



LIM BOON KENG - THE MUSICAL

STELLA KON @ LIM SING PO

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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LIM BOON KENG - THE MUSICAL

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School of Humanities and Social Sciences

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LIM BOON KENG

The Musical

Libretto by Stella Kon

Music by Desmond Moey

4. SYNOPSIS AND LIST OF SONGS
5. THE LIBRETTO
6. NOTES
 - iii. Yu Loo and her fictitious descendants
 - iv. Lead sheets for four songs

LIM BOON KENG THE MUSICAL - SYNOPSIS AND LIST OF SONGS

SYNOPSIS		SONG		
SECTION	CONTENT		TITLE	BY
1. Post-War Trial	Boon Keng’s story opens with the disgrace and humiliation of his trial for Collaboration. JENNY narrates: she is a descendant of Boon Keng’s sister. She was shocked to learn he was once on trial	1	Traitor Lim Boon Keng	ensemble
2. LBK’s Controversial Nomination	Singapore 1895. The chorus of Straits Chinese argues about “ <u>Dr Lim Boon Keng</u> ” – then BK is nominated to the Legislative Council. He thanks everyone with his catch phrase <i>Merci Beaucoup</i>	2	Dr Lim Boon Keng	ensemble
		3	“Laugh at Life,”	Boon Keng and ensemble s
3. Jenny Questions	Jenny narrates: regrets that so little of Boon Keng’s personal life is on record	4	Tell Me Who You Are	Jenny
4. Boon Keng’s Public Work	Editor of Straits Budget: recaps BK’s Lifetime of great works and the award of OBE	5. 6.	Guns of War and Hear My Appeal	Boon Keng
5. Reforming The Babas	Boon Keng and friends try to reform the Straits Chinese on many issues.	7.	Reforming the Babas	BK and Ensemble
6. Marrying Margaret	Boon Keng courts Margaret. They pledge to a common vision of educating the world.	8	Don’t Want To Marry A Baba	BK and Margaret
		9	Promised my Life	BK and Margaret
7 Founding SCGS	SONG ONG SIANG and Marg persuade the Babas to found the school for girls	10	School for Girls	BK Margaret and SOS
8 China Concerns	WONG NAI SIONG narrates his activities with BK for China Reform. BK opposes Sun Yat Sun. The Chinese Revolution succeeds.	11	Revolution or Reform.	BK Sun Yat Sen and ensemble
9 SCGS Flourishing	Prize-giving day The little girls sing a song with candle dance	12	Light a Little Candle	Girls of SCGS
10. Margaret’s death	Margaret dies, leaving 4 children	13	Hold me in Your Heart	Margaret
11. Grace Yin	Jenny relates Family recollections of Grace. Grace talks about her home Kulangyu.	14	Grace’s Song	Grace
12. Business and Banking	Song Ong Siang narrates about BK’s Business activities.	15	Rubber Boom Boom	ensemble
13. Boon Keng leaves for Amoy	Straits Chinese say good bye to BK and sing song of their joie de vivre	16	Promised my Life-First Reprise	Boon Keng

		17	Sambal Blachan	ensemble
	ACT TWO			
14 Boon Keng in Amoy	Jenny narrates: BOON KENG's time in Amoy. Grace sings of Kulangyu. The dream didn't work out. Boon Keng lost his money.	18	Kulangyu	Grace
15 Return to Singapore	Babas welcome BOON KENG back from Amoy. Judith's husband Tommy now part of the Chorus of Babas, talks about future self-government. With Song Ong Siang, BOON KENG sings one elegiac verse about his retirement.	19 20	Sambal Blachan reprise Sunlight On the Water (Preview)	Ensemble Boon Keng
16 Japanese Occupation	Chorus of Babas speaks about the War, Mime: The Occupation begins; Boon Keng saves Tommy from Sook Ching, colludes with Shinozaki to set up Overseas Chinese Association to save more people. Shinozaki dismissed from Singapore. Watanabe demands OCA raise \$50. Million. BOON KENG and OCA have to get money from the population – resented and spit upon. Boon Keng presents cheque to Watanabe. Boon Keng feels miserable. Margaret's spirit comes to comfort him.	21 22	Dark Days Hold me in Your Heart Reprise	Ensemble Margaret
17 Children of Syonan	Next time Watanabe looks for Boon Keng he is very drunk and incapacitated. The Occupation continues – little girls of SCGS sing their same song in Japanese.	23	Children of Syonan (reprise Light a Candle)	Chorus of SCGS girls
18 Tribunal	Occupation ends, the British return. Scene reverts to the Tribunal of the opening scene. Shinozaki as witness tells his role in setting up OCA .BOON KENG cleared by tribunal, the Babas still despise him.			
19 The Recluse	Boon Keng is at home, feeling that life has no meaning. Margaret appears, to comfort him and assure	23	Sunlight on the Water	BOON KENG and Margaret

	<p>him that his name will live with honour forever.</p> <p>Tommy and Judith visit him with their daughter. Tommy is working for self-government for Singapore. Mao Tse tung is going to eradicate Chinese culture. Boon Keng is fired to action and plans to found the China Society.</p>	24	Promised My Life - Second Reprise	Boon Keng
20 The China Society	<p>The China Society is founded with celebration and toasting and a jolly song.</p> <p>Jenny sings an inspirational finale and all join in,</p>	25 26	Laugh at Life Reprise Tell Me Who You Are Reprise	Ensemble Jenny and ensemble

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V5.3

LIM BOON KENG

The Musical

Libretto by Stella Kon

Music by Desmond Moey

CHARACTERS

Main Parts

LIM BOON KENG between ages of 26 and 81

MARGARET Boon Keng's first wife

SONG ONG SIANG Boon Keng's best friend, one year younger than Boon Keng

JENNY, aged 40+, Yu Loo's descendant.

Minor Parts

GRACE Boon Keng's second wife

WONG NAI SIONG Margaret's father, Pastor of Foochow Methodist church

YU LOO Boon Keng's sister - six years older than Boon Keng – speaks no English, only Nonya Malay

(A table in the Notes to the script shows Yu Loo's descendants and their ages)

JOOLEE - Yu Loo's daughter

JUDITH – Yu Loo's grand-daughter, Jenny's grandmother

JULIANA – Jenny's mother

TOMMY – Judith's husband, Jenny's grandfather

SHINOZAKI Japanese civilian attached to the military arm

WATANABE Colonel in Japanese Occupation forces

GOVERNOR of Singapore.

EDITOR OF Straits Budget

VOICE of Commander of British Military Tribunal

Extras: Chinese Nationalist Reformers– Western dress

Chinese Nationalist Revolutionaries – Western dress

Japanese soldiers

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Three Baby amahs, in black and white uniform, carrying a series of infants wrapped in long trailing cloths.

CHORUS OF STRAITS CHINESE OF SINGAPORE (Nonyas and Babas)

-- includes Boon Keng's close friends, SEOW POH LENG and TAN BOO LIAT.

CHORUS OF GIRLS OF CHINESE GHIRLS SCHOOL

LIM BOON KENG

The Musical

Spoken Dialogue shown in this font. **Lyrics shown in this font. Recited verse shown in this font.**

Production should be as simple as possible, no heavy sets, movement between sections fluid and easy.

Music is from a live band, including Chinese pipa and the big Chinese Drum.

ACT ONE

Section One

The date is 1945, when the British returned to Singapore after WW2. Discordant music. Shadowy figures form a tribunal over which flies the British flag. Boon Keng, aged 76, is dragged to a raised dock, where he is pierced by a harsh spotlight.

A disembodied voice reads the charges against him.

VOICE Dr Lim Boon Keng! You are charged with treason against His Britannic Majesty during the recent War. You are charged with collaboration with the enemy. You are charged with aiding and assisting the enemy in the oppression of the people of Singapore.

