, we are recognized as one of the domiciled communities of Singapore.” The EAS offers multiple definitions that they deem useful such as:

“a person born of union between a European and an Asian” and the subsequent off-springs of that first ‘mixed-blood’ (Braga-Blake).

“an Asian, with European ancestry and heritage” (Barry P. Pereira).

“The term ‘Eurasian’ was perhaps first used officially in the Straits Settlements records in 1849, in the population census encompassed several smaller ethnic groups. Prior to this, the population census included groups that came from various regions – Native Christians (which included the Luso-Malays, Serani or Kristang communities from Peninsula Malaya), Indo-Britons (which included the Anglo-Indians, Luso-Indians, Ceylon Burghers, Dutch Burghers and Portuguese Mechanics), Armenians and Jews.” (*Eurasian Association, Singapore*).

There are many ways to define the concept and application of the ‘Eurasian’ concept. The written Constitution and the EAS publications online and in hardcopy are considered the most official source for the Eurasians in Singapore. However, the cultural preferences have also revealed certain anachronisms such as “marital union” and ‘Native Christians’ or “Indo-Britons”. The first two are not representative of the Community as a whole because many are Catholic and Muslim but not all believe in marriages and like other communities, the Eurasians of Malaya, Malaysia and Singapore have their own skeletons in the closet. The third category is nonsensical because it tries to include everything but achieves nothing because there is too much complexity for such a category as Indo-Briton to be meaningful and no serious scholars even refer to this label.

There are many shortcomings in present day approaches to the question of “What it means to be Eurasian?” and at best they are a Contested Community. Out community is contested in three ways: (1) one cannot rely on a single definition and no one really can say what a Eurasian ‘typically’ looks like. Physical appearances or primordial manifestations are superficial presentations of a deeper cultural reality. One cannot really rely on what one observes and interprets from the senses; (2) the presence of the Eurasian Community in Singapore is contested as being the ‘fourth’ ethnic category. Some government officials and agencies accept use it in their bureaucratic forms and reports but others do not. The government’s inconsistency has led to contestation and confusion in the public and private spheres.

Contestations come from those other minority communities who (perhaps selfishly or perhaps rightfully) demand official recognition for a place in the Singapore sun.

It was also really ironic that the Minister “in-charge” of Eurasian affairs was George Yeo (now the President of a secular Indian university) was a popular Chinese Catholic politician with very close ties to the Eurasian community. The current minister representing the Eurasians is S. Iswaran, a Indian married to a Chinese. Therefore it is not merely ironic that there are no Eurasian ministers but that there is even a need for Eurasians to be represented in Cabinet. The fact remains that having Barker, Yeo and Iswaran in Cabinet has not really led to any overt or material support for the Community. The Cabinet must think and act for all Singaporeans and not just the minority ethnic communities; and, (3) the Eurasian Community is a contested despite having made significant contributions to the country since 1965 (in addition to its

earlier contributions since the 17th century) there are other minority ethnic communities with louder voices and larger numbers who are making more demands in terms of government support for education, housing and marriage.

Self-Help?

The EAS as a government supported institution was formed in 1919 as a civil society group. Modelled after the EAS, the PAP government decided that other Self-Help groups should be formed such as the CDAC, Mendaki, and SINDA in the 1980s. Indeed, the EAS was the first and remains the only Self-Help Eurasian Association. It is the oldest Self-Help group as well as the smallest in terms of numbers of members but not in terms of contribution to society.

By contrast, there are also Chinese ones such as the Hokkien Huay Kuan and Hakka associations and the various Malay madrassah that are Islamic-based schools. Unlike the Chinese clans or Islamic schools, the Eurasian Association has always kept its doors open for all Singaporeans and foreigners who need help and was never narrowly focussed from the start. Anyone who asked for help or was in need of help would never be turned away based on grounds of religion, culture or national identity.

