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MCAO Newsletter

Eddie Gaëtan Sit Yee... A Talented Artist in our Midst

By Joyce Leung & Priscilla Lam



Throughout the past few decades, we as Eddie's compatriots have had many occasions at various Mauritian parties to see and admire his paintings. We have always known of his talent as an artist. However, about a year ago, what brought Eddie's art to the attention of a

wider audience was his participation in a national art exhibit organized by the Federal government of Canada (Canada 150 Art & Heritage Connection Exhibition) and held at the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto (CCCGT). The opportunity was provided to Eddie through the Toronto Hakka Heritage Alliance (THHA) that was invited to partake in this national venture at the CCCGT. Eddie is, as we know, a member of MCAO which is part of THHA. At that exhibit, Eddie successfully showcased some Canadian landscapes.

We at the MCAO have a great interest in Eddie's art and are very proud of Eddie's achievements, hence this interview, which will give some insight into this artist's mind and shed some light on his interesting life and achievements.

1. The Early Years

Q: Tell us about yourself and your early days in Mauritius, as a young boy and student and specially life in the family shop "en bas montagne".

A: I was born in Quatre Bornes, second last in a family of seven children. Like many Chinese families at that time, my dad had a shop which was located almost at the foot of "Montagne Corps de Garde" on Remy Ollier Avenue. The area was familiarly and exotically called "en bas montagne"!

It was in the 1940's and we had no electricity. We used the "lampe petrole" for lighting in the shop and house at night

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time.

I lived and grew up in the village until I finished secondary school. We always walked to school which was about a 15-minutes stroll from my home. We had dirt roads all around our neighbourhood, not the nice paved ones we have today.

I was the only Chinese student in my class given that we were living in a community that was made up of mostly Hindus. My friends were kids from the local families and like all kids our age at the time, we spent lots of time playing balls and marbles in the streets.

Q: Did you have to help your parents in the shop? How was your "free time" spent in those days?

A: I was always helping in the family shop during my "free time". There was not much else to do.

As a little boy, I was not known to be academically bright, just the average Joe but with high hopes and aspirations. I was well aware, at that time, of people around me, saying as a joke or maybe not, that I was someone who would definitely end up "ene commis dans ene la boutique plus tard dans la vie".

On the other hand, as far as I can remember, I was naturally gifted for art with a unique ability to draw anything accurately. I was also naturally inclined to create or make arts & crafts items using different kinds of materials such as: wood, grass, wool, raffia, fruit and vegetable seeds, sea-shells, wire, etc. Later in life, that

joyful hobby would eventually help me earn extra income by selling those handmade articles in tourist shops.

Q: Tell us a little bit about your family and your career.

A: *Before I finished my secondary school education, my dad had a stroke. The fact that my dad was sick and that he was the only bread winner in the family probably triggered in me the willingness to work hard and do something with my life. I was motivated to apply myself and study harder. I realized that no one could help me but myself to achieve anything. I was determined to succeed in spite of everything. I finally did and was very proud of myself. I was very happy and relieved. I waited until I turned 18 to join the Teachers' Training College in Beau-Bassin. I graduated from the Teachers' Training College in 1959 and worked for twelve years as a primary school teacher in Mauritius.*

Subsequently, I immigrated to Canada in 1970, got married in Toronto in 1972 to Elise Chan. I have a son, Mervyn, and a daughter, Christina Lynn. My wife Elise passed away in 1997.

2. Life as an Artist

Q: When did you realize you wanted to paint: was it a sudden revelation, or did it come gradually?

A: *I was still a student teacher when my dad passed away and his shop was sold. I had to earn my living. As time went by, I dreamed of going overseas for further Art Studies, but could not really afford it. So, the next affordable and available choice I had was "Good Old Mother Nature". By observing and studying the world around me, I learned a lot about the sun, the sky and the sea. I become more conscious of shapes and colours and chiaroscuro (treatment of light and shade by an artist), and of trees and flowers. I also became more aware of blending and harmony in nature. And, on top of all this, everything was free, free to enjoy and appreciate.*

Q: What type of painting do you do?

A: *In the initial stage, I used coloured pencils to express myself. Then I started painting in water colour, later in oil and now mostly in acrylic. I use different sources: live, sketch or photograph. Now I paint mainly landscapes, seascapes and I also do still life. About 25% of my paintings are based on Mauritian background. These were mostly seascapes. The remaining 75% are based on Canadian*

themes, which are mostly landscapes.