CHORUS (*Muttering in the dark*) Boon Keng. Boon Keng Boon Keng Boon Keng --

SONG #1 TRAITOR

He's a traitor Dr Lim Boon Keng!

He's a traitor Dr Lim Boon Keng!

He's a traitor Dr Lim Boon Keng!

Boon keng answers in a low voice amplified

BOON KENG I deny the charges.

VOICE Do you hear what they are saying, on the streets of Singapore?

BOON KENG My people have turned against me ..

VOICE Who are your people?

**BOON KENG I am a subject of the British Empire, I am a son of the Chinese race,
I am a Straits Chinese of Singapore.**

VOICE Do you wish to answer the charges brought against you?

BOON KENG I have served my people all my days. I have kept faith with them.

My whole life must be the answer to those charges.

VOICE Let us look into this case –

The people spit on him, curse and throw rotten tomatoes as BOON KENG is dragged away, leaving stage empty.

Spotlight: Jenny, professional woman of our times, holding research notes, speaks to audience.

Music Underscore : "Tell me who you are."

JENNY Lim Boon Keng. You know his name, right? There's that Boon Keng train station that's named after him. Seems he's a kind of ancestor of mine – his sister was my grandmother's great-grandmother. I was rather proud of being connected to a famous man. But I had quite a shock when I found out that after the war he was tried by the British, for collaboration with the Japanese.

I was doing some research -- my old school, SCGS, Singapore Chinese Girls' School, they asked me to do an article for their magazine. I thought it would be fascinating, to do a piece on Lim Boon Keng, my distant relative. I learned he was arrested and put on trial --- like a war criminal.

My mother, Juliana, she remembers him. She was just a child when Lim Boon Keng died. But she remembers visiting her Pek Kong Chor, in his house on Paterson Road. An old two-storied wooden bungalow, shadowed by the fringe of leaves dangling from the attap-thatched roof. The old man in his chair, calling for his drink – *(imitates the quavering high pitched voice, giggling)* "Whiskey! – *(a toast)* Merci beaucoup! "

Merci beaucoup. That was his drinking toast. It sounds like the Hokkien words – Meh Si Bo Ku – "very soon we die." Inauspicious words, to the superstitious -- a strange thing to say.

He had few visitors, he who had once been the most respected of the Straits Chinese. He sat alone in a room lined with furniture, the big old rosewood chairs, that no one came to sit in. When he died, it was a small affair. There should have been a big Chinese funeral, my mother said, for a man of his great fame. There should have been a huge procession that took all morning and blocked up Chinatown ... Nothing. She remembers – just a modest cortege, walking a short way near his home.

What happened? Why was he called a traitor? Why did he fall?

(She looks at research notes)

Lim Boon Keng was first appointed to public office, fifty years before that War Crimes trial. He was 26 years old when he was nominated to the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements – a board of civilians and others, who advised the Governor of Singapore. Boon Keng had already made a name for himself, on the social media of the day, writing to the papers, speaking up at public meetings and community functions. Stirring up public opinion and criticizing the Government, not exactly a recommendation to the Governor.

c) **Section 2: Controversy over Nomination**

Singapore 1895. The Chorus is a crowd gathered at the Town Hall (now the Asian Civilisation Museum). BOON KENG himself is not in sight. In the Crowd:

The British Governor and some Westerners – members of Legislative Council

Chinese Revolutionary -- (Western clothes – black and white.)

CHORUS OF STRAITS CHINESE includes Boon Keng's supporters *who are Straits Chinese with short hair and modern Western clothes – (SONG ONG SIANG, Tan Boo Liat and Seow Poh Leng) and Conservative Straits Chinese – with long queue and Chinese clothes.*

Onlookers include well-to-do merchants of other races eg a Parsee, Arab, Armenian, Chettiar.

Song #2 DR LIM BOON KENG

Ensemble

GOVERNOR:

**Firebrand, he's a trouble maker,
I have heard that's so, Doctor Lim Boon Keng!**

CONSERVATIVE BABA

**Upstart, young tradition - breaker,
over turns our ways, Doctor Lim Boon Keng!**

SONG ONG SIANG

Splendid mind, scholarship in Edinburgh, educated to a high degree!

TAN BOO LIAT

**Best to carry our cause, in the Legislature,
name him to the Council Lim Boon Keng!**

CONSERVATIVE BABA

**No! he never will do,
there to represent the Strait Chinese!**

ALL

He's/Not our Legislative Council man!

(INSTRUMENTAL interlude follows over which the next dialogue section is spoken)

GOVERNOR: You local worthies are here to propose your choice, for the candidate, whom I shall nominate to the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements. Some have proposed the name of Dr Lim Boon Keng. But Dr Llim is a firebrand, a trouble maker! Furthermore he is very young!

CONSERVATIVE BABA: (indignantly) He's only twenty-six! He's a nobody!

SECOND CONSERVATIVE BABA How can people respect him?

CONSERVATIVE BABA: He's an orphan! He has no money!

SECOND CONSERVATIVE BABA He's on the make for his own interests!

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SONG ONG SIANG: Dr Lim is already known as a public speaker – he has won universal acclaim!

GOVERNOR: I am concerned about Dr Lim’s loyalty to the British Empire. He supports those Chinese who rebel against the Chinese Emperor!

SONG ONG SIANG: (*hotly*) My friend Boon Keng is not a Revolutionary!

SONG #2: DR LIM BOON KENG Continued

**GOVERNOR: Boon Keng! could he be a traitor,
is he really true, to the British crown!**

**CHINESE REVOLUTIONARY SUPPORTER Boon Keng! that collaborator!
White man's running dog! Lets his people down!**

SONG ONG SIANG Sir, I have letters here from Europeans and Chinese.. from merchants, clan leaders, and the Straits Times newspaper. One and all, they urge you to appoint Lim Boon Keng to the Legislative Council!

CHORUS 2 (sung) Raise to Council – Lim Boon Keng!

GOVERNOR (*spoken*) I see that public opinion is on his side. Call Dr Lim. Inform him, that it is my pleasure to appoint him as an Unofficial Member of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements.

Dance. BOON KENG enters – carried high by his supporters on their shoulders

CHORUS Boon Keng! Boon keng! Speech! Speech!

BOON KENG Here at the precipice of a new century
East faces west, cultures poised to merge or contend –
The world is turning, the world is turning upside down
Anything is possible, in the twentieth century!
I, a poor boy from the Singapore River,
in the smoky stone city of Edinburgh
ascended the heights of modern learning.
I returned, transformed, to help transform my people!

(Ensemble Yay! Boon Keng! Boon Keng!)

You have raised me to represent you on this council,
Where we the governed, help to govern ourselves.
One day perhaps full self-rule, full freedom.,
In the twentieth century, anything is possible!

Applause and cheers. For a moment, the people freeze as for a photo shoot for posterity – the lighting goes sepia-toned and there is a flash of magnesium flare.

BOON KENG Thank you very much! (*The people laugh as he playfully runs through a range of dialects, while drinks are served*) Terima kaseh. Kum siah. Xieh Xieh. Arigato Gozaimas. Ungalukku Nanri. Danke schon. (*he toasts the company*) Merci Beaucoup!

CONSERVATIVE CHINESE MAN (*shocked by the inauspicious words*) hah? Meh si boh ku? Death not far away! Choy choy.

BOON KENG'S FRIENDS (*laugh and register the bi-lingual pun.*) Merci Beaucoup! Thank you very much! Mehsi Boh ku! Very soon we die!

BOON KENG (*drinking and toasting*) We remember -- Death is never far from us -- so we must always laugh – and be thankful for our life! Merci Beaucoup!

Dance with a chorus of Nonyas and Babas. Note that unmarried Nonya girls do not appear in public.