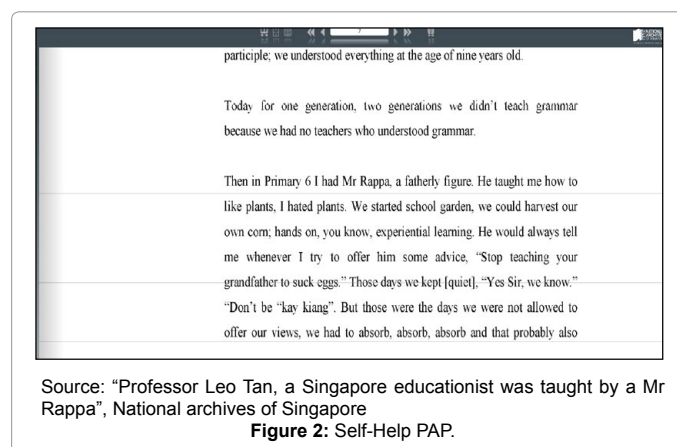
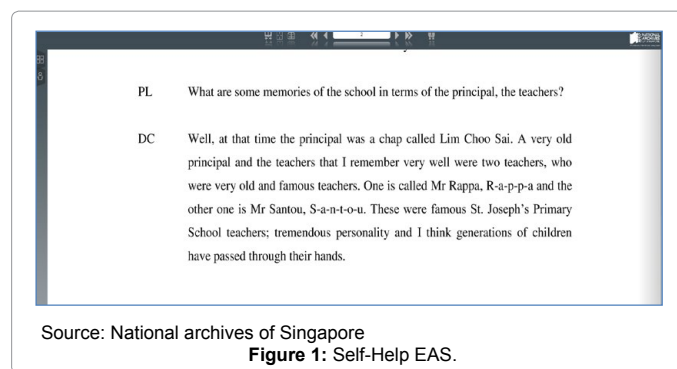
In a series of interviews with Bryan Davenport when he was EAS president, a few years before his death, he mentioned to that the EAS is an Institution of Public Character (IPC) and that such an official charitable status allowed it to gain access to government dollar-for-dollar matching for its donation drives. He had strongly supported that move along with former EAS president Timothy De Souza. In those interviews at the Singapore Cricket Club, Davenport proudly proclaimed that the democratic ethos of the EAS was seen in the fact that it was not "colour bar". Although he and his family were originally from Ceylon and Dutch-Burghers, no one stood in his attempt to get elected as EAS president⁴. He told us that the Eurasians of the past were mainly clerks, school teachers, and civil servants. Many were also entertainers like singers, disc-jockeys, radio and television personalities. When Davenport discovered my surname was Sicilian in origin, he said he always knew I was a don (a pun on the fact that I was teaching at NUS). The rest of the interviews with him involved what some have referred to as 19th century public policies. Despite the people within the community who have privately or publicly criticized Davenport, most would say that he was a very generous man. As a shipping tycoon he could afford to be very generous and had donated much of his wealth to the Eurasians and other local causes without ever asking for anything in return. Perhaps one day his London-trained daughter will run for the EAS presidency (Figures 1 and 2).

Bahau – A Eurasian Concentration Camp

There are multiple sources that explain and narrate the sad stories associated with the only Eurasian concentration camp known as Bahau. The camp was not located in Johor state as some believe but in Negri Sembilan. Bahau Town had a railway stop that is about 8 hours and 15 minutes from Tanjong Pagar Station. The actual Concentration Camp itself was located outside the town of the same name, about 4.2 km away on hilly terrain. The main contemporary sources for the Bahau case come from the historian C.M. Turnbull, Shinozaki Mamoru, and the Arkib Negara, Malaysia as well as indirect stories within the National Archives of Singapore⁵. Some Bahau observers say that Bahau