I have had my art works exhibited in various Toronto Public Libraries in 1998, and also in private home art exhibitions for friends and relatives in 2006. I have also participated in "All Artists Art Show" of Del Property Management Inc. in 2016 and 2017. Last year, as part of the Canada 150 celebrations, I had the opportunity to participate in a national art exhibit organized by the Federal government of Canada (Canada 150 Art & Heritage Connection Exhibition), which was held at the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto in Scarborough.



Eddie and his art exhibits at the Canada 150 Art & Heritage Connection Exhibition (Nov 2017)

Q: You have sold a great number of paintings. What percentage of your paintings has been sold in Canada, Mauritius or elsewhere?

A: *Some of my paintings were good enough to attract buyers. I have sold more than 70 paintings (about 25% of my portfolio) in Mauritius and Canada, and a few in England, France and Italy. I have also given away many of my paintings to friends and relatives as gifts for various occasions and also donated others as prizes for special events such as MCAO's Chinese New Year banquets.*

Q: Do you have a favourite painting among your many works?

A: *My favourite painting is an oil canvas (24" x 36") depicting "The Old Mill", a historical landmark in Toronto.*

3. Achievements

Q: In Mauritius, you were part of a team developing graphic art items that the government needed for the island's independence celebrations and also for the post-

independence era. How did you get involved?

A: *In Mauritius, I was involved with Government projects because I was an employee of the Ministry of Education at the time. As such, I participated in a series of television educational programs sponsored by the Ministry of Education in 1967.*

I was indeed honoured to be a member of the Government of Mauritius committee to select a National Anthem, the National Flag and a National Coat of Arms for the independence of Mauritius in 1968.

I also did the illustrations for the French textbooks: "Rémi et Marie", "Enfance Mauricienne" and "Lectures Mauriciennes", which were used in the primary schools of Mauritius in the 1960s and 1970s. Some of you may probably relate to "Rémi et Marie".

I was the Top prize Winner in an Art exhibition sponsored by the Ministry of Health of Mauritius to obtain paintings to decorate a new hospital that was being built in the north of Mauritius in 1969.

I was also the Top prize winner in Arts and Crafts exhibitions sponsored by the cities of Beau-Bassin and Rose-Hill in the years 1965 to 1969.



Spring Time (Algonquin Park)

Q: You became a teacher in Mauritius. Tell us how you chose this career, and why?

A: *To be quite honest, there were not too many career choices at the time for young people leaving school. Mauritius was still not economically well developed and career opportunities were not plentiful. So, I went into primary school teaching as it was one of the few opportunities that presented itself to me and I must say I do not regret the choice at all! Once in 1968, Mr. C. Curé, then principal of the Teachers Training College of Mauritius, visited the school where I was teaching and he commented*

that my classroom was the most attractive classroom he had ever seen in Mauritius!

Q: You came to Canada in 1970 as one of the early immigrants from Mauritius. You got your Bachelor of Art degree and you continued your teaching career here. Tell us about your journey as a new Canadian and as a teacher in Toronto.

A: *For 12 years, I taught in Mauritius, saving money to be able to go overseas for higher education. At that time, Australia was not accepting immigrants of Chinese descent. So, I decided to come to Canada. I still remember vividly that cold winter night on the 22nd of February, 1970 when I landed in Toronto. And, that was 48 years ago!*

By 1975, I was able to work in Toronto schools, raise a family, take night and summer courses until I obtained my Supervisors' Certificate in Art of the Ministry of Education of Toronto and my B.A. at the University of Toronto. I taught French, Art and Crafts in the primary schools of Toronto for 25 years.

Pictures of self and my classrooms were selected to partly illustrate the French Core Programs book of the Ministry of Education in 1980.

When I started teaching in Toronto, I was really impressed at how the schools were so well equipped with all sorts of teaching aids creating an excellent learning environment.

Some of my contributions in Toronto include:

- *Making numerous religious banners for the school where I worked and for the Parish of St. Andrews Church.*
- *Making Christmas banners for St. Rock Church.*
- *Responsible for all school decorations for different events during the school year, e.g. First Communion, Confirmation, concert and graduation etc.*



Historical "Old Mill" in Toronto

Eddie is now retired and enjoys life with his family and friends. He still paints occasionally, and does his crafts. Once an artist, always an artist, as the saying goes!

We were very honoured and privileged to have this chat with Eddie. We thank him abundantly for letting us gain some insight into his quiet personality and life. We congratulate him on his many achievements and wish him all the very best in his retirement: plenty of joy and good health! And "*bonne continuation*" with his paintings that are such a source of joy and pleasure to members of the community, especially to us Mauritians who feel great pride when we see any of Eddie's art!