Song #3: LAUGH AT LIFE'

Boon Keng and ensemble

**Laugh at life! be light of heart,
for you know there is no use in regretting,
you have to smile, a little while,
and no troubles will be troubling you.
Dance for joy, and raise a song,
make a happy sound of thanks for our living,
so ev'ry day, in ev'ry way,
we will find a time to say,
merci beaucoup.**

**Not long, before we die,
so laugh while the sun is shining,
no use repining, you don't have to cry,
you can laugh at life!**

**V2. Laugh at life, the time is short,
we should never let the grass grow beneath us,
We've got to strive while we're alive,
to achieve so much that we want to do.**

**Dance and sing when light grows dim,
we'll remember all the best of our story,
we'll smile and say at end of day,
we give thanks for our living,
merci beaucoup.**

**V3. Laugh at life, be light at heart,
for you know there is no use in regretting,
you have to smile, a little while,
and give thanks before we start to forget!**

**Meh si boh ku, oh merci beaucoup, for ev'ry thing,
meh si boh ku, oh merci beaucoup,
we dance and sing,
merci beaucoup
merci beaucoup...!**

All exit

Section 3 – Jenny questions

JENNY What happened ? What was his life all about?

There is a public record in the newspapers such as the *Straits Budget*, in British government records, and in the history written by his good friend Song Ong Siang. Boon Keng himself wrote books and articles, lectured and spoke. But there's nothing personal in the records. No personal letters, diaries, journals have survived for us, through the chaos of war and personal uprooting.

Boon Keng's Yu Loo, my seven-times great-grand-mother, she never went to school, never learned to read and write. His first wife, Margaret. A beautiful, brilliant woman, married to Boon Keng for ten years, bore him four sons. Then she died ... Her sons mostly went to America. No one in Singapore now remembers Margaret, or her life with Boon Keng.

What can we know, about Boon Keng and the people closest to him? No voices from the past survive. Their griefs and sufferings all flow away, like water on the flowing river.

Song #4: TELL ME WHO YOU ARE

- Jenny

**Tell me who you are,
how I wish I'd known your face,
wish I'd known that wisdom in your eyes,
and your smile, and your kind embrace.**

**Tell me all your deeds,
how you won such great esteem,
share the secrets of your hidden heart,
of your hope, of your goal, your dream!**

**Careless time dims the years, the old pages fade away,
and who now will recall all your life and your fame?
Like a sound on the wind, come echoes from the city you knew,
Voices from those aged streets still call on your name.**

**Out of the silence, they're crying, calling, singing,
here by the river, they know you do not die!**

**Tell me who you are,
how you laboured and you strove,**

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**tell me of your ardent heart on fire,
of your pain, of your joy, your love!**

Tell me who you are!

SECTION 4: Public Work

Jenny exit. Entry of Straits Budget Editor – a Brit in white tropical suit.

EDITOR I have the honour to be the Editor of the Straits Budget, the chief newspaper in the Crown Colony of Singapore. For thirty years we have been the admiring chronicler of the career of Dr Lim Boon Keng. It can confidently be said that no private citizen has contributed more to the public cause than the good doctor. The *Straits Budget* has on no less than five occasions recorded his recurrent nominations to the Legislative Council, where he has promoted measures regarding the welfare of his fellow Asiatics, as well as advising the Council on matters of education and health. His advice to the Municipal council, for example in the prevention of cholera and other contagious diseases, has been of benefit to all residents of the town. He has served on the Chinese Advisory Board, and on the Committee of Raffles Library and Museum.

We may note that Dr Lim Boon Keng was made a Justice of the Peace at the unprecedentedly early age of 28, a indication of the high esteem in which he was even then held by the community. He has used his influence since to promote a great number of worthy causes, among these the fund-raising for the King Edward VII Memorial Fund which endowed Singapore's College of Medicine.

During the dark period of the Great War which recently consumed the nations of Europe, Dr Lim made a significant contribution to Britain's war effort, which has now, in this victorious peace, led His Majesty's Government to bestow upon him the Order of the British Empire. We are delighted to congratulate Dr Lim upon this honour, the first time ever bestowed upon a Chinese in the Straits Settlements, and we do not hesitate to say most richly deserved for his noble and untiring efforts.

Editor exit. Boon Keng addresses the Chorus of Straits Chinese.

SONG #5: GUNS OF WAR

BOON KENG

**The guns of war are roaring
The night is full of flame
The nations clash in conflict
The earth is racked with pain
The peoples cry in tumult
A darkness fills the skies
The storm is growing wilder
The angry waters rise**

All exit except Ong Siang and Jenny.

Section 5. Reforming the Babas

JENNY My mother remembers seeing that big silver medal in Lim Boon Keng's house, the Order of the British Empire. The British gave him that medal, so how could he have been a traitor? Wasn't he one of those King's Chinese — those Straits Chinese so loyal to the British Empire? (*SONG ONG SIANG appears on stage as a speaker.*) Song Ong Siang was a King's Chinese too -- Boon Keng's closest friend, a lawyer, elder of the Presbyterian Church, writer of the great history of the Chinese in Singapore. Boon Keng and Ong Siang founded the Straits Chinese British Association – today we call it the Peranakan Association.

Jenny exits as Song Ong Siang steps up to address the audience.

SONG ONG SIANG Our people are the Straits Chinese or the Peranakans, truly the “anak,” the children of the land; born in this country, speaking its Malay language and adopting its customs. We speak our own patois of Malay mingled with several local tongues, from which our men are called the Babas and our gracious ladies, the Nyonyas. (*With a touch of hauteur*) We differentiate ourselves from those China-born, China-speaking immigrants who are now flooding into Singapore. Under the British Government we've learned to speak English and some of us have been fortunate enough to receive an excellent education. *Exemple gratia*, Boon Keng and I won the Queen's scholarship to study in Britain.

I knew Boon Keng in the Queen's scholarship class in Raffles Institution, under the Headmaster Mr Hullett. Boon Keng lost both his parents young, and when his father died he was going to leave school to go to work – his grand-mother made nonya cakes, absolutely delectable, and he was going to sell them to support the family. Mr Hullett would have none of that. He went off to see Mr Cheah Hong Lim, who used to employ Boon Keng's father and his grandfather too in his opium business. Hong Lim helped the family and paid for Boon Keng's education. I pipped Boon Keng for top place in the examination, I had some advantage I must admit, my father being a lawyer and all that sort of thing, but I was a year younger than Boon Keng and too young to take up the scholarship immediately. So Boon Keng went off to Edinburgh, the first Chinese boy to win the Queen's scholarship.

When he came back – there were the two of us, young professional men, he in his medical practice and I in my law partnership, full of zeal, ready to set the Singapore River on fire. “I've never forgotten Mr Hullett's words to us,” Boon Keng said to me once. “You who have received so much, owe a debt to your brothers who have been less fortunate.” And we tried, oh yes we tried, to change the world, to right

wrongs and help the suffering. Boon Keng gathered others, the educated men among us, to help drag our people into the twentieth century.

BOON KENG *with various helpers (Tan Boo Liat, Seow Poh Leng, Dr SC Yin) goes on a crusade to modernize the Babas... and makes enemies.*

SONG #7 REFORMING THE BABAS
BOON KENG AND THE STRAITS CHINESE

BOON KENG Babas and Nonyas, all my friends –
Time that the Baba's backwardness ends!

CHORUS Lim Boon Keng, what's the haste and hurry?
Why this great reforming flurry?

BOON KENG singles out a man with a traditional queue)

BOON KENG Why do we wear that long pig-tail?
That the Manchus demanded of every male.
We aren't now under the Manchu law!
No place for the pigtail in Singapore!

(mime of BOON KENG's friends cutting off Babas' queues, to protests and curses, and suspicion of Manchu Govt agents.)

CHORUS OF STRAITS CHINESE What's all this over-zealous burning,
All of our customs you're over turning –

BOON KENG Why do our women bind their feet?
Must they suffer to make their beauty complete?
Foot binding's a curse on the female sex!
It's not for women whom a man respects!

