

**EARLY CHINESE  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
STUDIOS IN  
SINGAPORE**

**Activity  
Booklet**



前尘影事  
FROM BRUSH TO LENS  
EARLY CHINESE PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIOS  
IN SINGAPORE  
新加坡早期华人照相馆

**SUN YAT SEN NANYANG MEMORIAL HALL**

This exhibition displays many portraits and photographs taken over 100 years ago by early photography studios in Singapore.

Discover more about early photography studios and the people of early Singapore as you walk around the gallery!

## Museum Etiquette



Leave food and drinks outside



Use only pencils to write and draw on the activity booklet



Turn off the flash when taking photographs



Speak and walk softly in the galleries



Be gentle with our interactive displays and equipment

Do note that the artefacts listed may not be displayed in order, so do be prepared to explore the gallery to find them!



## Chinese Superstitions about Photography

When photography was introduced to the Chinese, the Chinese were not open to using the technology due to certain superstitious beliefs.

**REARRANGE** the words to find out more about Chinese superstitions and preferences regarding photography.

1. The Chinese believed that a reproduced image of an individual contained part of his or her \_\_\_\_\_ (l s u o) and if the image is destroyed the person might \_\_\_\_\_ (e d i).
2. Hence, many painted portraits were only made after the person has \_\_\_\_\_ (s a p s d e, w y a a).
3. When taking photographs in the past, the Chinese usually preferred a \_\_\_\_\_ (l u f l, d y b o) shot with the face, ears, hands and feet clearly displayed. They believed that any missing body parts in the photograph will cause the individual to lose them in real life.



Collection of National Museum of Singapore

## DID YOU KNOW?

Early Chinese studios would photograph individuals in a setting and posture similar to traditional ancestral portraiture.

# Before Photography

In the olden days, people recorded their appearance through painted portraits. Such portraits in China mainly featured ancestors who have passed away. They were meant to remind the younger generation to r \_\_\_\_\_ and h \_\_\_\_\_ one's ancestors.



**THINK!**  
What are some of the things that you and your family do to remember your ancestors today?

**LOOK** for this pair of ancestral portraits in the gallery



Gift of Ronney Tan  
Koon Siang, National  
University of Singapore  
Museum Collection

## DID YOU KNOW?

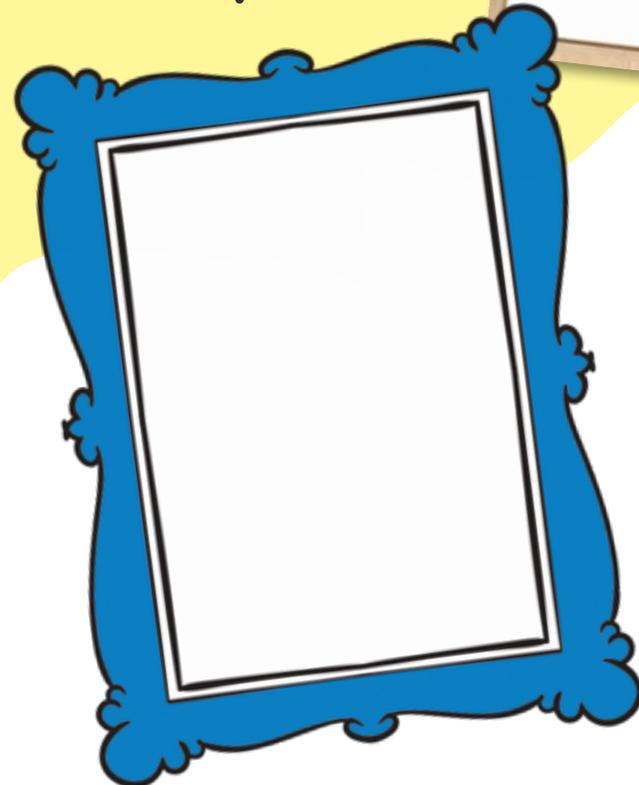
The way the sitters were dressed and the objects included in a portrait were specially chosen to tell us more about who they are, as well as their social and economic status.