Kai Tam Meh...and the Story of the Shoulder Pole

By Philip Wong

"*kai tam meh*" ... intriguing words uttered by our parents.

As children growing up in Mauritius, we sometimes heard such words as "*kai tam meh*", "*kai sui*" or "*fu tam*" from our parents. We were never quite sure what they meant. We felt the words held some deeper meaning. In our shop when there is a lull, usually in the mid-afternoon, grown-ups would reminisce about the old country. They talked about women trekking all the way from Meixian to Kongsì to "*kai yam*" as a trade. We, the children, listened with fascination. As we grew older, we would learn that "*fu tam*" meant one's duty such as the burden of providing for the family and "*kai tam meh*" was the prototypical idiom to signify "carrying one's burden or cross in life".

Back then our job was to busy ourselves with school. As in many families, some of us were able to "*prend leçons*" to get ahead. We then went abroad to study. After graduation we did not come back to Mauritius, or if we did go back, we would leave again soon after. Here we are in Canada, and we do not hear the old words "*tam meh*" anymore. All is forgotten. Still, these words stay with us: they intrigue us and sometimes haunt us. "*kai tam meh*" is one such sentence.



So, what does "*kai tam meh*" really mean? In its literal sense, it describes the time-honoured way for people, especially in the eastern culture, to carry heavy loads using the shoulder pole and baskets system (*tam meh*) by which the loads are carried in two

baskets hanging at the ends of a bamboo pole that is supported and balanced on the shoulder of the carrier. It is an extremely effective way of carrying heavy loads over large distances or through restricted spaces such as narrow laneways and is commonly used to this day in many parts of the world. In Mauritius, some of us may still have memories of lady hawkers back in the day selling Hakka snacks such as "*mikao pan*" and the like in containers carried over their shoulder by this ubiquitous bamboo pole.

Move forward to 2018: this year we paid a visit to Meixian. We were lucky enough to spend one whole day as guests of a 乡下 Xiāngxià [Hakka: hiong ha] family. As we walked around the village we noticed that every household had a vegetable plot or a paddy field. We observed how a "*tam meh*" was useful for fertilizing or watering the plants. It would have been a familiar scene to our Mauritian parents before they left, no doubt.

One of our hosts is the elder of two daughters. She told us a childhood story. Way back when her father was ill, she had the responsibility to "*kai*" [carry] their garden produce to the market. She carried her load across the hilly countryside, trekking along narrow paths crisscrossing rice fields. An oil lantern dangling on her Chinese bamboo pole lit her way. Well before daybreak she put out the light to save on fuel. In a room in the house where they kept old or unused things, we saw a pair of baskets that formed part a "*tam meh*". And this is what re-tweaked my interest in this emblem of our cultural past!



Biāndan 扁担 is the Chinese word for the bamboo carrying or shoulder pole. Culturally it has come to symbolise the burdens, struggles and hopes of the family. The immigrant experience and the issue of the Hakka identity as well as their integrity and endurance all find a home in the expression for very heavy burden 负担很重 Fùdān hěn zhòng [Hakka: *fu tam han choong*].

I surmise that due to the determination and physical strength required for carrying the burden, the “*tam meh*” has become a metaphor for the family responsibilities.

So, what is the Chinese carrying or shoulder pole? Asian cultures have used bamboo poles to carry heavy loads for centuries. Whereas the Western carrying yoke is rigid, bamboo offers a compliant back pack. Used with skill this method has the benefits of reduced peak shoulder forces. Although developed over the centuries through experience and performance, it can be explained today by mathematical analysis that the flexibility of the bamboo pole gives rise to resonant frequencies that are within range of a typical human walking cadence, hence the beneficial impact on locomotion energetics. In other words, a flexible pole allows the carrier to move the load consuming less energy as a result of the pole vibration properties.



Good Fun for the Children

People in China have used shoulder poles to carry loads for a long time. The pole was not always held horizontally. For example, at the time of the tea and horse trade between Tibet and Sichuan, the tea carriers kept the rod upright. At other times one big load was hung on a pole between two men as compared to one man carrying two loads.



Ancient Tea and Horse Road Between Tibet & SW China

Traders have employed men equipped with poles to cart their merchandise between distant destinations. The upright position of the poles was probably dictated by the type of terrain travelled.

Whenever there were heavy loads to be carried uphill in difficult places, people have resorted to using the Chinese carrying pole. One such place is Mt Taishan, Shandong, the birth place of Confucius. It is now a tourist destination. The viewing platform lies at the end of a series of steps. The brave men go up the steps carrying the goods up the 5,029 feet high mountain. The higher profit margins on the drinks sold there make the efforts worthwhile. The ambitious ones make the trip many times in a day.