CHORUS This young fire-brand nags and pesters,
To change the customs of our ancestors!

BOON KENG Opium usage in Singapore
Is a great disgrace, a social sore!

Migrant workers and local men
Spend their days in the opium den
Killing themselves one pipe at a time –
Opium trading is a crime!

CHORUS Opium trading is real big business,
Running the farms is where the cash is.
British Government loves to tax it,
You going to be the one who attacks it?

Mime of seizing and breaking opium pipes. BOON KENG and another doctor, SC Yin, pick up an opium addict, say briskly to each other "The Opium Refuge!" "Free treatment!" and have him hauled away. British agents, opium merchants, Chinese Government agents join the Chorus:

**CHORUS Firebrand, he's a trouble maker,
Yes we see that's so, Doctor Lim Boon Keng!
Upstart, young tradition - breaker,
over turns our ways, Doctor Lim Boon Keng!
Doctor Lim Boon Keng!
Doctor Lim Boon Keng!**

SONG ONG SIANG It was an uphill task, trying to modernize Singapore, but we were undaunted . Boon Keng had so many irons in the fire. He had so many clubs and associations – assemblies of “Men of good will,” he said. There was the Straits Chinese Association of course; the Chinese Philomathic Society, Straits Philosophical Society, Chinese Recreation Club, Weekly Entertainment Club, Garden Club, City Club and so on and on. I said to him, “Yes old boy, of course we want to have an active civic society in Singapore – but do you have to build it all with your own hands?” Wherever there was an important cause, he was there, gathering support, organizing the raising of funds. People trusted him, you see. They said, “Boon Keng, if you ask us for money, we know it is not for yourself. We trust you will use it well.”

And in those early years – there was Margaret. Beautiful Margaret. Liberated, outspoken, like the new women we had met in the West. Her father was Wong Nai Siong, the pastor of the Foochow Methodist Church. In later years, he led his people to found a new colony in Sarawak, on land that Boon Keng helped him gain from the British ruler of Sarawak. Wong Nai Siang wanted his daughter to marry the young leader of the Straits Chinese. *(Exit SONG O S)*

d) [Section 6 Marrying Margaret.](#)

WONG NAI SIONG and Margaret are by the Cavanagh Bridge.

MARGARET Father – I don't want to meet this – this Baba!! They believe women are inferior creatures

–

WONG NAI SIONG My dear Margaret, you have studied in America and I have taught you in Chinese, until you excel all other women. But now it is not easy to find a husband for you! Not many men want an educated woman!

MARGARET I don't want to marry a Baba!

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WONG NAI SIONG I told Dr Lim that you were visiting Singapore. He is eager to meet you.

Wong introduces BOON KENG to Margaret and exits to leave them together.

BOON KENG Miss Wong --

MARGARET Dr Lim, my father has told me about the Babas of Singapore. I find that your treatment of women leaves much to be desired!

BOON KENG (*taken aback by her vehemence*) Our treatment of women!!

MARGARET I see you still follow that barbarous custom of footbinding! And the ladies I have met are totally uneducated, can't read or write --

BOON KENG I am all for the education of women.

SONG #8: DON'T WANT TO MARRY A BABA

Margaret and Boon Keng

**M: You say women are stupid, you say we are so dumb,
we should stay in our kitchen and in our home.**

**BK: Just find some girl, smart as a man,
I'd give her freedom, learn all she can!**

**M: You don't value the Nonya, you think she's just a fool,
she can't read her own letters, not been to school!**

**BK: I fear you're right, too bad it's true,
I wish our women could be like you!**

M: I don't want to marry a Baba! He won't turn my lights high!

**BOTH: In this modern world, my/your kind of girl
needs a modern kind of guy!**

**BK I wish Babas were wiser, they must wake up their minds,
if they don't learn to progress, they'll fall behind!**

**M: You talk more sense than I had thought,
I guess you're clever, you must be smart!**

**BK One wish burning within me, my heart ever impels,
I'd start raising a new school, for Chinese girls!**

**M: I like this plan! Let's make it true!
I want to help you, I'll build with you!**

**BK: Perhaps you can work with this Baba,
Let me turn your lights high,**

**BOTH: In this modern world, your/my kind of girl,
needs a modern kind of guy!**

**In this modern world, your/my kind of girl,
needs a modern kind of guy!**

I hope/perhaps you'll/I'll marry-a Baba!

Photo-shoot: A wedding party. Wong officiates in a Christian wedding. Song Ong Siang is best man. Boon Keng's 4 sisters in Nonya garb, and their husbands are in attendance.

Yu Loo and sisters greet Margaret and embrace her. They leave.

Margaret and Boon Keng talk together in their new home –with an amah hovering in the background.

BOON KENG You know that I have to be very busy every day.

MARGARET The work you do is important. You help many people.

BOON KENG I feel that I have to do it – to help those who haven't been so fortunate as I --

MARGARET I too realize how fortunate I have been.

BOON KENG If I hadn't had a good education –
I'd have been little better than the poorest coolie.

MARGARET If my father hadn't had a good education –
I'd have had my feet bound and been kept at home.

BOON KENG So much I have attained,
so much has been given to me –

MARGARET So much has been given to me,
So much I have attained –

SONG #9: PROMISED MY LIFE

**BOON KENG Out of darkness, out of ignorance,
I was raised up, I was lifted.
Into brightness, into wisdom,
I was raised, and my life transformed!
Once was hopeless, once was powerless,
I was rescued, I was ransomed ,
Into splendour, into greatness,
I awoke to a world transformed!**

**MARGARET I was rescued, I was ransomed ,
Into splendour, into greatness,
I awoke to a world transformed!**

**BOON KENG Those less lucky, those less fortunate,
Still in darkness, still unknowing,
They still languish, they still suffer,
I must bring them some relief!
I must lift them, I must educate,
I must help them, I must teach them,
To these souls my life I dedicate,
I must promise my life!**

**BOTH I must help them, I must teach them,
To these souls my life I dedicate,
I have promised my life!**

Section 7. Founding SCGS

BOON KENG, Margaret and Song Ong Siang, and Amah carrying Margaret's new baby.

SONG ONG SIANG My dear Margaret, I'm sure Boon Keng has told you about our efforts to convince the Straits Chinese people, that they must educate their daughters!

MARGARET And I would like to help to convince them.

BOON KENG (*expressing great compassion*) My own sisters never had a chance to go to school. I don't want even one more generation of our girls growing up, ignorant and illiterate.

Boon Keng and Margaret and Song Ong Siang talk to Chorus of older Straits Chinese Babas and Nonyas.

BOON KENG AND ONG SIANG

Let us tell you about this grand idea
to start up a school for girls –
to change the fate of the Straits Chinese –
to try to change the world!

CHORUS A school for girls?
'nak perempuan pergi sekolah?
Geela lah dia!
You're mad!

ONG SIANG We will educate the little nonyas –
BOON KENG To bring up the new lot of babas –
BOTH We will change the fate of the Straits Chinese –
And that's how we'll change the world!

SONG # 10 : SINGAPORE CHINESE GIRLS' SCHOOL

BOON KENG, SOS, MARGARET AND BABAS

V1 BOON KENG AND ONG SIONG

**Hear this plan that we propose to you, for our Baba nation,
raise a school for Chinese girls, the first in Singapore!
These young girls that you now keep at home, these the Nonya's daughters,
Let them go to school to learn, be ignorant no more, no more!**

ENSEMBLE

**C1. It's ri-di-culous, It's preposterous. nothing such was ever heard,
It's so strange, inconceivable, this is too absurd!**

BABA 1 When they are young you can teach them some little nursery rhymes in your school (*Boon Keng is disappointed*)

BABA 2 But after twelve years old, they must stay home and prepare to get married. (*Ong Siang is crushed.*)

MARGARET Dear as fine jade do you love your little daughters,

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**precious is their beauty, bright as gold, how they glow!
let them beam, let them gleam, let them shine!
Light all their tender minds, so they will shine and grow!**

**BK: Let a flame of learning brightly burn, in our Chinese Girls' school,
OS: Minds and bodies thrive and grow, in exercise and play!**

ENSEMBLE (*horrified*) Exercise? Running around?