4 Rappa, interview with Bryan Davenport (transcription by Jack Lai Kuo Yen, NUS), 1998/9 (Singapore Cricket Club).

5 Rappa, fieldwork notes, 1987 (Penang), 1990-1992 (Malacca); Rappa, fieldwork, 1999-2007 (NUS research scheme).



(Fuji Village)⁶ was designed as an agricultural village. In reality, the Settlement was no more than a make-shift self-help farm for 3,400 Eurasians. The intention that Mamoru had was to ease the pressures of food production for locals by resituating the work entirely to the Eurasian community under the supervision of a Japanese overlord. The Japanese name for Bahau or *Fuji-go* was not popular among the mainly Roman Catholic residents. No matter how hard they tried to design and plan for the settlement, the widespread sicknesses, malaria and other diseases quickly transformed Bahau into a Eurasian death-trap. Everything had to be built from scratch. Some historians in Singapore have written that the Eurasians chose to bring their families to Bahau. This is inaccurate. No one chose to go to that concentration camp. They did not have to be tricked like millions of Jews were tricked by the Nazis. Rather, the Eurasians tried to avoid Bahau and quit it as soon as the war ended. They knew that it was a decadent and backward place full of dysentery and malaria. And like the Jews they had no choice when forced to walk there. Very few rode in a vehicle and at least 50 perished by the wayside in this arduous journey⁷. Unlike the Jewish fate, the Eurasian one seemed less horrific. Bahau Concentration Camp was an agricultural model farm designed to make the people self-sufficient. It failed miserably. By 1945, it was clear that at least 2,400 Eurasians had been forced to take the train and to walk to Bahau and many had perished along the way especially the old and the infirmed. Some were even tortured by the *Kempetai* (the Japanese secret police) for not walking fast enough, poking fun at the Japanese, or talking⁸. This was because most Japanese soldiers were illiterate and suspicious of foreigners who spoke the English or Chinese languages. To some

6 The name in Japanese according to Kwok Kian Woon's coffee table book on the Internet.

7 Rappa, *ibid*.

8 Interview with Kathleen Klyne, "World War II and how Eurasians survived in my family" Rappa, 1983.

Eurasians, the Japanese soldiers walked and spoke in a way that made one laugh because they looked comical⁹. The number of Eurasians who perished in their forced march to Bahau pale in comparison to the Death Railway in Siam over the *River Kwai* or the death march to Ponggol Beach. Hundreds had lost their lives, especially the Chinese and the White soldiers. Many Australians, British, some New Zealanders and even a few Americans had lost their lives as inmates at Changi prison. About one hundred Eurasian men volunteered to fight against the Japanese and joined the Singapore Volunteer Corps (Company D). Some were said to have been “machine-gunned tortured or killed by the Japanese”¹⁰.

The official colonial records of the British Army in Malaya tended to focus on documents relating to the British and Indian veterans and other European soldiers rather than the few Eurasian ones. Nevertheless, some of their families were forced to walk to Bahau town and then to the Bahau Concentration Camp in 1943-1944 and had lost their fortunes in Singapore. Others who lived in the Eurasian enclaves in Katong along the East Coast or in the Town were luckier and did what they could to survive by avoiding Bahau. It is not known where the Bishop who was sent there is buried. Apparently some believers brought his body back to Singapore for burial on sacred ground but I could not locate its site and still have not been able to do so. The cemeteries in Malacca and Singapore (Chua Chu Kang Christian cemetery – that still exists; and Bidadari cemetery – that is now a public park) provide fairly reliable records of the Christian Eurasians buried there.

Eurasian tombstones and grave markers placed along the walls of the ruins at Fort Canning in Singapore (formerly Government Hill or *Bukit Larangan* – ‘forbidden hill’ in Malay) are of English descent while those Eurasian tombstones in Paul’s Church in Malacca are of Dutch descent. These were present when the British colonial soldiers under Farquhar and Raffles tried to blow up the Japanese invaded Malaya through Kelantan to the northeast of the Malay Peninsula including the grave of the famous Catholic Saint, Francis Xavier. Interestingly, there are no religious or medical structures left at Bahau despite the close relationship between the Eurasians and the Catholic religion even during the Second World War.

One of the most famous internees who served as a medical doctor was the popular and well-respected Dr Charles Paglar. A Eurasian interviewee in his 70s had some interesting things to say about Dr Charles Paglar. “Charlie Paglar”, he said, “was fat and famous” and gave free food and medicine before the War but he was “secretly in cahoots with the Japanese *Kempetai*” and hence he could “remain fat and round while the other Eurasians looked like skeletons!” because, “the Japanese gave him food, shelter and banana money”¹¹. Medical science proves that the girth or size of a person is not due to the food consumption as much as his DNA.

Nevertheless, it is widely believed that Paglar had collaborated with the Japanese and had benefitted from their occupation in Singapore. Lee Kuan Yew, by his own admission, had also collaborated with the Japanese by helping them intercept radio messages during the war years. Neither man was convicted for their crimes because it was war

after all and everyone did their own part to survive whether they were Malay, Indian, Eurasian or European.