Again Huangshan, Anhui, at elevation of 6,115 feet, is another place where vendors bring their wares up a large number of steps. The carrying pole is an indispensable tool of the trade.



Huangshan, Anhui Scenery

Vendors have to walk up steep steps to ply their trade.

Chongqing is a city located at the confluence of the Jialing and Yangtze Rivers. With geography of cliffs up to 1000 meters in height, loading and unloading of goods from ships was done by stevedores until recently. The men with ropes and bamboo poles were particularly well suited for the job. In the local dialect, such porters are called “*bang bang*”. *Bàng* 棒 in Mandarin means baton or stick.

It is also possible for a recently arrived peasant to set up business with just a bamboo stick and some rope. He would freelance his service wherever he could. It is hard work. Faced with few choices some of them make a career of it. The business minded ones study the market in the meantime, and after a few years open their own shops. It was reported that one person, who started as a

“bang bang” man, is now the successful owner of a fleet of vans.

One can also remember the not-too-distant past, before mechanical equipment was widely available or affordable, how large earthworks were often accomplished on the strength of hordes of human workers with nothing more than a “*tam meh*’ for a tool.

If Archimedes thought he could move the world with a lever, then our forbearers with their shoulder pole have certainly given it a good try!

Rodrigues, a Jewel in the Rough...

By Andrew Wang & Clifford Lam

To those of us who grew up in Mauritius many decades ago, Rodrigues was at the time, first and foremost synonymous with its delectable free-range chicken, known as “*poule Rodrigues*” or “*lotili keyeh*” in Hakka parlance. Who can forget those indelible images of elderly ladies getting into a frenzy to buy live poultry freshly offloaded from the supply ship, *M.V. Mauritius*? Fortunately for Rodrigues, these memories have gradually become a thing of the past and today’s reality speaks of an island that has been transformed into a popular and much sought-after destination for people to visit, an island with a beauty and character to behold, a true touristic jewel in the rough! We had the pleasure to make such a visit to Rodrigues recently to discover for ourselves the unspoiled beauty, the charismatic charm and a way of life that we used to cherish during our childhood days in Mauritius.



Rodrigues is situated about 560 km (350 mi) to the east of Mauritius. It is about 18 km (11 mi) long and 6.5 km (4.0 mi) wide with an area of 108 km² (42 sq mi). Unlike Mauritius, the island is hilly with a central rocky spine culminating in the highest peak, Mont Limon at 398 m (1,306 ft). The landscape is scarred by deep cut valleys running down on either side of the ridge towards the coast. Rodrigues is the only Mascarene island with extensive limestone deposits that have given rise to beautiful stalactite-filled underground caves.



Rodrigues used to be the 10th district of Mauritius and was administered by Mauritius as a dependency during the colonial days and then became a constituency of Mauritius after independence with elected representation in the Mauritius Legislative Assembly. In 2002, Rodrigues was granted autonomy by the National Assembly of Mauritius and a decentralized local government system was put in place. Rodrigues is now run by a regional elected assembly that is responsible for the day-to-day running of the island while retaining its representation in the Mauritius National Assembly with at least two elected members.

The latest population estimate of Rodrigues is about 39,000, most of whom are “creole” in origin with a sprinkle of other ethnic minorities such as Chinese, Muslims and Hindus. The local population speaks a local creole dialect, with a slight variance from the Mauritian version. The educational system and living conditions are very similar to Mauritius.

The economy of Rodrigues is mostly dependent on Mauritius. The main sources of income and economic activity are tourism, fishing, agriculture (lemons, red kidney beans, onions, garlic and chilli), and animal husbandry (poultry, goats, sheep and cattle). As a result of its dependency on Mauritius, the economic

development of the island has generally lagged behind although in recent years thanks to a substantial increase in public spending by the central government, there have been significant improvements in many areas such as road infrastructure with a good network of well-paved roads linking all communities on the island today; water supply and distribution with a new sea-water desalination plant under construction to alleviate perennial water shortage problems; and public health care, education, and environment.



The cost-of-living is higher in Rodrigues compared to Mauritius due to the need to import most of its goods and services from Mauritius. Shopping is not an issue as most consumer goods are easily available in the shops run by the local people. Most businesses are located in the capital, Port Mathurin, as is the regional government administration. Even though it is the main town on the island, Port Mathurin is a relatively small place with only three major roads. It does not take more than 30 minutes to tour the town where rush-hour traffic is not yet part of the local vocabulary. The most striking feature of life on the island is the liberating sense of security that people feel all around the island. Theft, drugs and crimes are almost non-existent and there are anecdotes of people rarely locking their homes when they leave for work every day!