**BK: Girls imbued with lofty moral code, shall be high aspiring,
OS: Law degrees or Medicine shall serve society, one day!**

ENSEMBLE (*incredulous*) Lawyers, doctors?

**CHORUS. It's ridiculous, It's preposterous, nothing such was ever heard,
It's so strange, inconceivable, it is too absurd!**

BABAS (*severally*) A Daughter is meant for getting married. Educate girls—Would you put wheels on a kitchen sink?
A woman is meant for having babies. Expect them to study – Would you ask a cow to dance?
Would you ask a fish to sing? Would you ask a frog to fly?
Ask a girl to get educated? What a silly reply!
NONYAS (*severally*) A woman who always reads a book – sure cannot learn to cook!
Read too much – eyes get red.
Too much learning. Bad in bed.
Running about is a disgrace, in the house is woman's place.

MEDLEY -

MARGARET

**Dear as fine jade do you love your little daughters,
precious is their beauty, bright as gold, how they glow!
let them beam, let them gleam, let them shine!
Light all their tender minds, so they will shine and grow!**

(SONG ONG SIANG AND BOON KENG SING IN COUNTERPOINT)

**Hear this plan that we propose to you, for our Baba nation
raise a school for Chinese girls, the first in Singapore!
These young girls that you now keep at home, these the Nonya's daughters,
Let them go to school to learn, be ignorant no more, no more!**

**CHORUS. It's ridiculous, It's preposterous. nothing such was ever heard,
It's so strange, inconceivable, it is too absurd!**

**No no no lah, never can, never be,
No no no mana boleh mana mana ki.**

most of the Babas and Nonyas go off. Sister YOO LOO and her husband Remain with their 8 year old daughter JOO LEE, and one or two other couples with daughters. They gather around BOON KENG and Margaret , ready to join the school, and exit together.

SONG ONG SIANG

It took us years to get the school soundly established, raising funds and persuading people to send their children. Meanwhile Boon Keng got involved in the politics of Chinese nationalism.

I don't speak Mandarin or write Chinese (*his tone indicates he isn't interested*) But Boon Keng felt that as a son of the Han race he ought to know Chinese. Margaret and her father helped him learn. Then he said *I should learn, that all of Chinese race needed to know the language of their mother-land. We must understand the treasury of China's wisdom, he said, our heritage of learning and culture. (Ong Siang shakes his head in refusal)* He set up language classes at his home for anyone he could persuade to attend. Then he said our school should teach Mandarin. Nonsense, I said to him, Our little girls already speak Malay at home and Hokkien, and they learn English in school. How do you expect their poor little brains to take in a fourth language? He was quite obsessed about bi-lingualism.

Then he got involved in the issues of Chinese nationalism. Irrelevant, not necessary, I said, for us subjects of the British Empire. But Boon Keng kept writing and speaking, trying to mould the opinions of people in Singapore.

His main partner in this was Margaret's father, Wong Nai Siong. A man of great ideas, you'd say – a visionary, a kind of prophet.

Section 8: CHINA CONCERNS

Song Ong Siang exits and Wong Nai Siong and BOON KENG enter. Wong narrates story, interspersed with remarks from BK.

WONG NAI SIONG I Wong Nai Siong came from Foochow, and I went down to the city of Singapore, and I saw the young man Lim Boon Keng. And the young man was full of wisdom for his years, and his heart was full of fire to serve justice and truth. And when I looked upon him I loved him. My daughter also looked with favour upon him. And I said to him, the people of China which is our mother land, suffer under rulers who oppress them, and their cry rises up to Heaven. He said:

BOON KENG: My heart is also heavily burdened for the people of China. But I do not have the Chinese tongue.

I said, We will teach you. So my daughter and I taught Boon Keng the Chinese tongue, and he learned well. Then I said to him, The Emperor of China is a young child. Around him are Ministers who have no

care for the nation and the people. Surely it is the Lord's will, that the Government of China be mended and reformed. He said,

BOON KENG This thought was in my mind also.

WONG N.S I said,. He said,

BOON KENG We in the Nanyang can help in this. For in China men are forbidden to speak about these things. But here, we are free to call for the Reform of China.

WONG N.S Thereafter he and I labored, in the streets of Singapore, and in the newspaper. We wrote a great petition to the Emperor in Peking, to reform the Imperial government. We exhorted the people and the coolies to sign their names to the paper and they signed, by the hundreds and the thousands did they sign their names. Then we sent the petition to the Emperor.

A man came from Hawaii whose name was Sun Yat Sun. He also was a doctor trained in the West. This man went around all the world where Chinese people dwelt, teaching the people to return to China, to rise against the Chinese Government in a bloody revolution. So in Singapore Boon Keng and I contended against this man, saying that change should come by peaceful means. But the heart of man is wicked, and attuned to evil. Men seek to find their way through the shedding of blood. So people gave ear to the words of Sun Yat Sun.

Sun Yat Sun enters. He sings:

SONG #11: CHINESE REVOLUTION OR REFORM
ENSEMBLE, SUN YAT SUN AND BOON KENG

SUN YAT SEN

China! My beloved motherland!
You lie trampled beneath the foreigner's heel.
Our once-great nation is cast down low,
the sons of Han hang their heads in shame.

Awaken! Children of the yellow emperor!
It is time, it is time
To throw off the shackles of the past,
To re-shape the world to a new beginning!

BOON KENG Revolution will bring untold death and hardship to the people! Thousands, millions of people will suffer! The man who does not understand this is a devil, a foul fiend!

SUN YAT SEN Revolution is the only way! Those who would sustain the Empire of China are making love to a decaying corpse!

Song #9 REVOLUTION OR REFORM

ensemble

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Boon Keng leads a factions of Reformer dressed in gray and blue -- Sun Yat Sen leads Revolutionaries dressed in black and white

BOON KENG
Old ways must be reformed,
Old must be changed and renewed!

SUN YAT SEN
Old ways must be thrown out!
Old must be driven away!

REFORMERS
Change and reform! Change and reform!
reformation reformation!
Struggle for reform!

REVOLUTIONARIES
People revolt! people revolt!
revolution revolution!
fight and revolt!

SUN YAT SEN
Sweep away the degenerate past!
Start again on a blank new page!

REFORMERS
Change and Reform!
Change and reform!
Reformation reformation!

BOON KENG
Emperor learn from the modern world,
Ancient wisdom learn from the new!

REVOLUTIONARIES
People revolt! people revolt!
Revolution revolution!

ALL (in counterpoint)
REVOLUTIONARIES
Sweep away the degenerate past!
Start again on a blank new page!

REFORMERS
Change and reform!
Change and Reform!
Reformation reformation!

REFORMERS
Emperor learn from the modern world,
Ancient wisdom learn from the new!

REVOLUTIONARIES
People revolt! people revolt!
Revolution revolution!

All exit except BOON KENG and WONG NS

WONG NAI SIONG It came to pass that the Emperor of China died. The young child died, who was the Emperor, and also the woman who had ruled in his name. But the Ministers of China put another young child on the throne and they ruled in his name.