Post War Eurasians

There is also great misnomer about Eurasians leaving Singapore after the War. No one knows exactly where all these Eurasians went. There is also seems to be no point in discussing the reasons why Eurasians emigrated. Many Eurasians would return and marvel at the progress. Others preferred to be absorbed into the large White ethnic communities of Australia, the United States and Canada. They would lose their ethnic and cultural identity inasmuch as those who converted to other religions and changed their names.

In post-war Singapore, Eurasians continued to play important nation building roles. Many were democrats and capitalists but there were some prominent Eurasians who were socialists and others who came under the Communist banner. A few were rounded up by the police in Operation Cold Store. There is a belief among some Malayan Eurasians that it was a Eurasian Communist marksman who pulled the trigger that shot the bullet that killed Sir Henry Gurney on October 6, 1951, some five years before *Merdeka* through Malaya. However, I have found no evidence to support this claim made by two old Eurasian gentlemen Lai and Sng interviewed outside the Funeral Parlour at St Joseph’s Church in Victoria Street, Singapore.

Gurney was ambushed by Communists while driving to Fraser’s Hill in his Rolls Royce car by two troops of guerrillas. He was dead before his body was flung into a dry ravine along the thick underbrush. There were some wealthy Eurasian families before the war including the Tessensohn, Blake, De Souza, Pereira, Klyne, Cornelius, Desker, Eredia, Farrao, Texeira, Rappa, Bachelor, Oliveiro, Barker, Bogaars, Baker, Richards and others. However, many of them lost their fortunes made during the heady days of the British Empire because of the looting by Japanese soldiers, impoverished Chinese, Malays and Indians (see Lee Kuan Yew’s works on the war years) as well as the damage caused by Japanese bombers and the hardships of wartime occupied Singapore. The Japanese also stole much movable wealth from Singaporean homes.

Famous and Wealthy Eurasian Families

The wealthiest White Europeans, Eurasians, Chinese, Malays and Indians themselves lost the most from the war. Even the records kept about the total number of Eurasians do not match the colonial records in London. Neither do they match the official Portuguese Mission and French foreign mission Catholic Church and Parish records of the period. Therefore, at best, one is presented with an approximation of the truth: there were between ten to twenty thousand Eurasians before the war and about six to eight thousand left after the war. The De Souza, Theseira, Desker, Cornelius and Rappa families remained in Singapore and increased their wealth significantly through legal means.

Over a period of two and a half decades, more Eurasians returned from the Southeast Asian archipelago and the numbers were boosted to about 50,000 Eurasians. Under, Dutch Indonesia the plan was to give Papua to the 200-300,000 Eurasians who were left behind but this did not come true due to Indonesian independence under Sukarno. By the time of Suharto, most had emigrated to Malaya and Singapore, America, Canada, Holland and other European countries, and with a few who converted to Islam and remained in Indonesia and who of course eventually lost their ethnic identity as is what happens to religious converts. There are many English and Portuguese road names throughout the former British empire, and what used to be the British

9 Rappa (1983), *Ibid*.

10 Interview with Barry Peter Pereira, 2000. He was writing his book on the Eurasians in the Singapore Volunteer Force (SVF). In that interview, he began asking me questions about my own ancestors and whether L. Rappa was in fact my grandfather Leopold Aloysius Rappa who was on the roster in the third column to the right in the diagram from his manuscript. Pereira kept working on his book till his untimely death.

11 Rappa (1999-2007), *ibid*.

Commonwealth, a fledgling bunch of states that included New Zealand, Australia and Canada as well as all the African, Latin American, Pacific Rim and Southeast Asian states. These road names were reminders of the colonial masters and their colonial bureaucrats. Some were famous entrepreneurs while others were philanthropists and had roads and streets named after them. These road names include Desker Road, De Souza Avenue, Tessensohn Avenue and Rappa Terrace for example. Natasha Tan wrote a brief caption about Rappa Terrace where she says, "Rappa Terrace, which lasted until the nineties, used to exist beside the Sri Veeramakaliamman Temple. It was named after George Rappa, Jr., a Eurasian who became Philip Robinson's business partner in 1859. Philip Robinson was the founder of Robinson & Co that later opened the famous Robinsons Department Store at Raffles Place. In 2002, the Klang Lane flats were built at where the Rappa Terrace shophouses used to stand" [8]. There were many other Eurasian street names such as Aroozoo Avenue, Barker Road, and Zehnder Road¹².