There is a local market that is open throughout the week in Port Mathurin, but it is usually on Saturdays that most people will do their shopping and that is the time to meet friends for some chitchat. The market is reputed for selling locally produced goods such as handicrafts made from raffia leaves, the well-known "*piments Rodrigues*" (a super-hot variety of chili), lemon pickle, locally produced honey and the popular Rodriguan "*tourte*", a pie cake with coconut stuffing.



Rodrigues is also well known for its fresh fish caught daily from the beautiful lagoons that surround the island, not to mention the "*ourites*" (octopus) and lobsters that are plentiful when in season. Not too long ago, Mauritians going on vacations there made sure to buy fish (fresh or dried) to bring home. Unfortunately nowadays, fish is becoming scarce, maybe due to over fishing.



It is easy to travel from one place to another in Rodrigues thanks to a good bus transportation system that now links all the communities on the island. But one must not be in a hurry, as everything goes at a slow pace here, including the internet... One can see people queuing nonchalantly in shops, banks, waiting patiently to be served. Most of the businesses close by 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon when active life takes a back seat everywhere. This laid-back attitude appears to be shared by the local animal population too as cows, goats and sheep can often be spotted leisurely jaywalking on the island's roads!



There is little pollution on the island due to the absence as-yet of heavy industry or road-clogging traffic. Plastic bags have been banned but unfortunately plastic bottles are still in use. Health care is easily accessible to all through the public general hospital in Port Mathurin.

Unlike the old days when Rodrigues was linked to the outside world through a once or twice-a-month ship service to Mauritius, the island is now served by regular air service with at least 3 daily return flights between the two islands. Rodrigues is definitely a good place to go for a quiet and restful vacation. The people are friendly, helpful and simple, which adds to the unique charm and beauty of the place. The island is surrounded by coral reefs and a pristine blue lagoon within which lie a number of small islets harbouring unique bird and plant life. There are marvelous white sandy beaches all around the island and the best part is that most of them are sparsely crowded and you can often have an entire beach to enjoy all by yourself!



There are many guest houses, and a few hotels and resorts that cater for all categories of visitors. If you want

to experience the local feel, you can even opt to stay with a family. Whatever your budget, one thing is certain: Rodrigues will not disappoint you...a real jewel in the rough.



毛島情懷 (3)

By M. How

今年八月中去毛里求斯渡假回來快要二個月了。像以往的心情一樣，飛機一著陸我就有回到家的感覺。天堂就在眼前，體會着我童年情深似海的好地方，多激動的也！一大清早由Plaisance機場到PortLouis市的路上，我雙眼忙着東張西望，沿途真的漂亮！遠邊的山山水水，一草一木都非常可愛。內心感恩上天再給我機會跟你們重溫舊夢-Reconnect。毛島你的溫潤沒變而我對你的留戀反而加深了。

這次回去也可以說有不少不同的節目，其實三個星期的時間有點緊。除在島北酒店住了一個星期陪伴我中國來的妹妹、姪女家人外，好友CL邀請我參加他們的RCPL50周年聚會。碰到不少往年的熟人、朋友。同時也交了新的朋友。

我和Thérèse也去了留尼望島待了四天。拜訪了親人也在市中心跑了一趟，留尼望島是我第一次踏足，印象不錯，但沒有什麼好玩。看上去那邊人民比我們毛島人富有，島民也過得很隨和的生活，聽說每個人一出生就能拿到“退休金”。多好也！我真希望自己能在這樣的國家出生！！一生無憂。

天天可以出海釣魚，在印度洋操練操練姜大公吊魚技巧。晚上可以圍着火爐燒烤跳跳土風舞。哈哈！！

下次回毛島也要去另外一個鄰島羅的利玩幾天。聽說那

邊更是人間天堂,生活单纯,朴素。
島上人民都自供自足,没有污染环境。

每次回毛像以往一样住在和平神像邻近嫂子家。每天一清早就去爬山,早餐後就去波累市市中心。街道我是烂熟的。那些细街小巷都有些变化。因为我自小都在La rue Remy Ollier 和 La rue La Paix