Then I Wong Nai Siong gave up hope for peaceful change in China. I said, the Lord has hardened the hearts of these ministers. They will not change, until the day of wrath falls upon them. Woe upon them, woe upon the Imperial Court of China! They shall be delivered up to judgement. The Revolution shall overtake them, and they shall be cast down into darkness, and there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. As for me, I will take my people, and I will lead them to the land the Lord has given us, far away from tyranny and oppression. And we went down to the land of Sarawak to build our new country. But Boon Keng said,

BOON KENG I believe the heart of man is good. There are men in China among the Ministers, who have seen the light of truth, and who seek the ways of peace. Let me go now to Peking. I will speak to these men, to see what can yet be done to bring about peaceful reform in China.

WONG N S For many years, Boon Keng worked secretly. He journeyed often to Peking, to speak with powerful men who still hoped for Reform. He gained influence with these men; the Imperial Government appointed him to a high position, to represent them as a doctor in Europe.

Then a wonder appeared in China. A great rebellion swept across the country, and the Imperial Government fell. Sun Yat Sen proclaimed the new Republic. He came to Singapore, and the people greeted him with rejoicing. But my friend Boon Keng was in Europe, he was not in Singapore.

Wong Nai Siong exits. Revolutionary Chinese carry Sun Yat Sen in, borne aloft on a platform. The Babas join the procession; some hastily cut off their pigtails. Tan Boo Liat leads the Singapore Babas in welcoming Sun (and hosts a grand banquet at his house.) All exit on the opposite side of the stage, as Sun goes off to China.

BOON KENG enters – and looks after them, as they go.

BOON KENG So the old Empire of China is falling –
The palaces are burning, the books are burning,
Lost the beauty and the wisdom,
lost the heritage of three thousand years.

This new Republic, born out of bloodshed and destruction --
From such beginnings, how can peace and stability grow?
What will become of the people of China?
What will befall them, in the years ahead?

(exit)

e)

Section 9 SCGS Flourishing

Present are a bevy of little girls, the pupils of SCGS, and their parents. Boon Keng, Margaret and Song Ong Siang are there as GOH. . With Margaret are three baby amahs and her 5 year old son Robert.

YU LOO (brings her daughter to greet BOON KENG and Margaret) Tua Koo– Twa Kim.. Robert...

(prompting the shy child) Joo Lee,, Pangil Ah Pek, Ah Kim,.

JOO LEE Ah Pek. Ah Kim.

Head teacher calls girls to order and lines them up.

MARGARET I have always wanted to have a daughter.

BOON KENG You have given me four fine sons!

MARGARET Now we have twenty daughters, born out of our love and labour.

SONG ONG SIANG *(addresses the gathering in his mild-mannered way)* We are overjoyed today -- to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Singapore Chinese Girl's school!

BOON KENG *(oratorically)* Let us celebrate the rise of the Singapore Chinese Girls' School, as a beacon of education, to light a flame of learning in Singapore!

MARGARET *(smiles at his grandiosity and addresses the girls)* My dear girls, each one of you is like a little light, that will shine, shine bright!

(The little girls sing and do a "light dance." with candles

Song #12: LIGHT A LITTLE CANDLE

SCGS GIRLS

**Light a little candle, light a little flame,
keep the candle burning, twinkle all the same
Don't be scared of ev'ning, do not fear the dark,
bravely hold the glimmer, always hold the spark,**

**little light still shining, far into the night,
keep the candle burning, keep it ever bright!**

After the presentation all leave except BOON KENG and Margaret. Margaret leans on BOON KENG as though she is weak. BK anxiously supports her.

BOON KENG Margaret!

f) Section 10 Margaret's Death

At home -- Margaret is terminally ill.

BOON KENG Margaret – don't go. Do not leave me –

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**Song #13 HOLD ME IN YOUR HEART
MARGARET AND BOON KENG**

**Remember me, hold me within your heart,
never let me go!
This love we share, love never shall depart,
although we say goodbye.**

**Hold me close, I'm here, oh my love,
I'll be with you till time is done -
you will know I still love you, where ever I am,
as long as you keep me still close in your heart!**

**Remember me, feel my hand still in yours,
don't regret our love!**

**Hold me close, I'm here, Oh my love,
I'll be with you till time is done
you will know I still love you, where ever I've gone
As long as you hold me still close in your heart!**

**OUTRO I believe I'll see you once more,
forever through the years, our love will endure..
I'll stay with you, I'll stay with you,
in your heart.. your heart!**

Margaret's children are brought to her. She bids them farewell

MARG My boys – My little Robert – *(to Boon Keng)* Look after them!

BOON KENG Don't leave me –

MARGARET I will be with you as long as you remember me –

**MARGARET I'll stay with you, I'll stay with you,
in your heart!**

Margaret dies. Close of scene.

Section 11: Grace Yin

Grace enters and stands at the side

JENNY My mother Juliana remembers Mrs Grace Lim quite well. Once Mrs Lim came to the school prize-giving day, to present the prizes, and my mother was the one to give Mrs Lim a big bunch of flowers and curtsy to her.

Boon Keng married again, three years after Margaret died. She was Grace Yin, the sister of Boon Keng's partner Dr S.C Yin. Maybe he wanted a wife to look after his four young sons, to be a mother to

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them. But this wasn't what happened. Robert, the eldest boy, was only eight years old when he was sent away to school in Edinburgh. He grew up in Britain, and he never came back to live in Singapore. He became Head of the Chinese Medical Service, and later an eminent scientist in America.

Two of Robert's brothers also went to America. Only one of Margaret's sons, Walter, stayed with Boon Keng and Grace. The others were gone from Singapore, and my family does not remember them at all.

GRACE I am Grace Yin, the daughter of Pastor Yin of Amoy. I was born on the island of Kulangyu, in the harbor opposite Xiamen city. It is the home to the international community there -- a place of the greatest elegance and refinement.

I have now come to this city of Singapore, as the wife of Dr Lim Boon Keng. I do my best to help the people of Singapore, in works of charity and culture.

Song #13: GRACE'S SONG

GRACE

It's not easy being who I am, being Missus Doctor Lim Boon Keng!

But I try, all I can!

There are duties that I have to do, As a leader of society,

As the wife of such a famous man!

**All the poor, suffering and deprived, afraid,
so much need, for my aid!**

**Ev' ry year I go down to the school, hand out prizes to the little girls,
give them good advice and moral talks!**

I'm the founder of a worthy group, Chinese Ladies' Association.

We improve our mind, and do good works!

**All the poor, leading lives of grief and grime,
so much call, for my time!**

**Singapore I must serve without an end,
As the wife of Boon Keng!**

Boon Keng is such a busy man, I really don't see much of him. He has so much business and all his social work. He leaves the family and household to me. (*exit*)

SECTION 12. Business And Banking

SONG ONG SIANG (*speaks to audience*) My friend Boon Keng wasn't exactly a shrewd businessman—but he was wise, had a lot of foresight. There was that mad Englishman Ridley going around, trying to persuade people to take up a new crop -- Hevea Braziliensis, the rubber tree. People just laughed at him. But Boon Keng talked to his rich friends. “Rubber is going to be the great thing. Plant rubber!” he said. People listened to him. Tan Chay Yan took his advice, set up an enormous rubber plantation. In a few years' time, Chay Yan was a millionaire, and the people who had laughed at him were laughing on the other side of their faces. Boon Keng was a shareholder in the Sembawang Rubber Plantations Limited and he made a nice packet out of it. He gave me the tip-off too and I bought some shares which did very well.

Chorus of Straits Chinese sings:

SONG #16: Rubber Boom Boom Boom

CHORUS OF STRAITS CHINESE

**We thank the kind colonialists
And his Majesty Victorious
For giving us chances glorious`
To get rich! Rich ! rich!**

**Every American has a car
4 fine wheels go round and round
Every wheel needs a big new tire
To keep them rolling, keep them rolling,
money comes rolling in!**

**Acres of land in FMS
Plant the trees and watch them grow
Cut and tap that beautiful sap,
Watch that white gold flow!**

**Rubber rubber rubber rubber
boom boom boom!**

SONG ONG SIANG It was as though money was just sprouting from the ground, in those days. Boon Keng and Tan Chay Yan went into coconut growing, they had acres of coconut palms waving all across distant Tampines. With Lim Nee Soon, he set up an insurance company and a lumber company. People trusted Boon Keng's integrity; they beseeched him to be a Director of their companies, having him on Board was like a certificate of respectability. He went into banking, he was the first chairman of the Overseas Chinese Bank. After the Great War a merger of three banks was proposed and they needed an honest broker, a trusted middle-man to bring them together. Boon Keng was that man, and they became the Overseas-Chinese Banking Corporation Ltd.