**LOOK CLOSELY** at the pair of portraits on the previous page, do you notice something missing? Find out what the missing object is and try **drawing** it in the box below.



## LET'S DRAW!

Create a self-portrait or a portrait of someone special to you. What will you include in it to tell more about yourself or the person?



## Early European Studios in Singapore

The first advertisement for photography services in Singapore appeared in \_\_\_\_\_ (year) by French photographer Gaston Dutronquoy, who was also a p \_\_\_\_\_ p \_\_\_\_\_ and a miniaturist.



Collection of Mr. Loo Say Chong

**LOOK for this artefact in the gallery.**

This photograph was taken by a prominent Scottish photographer, who was one of the first photographers to travel extensively in Asia. His name is found on the back of the card.

What is the photographer's name?

\_\_\_\_\_

### DID YOU KNOW?

The individual in this photograph was Hoo Ah Kay, better known as W \_\_\_\_\_, and an area near the Memorial Hall is named after him!

**LOOK** for this artefact in the gallery.



Collection of National Museum of Singapore

G. R. Lambert & Co. also indicated on the back of their portraits that they were the official photographer for two monarchs in Southeast Asia. Indicate who they were in the blanks below.

1) K \_\_\_\_\_ of S \_\_\_\_\_

2) S \_\_\_\_\_ of J \_\_\_\_\_



①



②

These distinctive logos on the portrait represent the royal coats of arms of both monarchs. Can you guess which coat of arms belonged to which royal family?



Collection of Mr. Kelvin Lee

## Early Chinese Photography Studios

It was common for early Chinese photography studios in Singapore to advertise themselves as "Photographer, \_\_\_\_\_ and Portrait Painters", since many Chinese photographers were former \_\_\_\_\_ and portrait painters who catered to Western clients in the southern ports of Guangzhou and Hong Kong.

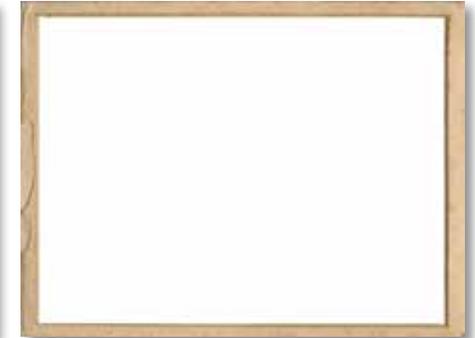
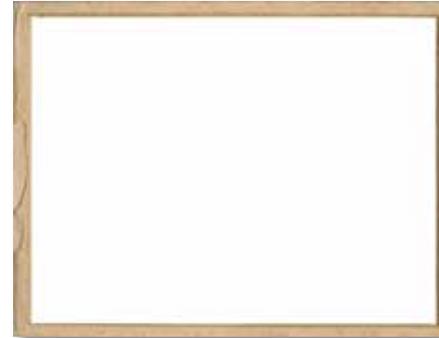
Hint: the answer can be found on the back of this artefact

LOOK for these two artefacts in the gallery.



Left and right: Collection of Mr. Kelvin Lee

**SPOT** the missing objects in the artefacts above and **DRAW** them in the boxes below.



### DID YOU KNOW?

Such small photographs were known as *carte de visite* ("visiting card" in French). Some people would also collect photographs of exotic lands and prominent individuals.



**THINK** about what you or your friends like to collect today. Why do you find collecting enjoyable?



## A Family Focus: The Lee Family Photographers

Lee Brothers Studio on H \_\_\_\_\_  
S \_\_\_\_\_ was set up by two  
brothers – Lee King Yan and Lee  
Poh Yan. Originally from Guangdong  
province in China, King Yan and Poh  
Yan had many relatives who were in  
the photography business.

**LOOK** for this artefact in the gallery.



Collection of  
Mr. Loo Say Chong



This is a glass-plate negative of a  
group photograph taken by Lee King  
Yan at an important event. What was  
the important event?

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### DID YOU KNOW?

Lee King Yan and  
Lee Poh Yan were keen  
supporters of Dr. Sun Yat Sen,  
who later overthrew the Qing  
government in China in 1911  
and set up a Chinese  
republic.