長大。這兩條街就是我主要的memory lane。徘徊了一趟內心有無限的親切感。就這半公里的範圍內就有說不完的故事,看不完的風景:-La boutique Lo Nam 还是一模一样。很想進去買些浸瓜,浸芒果,但没有開店門。真想念James的鮭圓,肉圓,釀豆干。當年La rue Royale 的雪糕一定要在Café Snow White買, Mama美味小炒和粥, JukeBox 和TeleBox 每晚爆場。和平,金龍,安能飯店都是我們華人最喜歡吃飯的地方。其他小街有Ding-Dong, 華珍,中央, Café International都能做出飲食精華。La rue La Rampe 街角客家小吃也很丰富;仙人叛,味教叛,芋圓,蕎叛应有尽有。這樣的一情一景大部分都不見了或轉形經營了。波累市其他族裔賣小頭的也不少而且做得很不錯。例如:椒板, 煎面包, 干非麻辣(Kolfi Malai), 垂魯打, 不吐, 单布意, 呵濟等等等等.....發了財的小商人; 大有人在。

一天清晨,我特地來到La rue Ti-Montagne 街,想找找我半世紀前的石梯牌-Perron, 上下徘徊了幾圈。可悲的是人去樓空!石梯牌也見不到了。可是路肩还是一模一样。真是可惜。已然這麼遠跑來我也就用手机拍了不少附近老牆壁和路肩照片。帶回家來表達怀念。

早年波累市華人文化也非常精彩:-
陳宅一年一度雙十節活動。新華學校十月一日國慶慶祝。拉沙鄰聖帝公生日晚上送壽面空前熱鬧。竹林,公進礼堂也經常有舞會活動。主要是我們華人青年男女的天下。
農曆新年是華人最主要的節日。不但年初一是官方規定全島公暇日,每年鳩必市政庁會舉辦(年三十日晚)除夕舞會。這樣的大勝會大家可以想像是特別熱鬧,人潮湧湧,水淺不通。全島有名音響樂隊都輪流伴奏經典名曲, 還記得嗎?...NightBirds? Lucien Pouzet? Karl Brasse? Gerard Cimiotti? Police Band? And Typhoon Band???

其實我們的年代物質可以沒有像今天丰富。但窮人有窮人的快樂。幸福有時就是這麼的簡單。
我真幸運和高興能在這季刊裡輕描淡寫我童年的記憶。今後希望更多同胞們來這裡說出你們早年點點滴滴來

跟大家分享。

冬天來了希望大家保暖。
祝福大家健康幸福!

文 / 侯少思

A Yearning for Mauritius (Part 3)

Translated by Mike How & Clifford Lam

I came back from my latest trip to Mauritius more than two months ago now. Just like in previous trips, as soon as the plane landed, I was overcome by this euphoric feeling of being "home again"! Paradise was right there in front of my eyes, I could feel this deep love of mine for this land. It was an indescribable feeling! Morning had just broken, I was all perked up during the early morning ride from Plaisance to Port Louis, eyes wide open, head turning left and right absorbing the scenery as it rolled by. I could see the mountains glistening in the morning sun and a deep blue ocean shimmering in the distance. What a sight to behold! Deep in my heart, I was thanking God for the opportunity to reconnect one more time with this land that I love so dearly. Mauritius, O motherland of mine, how sweet is thy beauty, how sweet is thy fragrance...how true are these words!

This time around I had a different program for my stay. In fact, the 3 weeks that I had planned were far too short, as they always seem to be for this kind of visit. First I spent a week in a beautiful holiday resort in Balaclava to welcome and entertain my sister on her first visit to Mauritius together with her daughter and family. Then, my friend CL had invited me to join him for his 50th RCPL reunion at a Blue Bay Resort. For me, I had the pleasure of meeting a few people whom I knew before and also made some new friends too.

Thérèse and I made a short hop to Reunion Island where we spent 4 days visiting the place for the first time. It was not a bad first impression but not very exciting either. On the surface, I feel the *Reunionais* have it real good and they all seem to enjoy a relaxing and pampered life. In a system where a state pension is already earned the moment you are born, there is certainly not many other places on earth which can boast of such state *largesse*. How I would have loved to be one of them, no need to struggle in life. I can go fishing every day, no pressure to catch anything, a heavenly easy life! At night, I can dance

my sega in front of the camp fire and I'll be happy...true paradise on earth. Next time, I know already where I will be going...Rodrigues, another beautiful island about which I have heard so much about, where people are welcoming, nice and simple and no modern day pollution.