Desker road is named after Andre Filipe Desker a Dutch Eurasian (1840s) who had built his fortune in the sale of butchered mutton and was a great philanthropist. Andre Desker's great-grandson Barry Desker took a First Class honours in History at the University of Singapore. Desker is one of the EAS Trustees and was a pioneering Singapore diplomat to Indonesia and some say Russia. He was also the first President scholars in the 1960s.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s approximately 30,000 Singapore Eurasians left for Australia and Canada, some settled in the US and India. Lee Kuan Yew once referred to them as transients indirectly during a speech. But that text is difficult to find and transcribed. However, Lee Kuan Yew was always fair to the Eurasians and he had in fact encouraged Eddie Barker to open up the grand preserve of the Eurasian Club (known as the Singapore Recreation Club) to all Singaporeans in 1972.

The Eurasians left before they were afraid that their political and bureaucratic influence as well as their social standing was falling with the rise of the PAP government and some even feared that the PAP government would turn Communist (in the time of Ong Eng Guan and Lim Chin Siong). There were at least 13 PAP members who left the party and defected to the Barisan Nasional under Lee Siew Choh. Eddie Barker would join the Lee Kuan Yew group along with Kenny Byrne and other prominent Eurasian leaders. Lee would ask Barker to open up the EAS to all Singaporeans. Lee depended on several people while studying at Cambridge and one of those was his senior Eddie Barker. A good friendship ensued. Barker trusted Lee since Cambridge days and he saw no reason to say no to Lee when the latter approached him about the status of the EAS.

Nevertheless, it was Barker's call. I had interviewed Barker several times in the 1980s and before his death. He said once said that he had no regrets opening (the SRC) to non-Eurasians. He shared a common joke about how the club was the only one in Singapore that had a bar named after a local chap. Barker was Singapore's first law minister. He Barker said in a serious tone that he had raised his children to believe that there was no ethnic group as important as the Singaporean one. Of all the early pioneers he had believed in a Singaporean Singapore identity.

¹² See other Eurasian Street names in Singapore at <http://remembersingapore.org/2014/01/09/pioneer-names-in-singapore-streets/>

Pioneer Eurasians who have Contributed to Singapore's Nation Building

There were those Eurasians who contributed much more than many other Singaporeans and those who did not make any real contributions at all. The contributions of these pioneers do not begin after 1965 but date back much earlier to at least the late 19th century. Eurasian civil servants for example helped build the British colonial infrastructure. They were clerks, supervisors, lawyers, accountants and even foremen. A relative of George Rappa, Jr., for example was appointed by the Colonial Secretary of Malaya to supervise the building of the Selangor Road [9] while George Bogaars was the Head of the Singapore Civil Service and played a critical role in its development. There are certainly many prominent Eurasians who could lay claim to building Singapore since 1965. Some still serve diligently on the management board or committees of the EAS. Sadly, the Eurasian case has diminished over time. Rather than that small but influential ethnic group that it was under the British era, Singapore Eurasians today no longer exert the kind of power they had up till the time of George Bogaars, the former Head of the Singapore Civil Service. Desker was a valuable Ambassador but ruffled feathers when he questioned the position and place of ASEAN in what was to become an open debate between him and Tommy Koh, Singapore's famous Ambassador at Large. Desker had helped build the Indonesian portfolio as the Singapore Ambassador to the world's largest Muslim country. Desker speaks fluent Bahasa Malaysia as well as Bahasa Indonesia and has a small collection of unique Javanese antiques as well as a deep cultural knowledge of Javanese culture. Having spent years there, he acquired critical knowledge on the Indonesian Armed Forces through regular diplomatic channels. The other equally if not more influential Eurasians were Benjamin Sheares, Eddie Barker, and Maurice Baker. Desker's uncle owned property along Serangoon Road like George Rappa, Jr., and the Tessensohn family.