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He was a shareholder of the Straits Trading Company which was doing well. He was pretty well-off by then, he gave up his medical practice, spent his time on his public affairs and worthy causes, not forgetting our girls' school. He bought a good house on Emerald Hill and built some fine new stables for his carriage and horses.

Another man who made a fortune in those years was Tan Kah Kee. Boon Keng advised him to build schools, and even a new University in China. Tan Kah Kee respected Boon Keng immensely, and after the Great War that was just what he did. He built a University and he invited Boon Keng to go to China, to be the President of Amoy University.

Section 13: BOON KENG leaves for Amoy

Photo shoot: CHORUS OF Straits Chinese are gathered, together with BOON KENG's sister Yu Loo age 57 in baju panjang, her daughter JOO LEE age 29 in sarong kebaya, with a Baby Amah carrying an infant.

JENNY (*narrates*). My grandmother Judith was just a baby when Boon Keng went away, and the Straits Chinese Association gave him a big farewell dinner.

SEOW POH LENG (*jovially*) Ladies and Gentlemen – thank you for coming to this dinner to say farewell to our esteemed Baba Boon Keng before he goes away. Please put your hands together, for the arrival of His Excellency Dr Lim Boon Keng --

All applaud enthusiastically as BOON KENG enters with Grace. He is wearing academic robes of Edinburgh University, with scarlet hood trimmed with rabbit fur.

SEOW POH LENG -- member of the Legislative Council, Justice of the Peace, Member of the Order of the British Empire, and – the new President of Amoy University!

BOON KENG Thank you! Thank you! Of all these honours, the most precious in my sight, is your respect and high esteem! (*more applause*) .. And the position that I most highly prize, is that of President of the new University.

CHORUS You have worked all your life for Singapore –
Why are you leaving for a foreign shore?
You built many schools for our children to learn –
now do you think it is China's turn?
You're a master of English, everyone sees –
Are you going to teach in Chinese?
Why leave the good old British Empire –
For a backward land where the comforts are dire!

BOON KENG This is the fulfilment of a lifetime's dreaming. An opportunity to bring education to so many young people throughout the Nanyang!

SONG #16: PROMISED MY LIFE – First Reprise

BOON KENG

**BOON KENG Out of darkness, out of ignorance,
I was raised up, I was lifted.
Into brightness, into wisdom,
I was raised, and my life transformed!**

**Those less lucky, those less fortunate,
Still in darkness, still unknowing,
They still languish, they still suffer,
I must bring them some relief!**

**I must help them, I must teach them,
To these souls my life I dedicate,
I have promised my life!**

When my friend Tan Kah Kee invited me to take the post, I did not hesitate. I have sold my house, I have resigned from all official positions. I have put my business affairs, my commercial ventures and banking interests, in the hands of trusted men. I will take my family to live in Amoy, in the city of Xiamen.

GRACE. (*with great satisfaction*) We will live in Kulangyu island, where I was born. A most refined place I do assure you! I promise I will do my best to fulfil all the duties, (*proudly*) of the wife of President Dr Lim Boon Keng.

(*All applaud and mingle.* Yu Loo, Joo Lee and baby amah approach BOON KENG

YU LOO Adik! Mau pergi itu Amoy – ayoh, Amoy SaMoy Jawoh-lah sajah!

BOON KENG Ahyah Yu Loo (*she embraces him*). Joo Lee --

JOO LEE Uncle – This is my baby, her name is Judith.

BOON KENG A little girl eh? Well when Judith is old enough, you must send her to SCGS.

SEOW POH LENG Come on all my dear Nonyas and Babas. let's have something to eat. Chap chye, Itek Siew

TAN BOO LIAT Babi bekluah, Boon Keng. You won't get food like this in China!

YU LOO Boon Keng! (*Presses a big parcel to his hands*) Yu Loo masak itu sambal blachan sudah bunkus Tua Koh pergi Ahmoy hari hari boleh makan –

BOON KENG Ahyoh Tua Cheh sangat baik baik lah. (*To his friends*) Sambal blachan. Grace – my sister has given us a year's supply of sambal blachan! I will have it placed on my table at every meal .. (*Grace smiles and conceals her distaste*)

TAN BOO LIAT Do you remember when we all went to the King's coronation in London –

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SONG ONG SIANG One contingent of the loyal King's Chinese –

TBL And we were toasting our sambal blachan in our hotel rooms at the Ritz.

SPL The Englishmen smelt the fragrance outside our room. “What the devil is that dreadful smell! Have you people got a dead cat in there or something?”

SONG ONG SIANG We Babas have to have our sambal blachan.

Song #17: Sambal Blachan

ENSEMBLE

**Sambal blachan, eh sambal blachan, spice of our life,
Baba loves it, nonya likes it, man and wife, ah,**

**Baba's pleasure, Nonya's treasure, all will agree,
we adore our sambal blachan, sedap skali!**

**Taste buds awaken when we add this stuff,
Just like a friend who helps us all to laugh!**

**Nonya's favour, adds the savour, best it can be,
Life is not complete without this home-grown fla-vour!**

**Oo -- wah, haven't got can die,
Crave it like Opium, nothing else can satisfy!**

**Sambal blachan, eh sambal blachan, spice of our life,
Baba loves it, nonya likes it, man and wife, ah!**

**Sambal blachan, ah sambal blachan, wakes appetite,
Nonya's table has to have it, day and night, ah!**

**Baba takes it, Nonya makes it, suka makan,
Like to eat it, you are true Peranakan! ah!**

**Mark of the Nonyas and the Babas too,
That's how we know who is so true and blue!**

**Baba's pleasure, Nonya's treasure, all will agree,
we adore our sambal blachan, sedap skali!**

**How we love it, how we love it, sambal blachan ah!
Sedap! (ah!)**

At the end of the song BOON KENG and family leave and all wave goodbye.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Section 14: Boon Keng in Amoy.

JENNY So Lim Boon Keng went to be the President of Amoy University. On the barren sea-shore, opposite Kulangyu island, he build grand new buildings, each named after the Confucian virtues. Students came from Malaya and Indonesia, the Philippines, all the Nanyang, to Tan Kah Kee's University.

However he had a problem when the famous writer Lu Xun visited Amoy University. He was a member of the May5th movement, those radical intellectuals who rejected the past, and he had no sympathy with Boon Keng's admiration for the Chinese classics. Lu Xun wrote to everyone he knew, he poured scorn on Boon Keng as an English-speaking Baba who was obsessed with Confucianism, and he destroyed Boon Keng's reputation among scholars in China. This ended Boon Keng's dream of a modern University, which would also imbue the students with Confucius's high moral values.

Boon Keng did undertake one big academic project, combining Chinese literature with Western science. It was a translation of the poet Chu Yuan's great epic the *Li Sao*, with scientific notes on plants and stars mentioned in the text. In the poem, Chu Yuan laments that he was unjustly blamed for being a traitor, disloyal to his king. He asserts his integrity and kills himself in protest. Boon Keng wrote an English version of the poem -- it's a little bit ironic, isn't it, in view of the way he himself was later called a traitor.

He continued to run the University for seventeen years, administered the university, and he travelled a good deal while Grace brought up the family in Kulangyu.