Every time I go back to Mauritius, I would stay with my cousin/sister-in-law in the *Reine de la Paix* area. My daily exercise would be to walk up the nearby *Montagne Signaux* early in the morning to enjoy the view and the fresh air. After breakfast, I would head to "en ville" (the city centre) on foot. Needless to say, I know all the laneways and byways of Port Louis as the back of my hand, every nook and cranny of the city is no secret to me. I grew up in the Remy Ollier/La Paix streets area in Port Louis and there I would find myself walking right down good old memory lane. Within a half a kilometre walk, I would be overwhelmed by so many nostalgic memories of old and so many stories I would like to tell. I could still see the old "*la boutique Lo Nam*" at one street corner, run down and frozen in time. I felt like going in and buying some of the mouth-watering "*mangues confies*" that used to delight my palate 50 years ago, but sadly, it has closed down for a while now. Across the street, I could remember James and his delicious *niook yans* and *sowmai*. Down the street, if you want to enjoy a good ice cream, there was Café Snow White. Further on, there was snack bar Mama and its trend-setting juke box and telebox, not to mention its signature food fare: congee and fried noodles. Close by were the Chinese restaurants of the day, Rayon D'Or, Lai Min, Onu, which were the hotspots of the Chinese culinary scene. There were other popular snack bars nearby: Ding Dong and Café International and more Chinese restaurants such as Au Ciel Bleu, Hotel Gros Piti and Hotel Central, which served some of the best food in town in those days.

At the four corners of La Rampe and Royal Streets, you would see street vendors selling more Hakka snacks such as *mikaopan*, *sien ngin pan*, *vooyan*, *kiowpan* and the obligatory *niookyans*, *vanyans* and *sowmai*! Alas, these images are not there anymore, swept into the dustbin of history by a newly found affluence, new social values, new realities of a changing world. I should also mention that in other parts of Port Louis, I could still remember other street food vendors who have also done pretty well selling Indian snacks such as *dipain frire*, *gato-piments*, *tibadia*, *pootoo*, *oonday*, *dalpouri*, *roti*, *alouda*, *colfi malai*, etc, comfort foods that we grew up on and still miss so much!

One early morning, I made my usual trip to the City and there at "*La Rue Ti-Montagne*" I stopped and gazed down the street looking for the "*perron*" where so many of my

youthful dreams started. Like so many other things, it too was gone, displaced by the construction of a new commercial building. Sad! However, the old colonial stone curb was still there and I snapped a few pictures (see below) just to remind me of a place which still harbor so many fond memories of a bygone era.



In those early years, Port Louis' cultural scene was both colourful and exciting. Once a year, Chan Chak stadium would be the scene of festivities to celebrate the "double ten" event marking the national day of Nationalist China. There would be basket-ball competitions, song and dance shows, beauty pageant show and even a baby contest with a winner that may be known to us! On the other side of the Chinese political aisle, there was the Chinese Middle School (Sin Fah) which staged the "October 1" celebrations to mark the national day of Communist China. The other calendar event of the year would be the celebration of the birthday of "*Sin Tee Koong*" at Les Salines, known particularly for the chaotic scenes when the *soo mien* (birthday noodles) are distributed at night!

Remember the old banquet halls in Port Louis, *Koong Chin* (Century Hall) on *La Rue La Rampe*, *Tchook Lim* (Cabane Bambous) on Royal Street, *Kwong Niet Loong* on *La Rue Ti-Montagne* where many a wedding were celebrated and dance parties ("*balles*") were organized for the young?

Of course, there was the biggest Chinese event of the year, the Chinese New Year celebrations with all the festivities at home with our families and outside with our friends. It was, as it still is, a public holiday for the entire country. The main talk-of-the-town event, especially for the young, was the big dance party that was held every year at the Curepipe Town Hall, where everyone would love to be seen at. They would dance the night away to the sweet sounds of live bands. Remember the

Nightbirds? Lucien Pouzet? Karl Brasse? Gerard Cimiotti? Police Band? Typhoon Band?

In reality, material things may not have been as plentiful in those days as they are today. But, poor man has poor man's happiness too. Sometimes happiness can be found in very simple things, it is often just a state of mind!

I am very lucky and happy to have the opportunity to talk about the sweet memories of my early years in this newsletter. In the future, I hope other members of our community will come forward and recount their own stories too.

Winter is here, keep warm and I wish you all happiness and good health.

Hakka Sayings (客家俗語)

By Mike How & Clifford Lam

Paan Téyw Naam Kiang (搬头抱颈)

Describes a very close relationship between two good friends. It conjures the image of two kids horsing around and having fun and hugging each other's neck.

Tien Téyw khé (癲头鸡)

Describes a crazy or wacky person. Translated literally, it means: "Chicken with a crazy head".

Mor kwee kee (么规矩)

Describes someone (usually a young person) who has no manners and is disrespectful towards his peers i.e. someone with a poor upbringing.