The De Souza, Blake, and Oliveira families lived at Haig Road Eurasian Kampong among other many Eurasians who were to become famous. There is an old saying that if you threw a stone in the town you would hit a De Souza. Tim De Souza was a colonel in the Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) and was the first Royal Air Force-trained Black Knight. Boris Theseira was a chairman of many companies and a former EAS Secretary. Boris Theseira's only son Benett would be twice elected as President of the EAS. Boris Theseira was also known for his loud and booming voice. He was outspoken and held democratic views. Theseira helped build the community alongside the other prominent Eurasians such as the Barker, Baker, Oehlers, Desker, De Souza, Rappa, Skinner, Cornelius, and Erskine families. There does not appear to be much volunteer work done by many Eurasians due to the fact of poverty or unwillingness to partake in community activities.

Not all Eurasians are as gregarious as one might imagine (thanks to the pulp fiction of the popular writer of the *Shrimp People*, Rex Shelley and Catherine Lim, the one who "got into trouble" for her political statements during Goh Chok Tong's time as prime minister). Another reason why there are fewer Eurasian volunteers at the grassroots levels and why the same old faces keep turning up is because there are simply not enough numbers. Pioneer Eurasians such as Eddie Barker was not only an established lawyer, sportsman and Queen's scholar at Cambridge University; he was also Singapore's first Law Minister. There were many others on the Civil List who of course included the wife of the former Chief Justice of Singapore, the first Eurasian lawyer. As well as Barker's own lawyer daughters. Also, there was Edwin Tessensohn the British Municipal Commissioner in 1915 and prominent member

of the Legislative Council; as well as another influential pioneer (Braga-Blake's father) who was also one of the first members of the Legislative Assembly in the march to Singapore's independence. Sir George E. N. Oehlers served as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly from 1955 to 1963 and was followed by Eddie Barker who served as the First Speaker of Parliament as well as the First Eurasian Speaker of Parliament.

Perhaps the best known Eurasian pioneer was Professor Benjamin Henry Sheares. President Sheares became a famous international surgeon because he invented the Sheares medical technique known as which served as an important medical method that saved many lives. He was the first Eurasian to become President of Singapore in 1971 and died in office a decade later. He is one of the few Singaporeans to receive a State funeral on a gun-carriage before Mr Lee Kuan Yew.

Eurasians – What Are They Good For?

The Eurasians must take pride of place in a country where they have a long and very colourful cultural history and one of the oldest ones in modern Southeast Asia. The Eurasian community developed from humble roots since the early 17th century with the arrival of the Portuguese in Malacca. The Eurasian community was a once influential and prominent social, cultural, economic and political community that has seen the rise and fall of the Portuguese, Dutch and British Empires [4-7].

The Eurasians of Singapore today have contributed more than their numbers have allowed by proportion. They have produced several queen's and president scholars. They also elected a (now former) Eurasian Member of Parliament who had to step down from office and from his political party for having had an affair with a young Chinese Singaporean woman who was working at that point in time with the People's Association. Eurasians have every right to be in Singapore as any other ethnic community. This was the first time that a Eurasian leader had been caught although others from the Chinese, Indian and Malay communities have been discovered under similar situations. The fact remains that if a political representative from a minority community performs an act that cannot be tolerated by society.

Conclusion

Minority communities also appear to exist in a state of constant danger because of their small numbers. Since the Singapore and

Malaysian Eurasians do not have the large population numbers, like the Indians, Malays and Chinese, some believe that the Eurasian communities will eventually disappear entirely like the Jews are disappearing and the Armenians have disappeared. Eurasians have to depend on locally nurtured talent because the "technical Eurasians [10]". The technical Eurasians refer to the offspring of Asians and Europeans. There are many derogatory words used to describe Eurasians even though many are known for their "aesthetically pleasing" looks. The Hokkien speakers used to call Eurasians "Chap Cheng" (mixed blood), the Malays referred to them as "grago", and the Indians called them *Bengali Putih*, the White Bengali, the *Orang Nasrani* (People of Nazareth), or the *Gente Kristang* (Christian gentiles) [4,5,11]. They have been represented at the highest levels of political office. They have produced ambassadors, three brigadier generals, a head of police force and a Civil Service head. The Eurasians must preserve their cultural identity and history and are likely to remain a small but potent contested community as long as the numbers don't run out.

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