This photograph was taken in 1905 at Wan Qing Yuan (presently  
the memorial hall). Can you figure out at which spot this  
photograph was taken? Try taking a photograph at the same spot!



Courtesy  
of National  
Archives

Compare the above photograph (located in Gallery 2 of the  
memorial hall) with the image on the glass-plate negative. **LOOK  
CLOSELY** at the clothes they wore and **CIRCLE** the correct answer.

Dark clothes appear  
**(lighter/darker)** on the  
glass negative, while lighter  
coloured clothes appear  
**(lighter/darker)**

Hence, the darker and lighter  
parts of the image on a glass-plate  
negative are **(the same/reversed)**  
from what they are in reality.

# Capturing Colonial Singapore



## DID YOU KNOW?

As portraits taken by Chinese photography studios were generally \_\_\_\_\_ than European studios, they attracted more customers of all \_\_\_\_\_ including Europeans.

**LOOK** for the following studio portraits in the gallery and **MATCH** them to their correct identity.

**FILL** in the blanks based on the information given in the captions.

1.



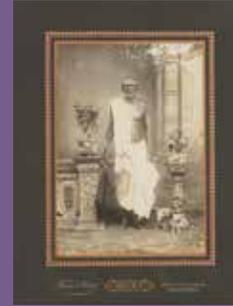
Lee Brothers Studio Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

2.



Reproduced with permission of Mr. Kelvin Lee

3.



Gift of Mr. M. Meyyappan, reproduced with permission of Indian Heritage Centre

4.



Collection of National Museum of Singapore

5.



Reproduced with permission of Singapore Police Force

### CHINESE

Do you know on which special occasion this studio portrait was taken?

\_\_\_\_\_

### EURASIAN

The bridal couple later had a son who became the first Asian Commissioner of Police in Singapore. His name was

\_\_\_\_\_

### CHETTIAR

The Chettiars in Singapore were involved in the m \_\_\_\_\_ industry.

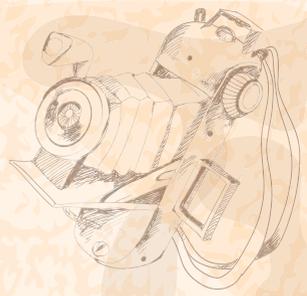
**THINK!** After examining the artefacts in this exhibition, what words would you use to describe Singapore in the past? Have you learnt something new today?





## Spot the dog!

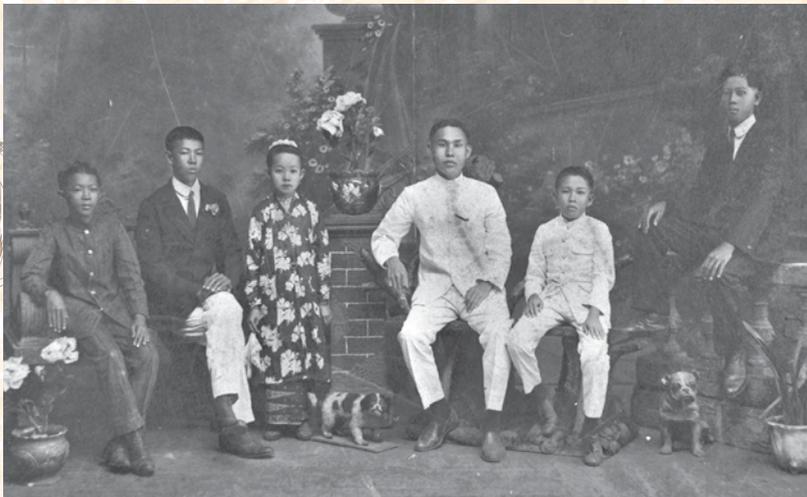
Can you spot  
my friends in the  
photographs?



Lee Brothers Studio Collection, courtesy  
of National Archives of Singapore



Lee Brothers Studio Collection, courtesy  
of National Archives of Singapore



The Peranakan Association Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Decorate this frame with the  
stamps at the activity corner  
and paste your photo here!

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