Mor Téyw Sin (么头神)

Describes a forgetful person with a poor memory

Mor Vee Foong (么威风)

Describes someone with a poor personality, without a good standing or public persona.

Mor Mien Ken Ngin (么面见人)

Describes someone who is ashamed to show his face because of some dishonourable act he may have committed. Translated literally, it means "Don't have a face to see people".

MCAO News



MCAO Annual Mid-Autumn Festival Luncheon

The annual Mid-Autumn Festival Luncheon was held on September 22, 2018 at the Sky Dragon Chinese Restaurant in Chinatown. The luncheon was well attended with over 100 members and guests in attendance.



Mid-Autumn Festival Luncheon (Sept 2018)

Visit of Philip Ah Chuen

Well known Mauritian entrepreneur, philanthropist and educator Philip Ah Chuen attended our Mix & Mingle gathering on October 6, 2018 and gave an excellent and interesting talk on "Serving the Country" and his role and contributions to helping his fellow countrymen in

Mauritius in his professional life as well as through his charitable and philanthropic endeavors.

He also took the opportunity to help in fund-raising efforts for the Ming Tek Centre in Mauritius, which has recently produced a well-received ballet show depicting the history of Chinese immigration in Mauritius. DVD's of the show, *"Du Fleuve Jaune au Bleu de L'Océan Indien"* were available for purchase with proceeds going to the Ming Tek School of Dance.



Talk by Philip Ah Chuen (Oct 2018)



Mental Health Workshop

A workshop on **"Mental Health"** was held at the Parkway Forest CC on November 17, 2018. It was presented by Dr Chu from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

A very informative and well-presented talk was greatly appreciated by the large and interested audience that was present for this important subject.



Mental Health Workshop (November 2018)

Upcoming Events

MCAO Annual Christmas Party 2018

When: Saturday December 15, 2018
6:00 PM- 11:00 PM

Where: Saint Jean de Lalande Catholic Elementary School Gymnasium,
500 Sandhurst Circle, Toronto, ON M1S 3Y7
(1 block south of Finch, east of McCowan)

Cost: Adults: \$15
Youth & Students: \$10
Kids (under 12): Free

Due to overwhelming demand, all tickets are now sold out. We thank all members for their great support.

MCAO Chinese New Year Banquet 2018

The MCAO Chinese New Year Banquet 2018 will be held on Saturday February 23, 2019 at the NKS Banquet Hall in Unionville.

Please stay tuned for details as they become available.

Laughter...the Best Medicine



Wife: "Honey, can you please help me clean the garden?"

Husband: "Do I look like a gardener?"

Wife: "Sorry, honey! OK, can you fix the bathroom door then?"

Husband: "Do I look like a carpenter...?"

Then, the husband walks out. After a few hours, he came back and found the garden clean and the bathroom door fixed!

Husband: "I know, dear, you can do this all by yourself!"

Wife: "It's not me"

Husband: "Who then?"

Wife: "John, our neighbour"

Husband: "How much did you pay him?"

Wife: "No money. He just gave me 2 options, bread or sex"

Husband: "Hope you gave him bread!"

Wife: "Do I look like a baker?"



Beggar: "Give me food"

Man: "I'll give you vodka and cigarettes"

Beggar: "I don't drink and I don't smoke"

Man: "I take you to the races"

Beggar: "I don't gamble"

Man: "I will get you a girlfriend"

Beggar: "No. I love only my wife"

Man: "OK, I will give you food, but first you have to come to my house"

Beggar: "Why?"

Man: "I want my wife to see what state people get into when they don't drink, smoke, gamble and only love their wives!"



Un couple se balade en voiture à la campagne. Suite à une discussion plutôt acerbe, ils ne se parlent plus. Passant devant une ferme où on voit des ânes et des cochons, le mari ose briser le silence et dit : «Tiens, de la famille à toi? ». Son épouse répond du tac au tac : « Oui, par alliance! ».



MCAO Sponsors

MCAO wishes to extend a deep and sincere thank-you to all its sponsors and members for their generous financial and in-kind contributions to help the association deliver on its mission objectives. Their generosity and support are truly appreciated.

Please support our Sponsors with your business!

For donations and sponsorship opportunities, please contact:

Joyce Leung (jmcleung@yahoo.com) or Allan Wan (647-824-3343).

MCAO Membership

New members are most welcome! For new membership enrolment, please contact:

Joyce Leung (jmcleung@yahoo.com)

Contact Us

If you have any questions or comments, please email us at: clubmcao@gmail.com

You can also visit our website at:

www.mauritiuschineseassociation.com/

Picture Gallery





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