Grace enters and sings

SONG #18: KULANGYU

Grace

**Kulangyu this pretty little isle,
home of Pres'dent Doctor Lim Boon Keng!
gentle town, so refined!
From its gracious mansions music sounds,
on the street called Thousand Piano Lane,
Melodies so sweet, for soul and mind!
On the bay, see the ferry boatmen row,
all day long, to and fro!**

**V2. High our house upon a three peaked mount,
aptly named the Scholar's Pen Rest Hill,
Fitting for the President to stay!
Aurora our residence is called,
Latin for the spirit of the dawn,**

Lim Boon Keng will bring a bright new day!

**On the shore, there's a hollow rocky cave,
Loud the roar of the waves.
Kulangyu, so they call the Drum Wave Stone,
In Kulangyu, I was born,
Here I live with Doctor Lim Boon Keng!**

JENNY When rubber prices fell in the 1920's Tan Kah Kee's businesses failed. Till then Boon Keng had not been taking a salary as President, using his own money from Singapore, till his businesses also collapsed in the Depression. Now Tan Kah Kee asked him to help raise money for the University. He was getting older, but over the years he made three exhausting trips, fund-raising tours, to Singapore, Malaya and Indonesia, and he kept the &University going. By 1937 Tan Kah Kee declared bankruptcy. He handed Amoy University over to the Chinese government and Lim Boon Keng went home at last.

My grandmother Judith remembers when he returned to Singapore.

Judith, age about 30, enters and takes Jenny's place as narrator

Section 15: Return to Singapore

JUDITH When Lim Boon Keng came back my mother gave a big dinner to welcome her uncle home. Her mother, Boon Keng's sister, had passed away while he was gone. He was now nearly seventy years old, and he had no money, no position, not even a house to live in.

STRAITS Chinese, BOON KENG's friends and family enter. Judith mingles with them. Photoshoot: The Straits Chinese are grouped in the same way as in Section 13. The visual contrast is great: women in modern kebayas or loose cheongsams Joo Lee, in cheong sam, Judith in a sleeveless frock. Also among them is Tommy, age 26.

JOO LEE (*exhorts friends*) Please eat!

SONG #19: SAMBAL BLACHAN - Reprise

ENSEMBLE

**Sambal blachan, eh sambal blachan, spice of our life,
Baba loves it, nonya likes it, man and wife, ah,**

**Baba's pleasure, Nonya's treasure, all will agree,
we adore our sambal blachan, sedap skali!**

How we love it, how we love it, sambal blachan ah!

While they sing, Boon Keng comes in, old and frail, with Grace; his friends hurry to greet him

SONG ONG SIANG Welcome back, Boon Keng! Welcome back to the land of sunny skies and good food!

SEOW POH LENG So glad you are back in Singapore. Don't worry about anything. All your expenses, your domestic needs, don't worry, they will be taken care of.

TAN BOO LIAT There's a house in Paterson Hill, you can stay there, it's old but it's clean, Grace will like it.

BOON KENG Thank you, thank you.

JOO LEE Welcome back Uncle. This is my daughter Judith –

BOON KENG Judith. What school did you go to?

JUDITH I went to SCGS Grand-uncle -- this is Tommy, my fiancé.

BOON KENG (*shaking hands*) Tommy --

TOMMY Doctor Lim!
You used to serve on the Legislative Council –
BOON KENG I did indeed.
TOMMY To represent the people of Singapore—
BOON KENG --So that the governed, help to govern themselves.
TOMMY That Council led by British Officers –
Now, it's just a colonialist tool.
One day we'll reach for full self-government!
Independence, and full self-rule!

BOON KENG Ah – a young fire-brand.

TOMMY Sir – will you join our new political party?

BOON KENG No – no more politicking for me. (*joking*) A few dinner parties in the evening perhaps – but no political parties. (*he goes to talk to Song Ong Siang while the rest leave.*)

SONG ONG SIANG *So your Amoy venture has ended, old boy. I'm sorry that it didn't work out quite as you had hoped.*

BOON KENG *Ah well.. in seventeen years, thousands of young people got a good education. I shall look forward to living a quiet life now. Writing a few letters to the papers, a few articles*

SONG ONG SIANG What, still writing?

BOON KENG The Japanese invasion of China – it is unjust, I must speak out. No man of good will can keep silent, while such things are happening. I must write, I must protest against it.

SONG ONG SIANG You never stop, do you!

BOON KENG I won't do so much Ong Siang. It's time for me to take it easy.

ONG SIANG We are both getting on ...

BOON KENG From Paterson Road I can walk down to the river in the valley .. I stand on the bank and look at the water..

Song #20: SUNLIGHT ON THE WATER - Preview

BOON KENG

**Stand and watch the river flowing by,
current dark with shadows down below,
see the eddies idly turn on the waterside,
then they ebb away, they fade, and they go.**

ONG SIANG Then they ebb away, they fade, and they go.

Music continues as Ong Siang takes his leave of BOON KENG and walks slowly across the stage. BOON KENG watches him go. The implication is that SONG died peacefully of old age.

Section 16: Japanese Occupation

JENNY The Japanese invasion of China led to the Japanese joining in the Second World War, and their Occupation of Singapore. My grandparents did not like to talk about that time. The Occupation was a time of darkness and confusion, of fear and hardship. Everything had changed; the peaceful Singapore they had known had disappeared. It was like a bad dream that went on and on.

JUDITH and Robert lead CHORUS of Straits Chinese and other Singaporeans

Song #21: DARK DAYS

ENSEMBLE

**It's a time of trouble
It's a time of fear
Horror and danger swallowed our town
All we know, broke to rubble
Lost, all that's dear**

**Why are they killing us,
why are they killing us,
We have nowhere to hide
We have nowhere to run**

noises of war: sounds of crashing.. irregular rifle shots –shouting and screaming)

JENNY After the British surrendered the Japanese soldiers made all the able-bodied men gather together, my grandfather Tommy was one of them. His group was held at River Valley Road, for days in the hot sun. We heard that they would all be shot.

My grandmother heard that Lim Boon Keng had been arrested at first, but he had been released and was now at home. She was desperate. She thought perhaps her Tua Kong had some influence to help her ..

Chorus sings during the Mime sequence

CHORUS
Dark days, darkness upon us
Dark of the rising sun
and we don't know what will happen to us
we don't know why this happens to us
it's a time of darkness
sorrow and pain
dark dark days
dark dark days,
dark of the rising sun.

At BOON KENG's borrowed home at Paterson Hill. A Japanese soldier guards BK. Judith enters anxiously, looking fearfully at the soldier. He gestures her in to see BOON KENG. She tearfully tells BOON KENG her problem. He looks very troubled, asks her to sit down and wait, he slowly walks out. Judith waits – listening to the harsh music, gunshots, screams. Boon Keng returns with Tommy, guarded by Soldier 2. The soldier releases Tommy; he goes to Judith's relieved embrace. Judith and Tommy exit with soldier.

The Japanese civilian Shinozaki enters, he dismisses the soldier, talks confidentially to BOON KENG-- gives him a handful of safe-conduct passes and exits.

Three businessmen (Straits Chinese and Chinese,) enter, looking frightened and distraught

BOON KENG (*heavy-heartedly*) Gentlemen, let us come together today, to form an association for the good of our people. Shinozaki-san has signed passes of safe-conduct -- (*they grab the passes as a life-line*) We will form the Overseas Chinese Association. Overseas Chinese, to remind the Japanese that we are NOT the Chinese who are their enemies. We will reason with them, as men of good will.

These men are now members of the Overseas Chinese Association, OCA

CHORUS repeats:

CHORUS Dark days, darkness upon us
Dark of the rising sun
and we don't know what will happen to us
we don't know why this happens to us
dark dark days
dark dark days,

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dark of the rising sun.

Mime: Colonel Watanabe appears. Shinozaki conducts BOON KENG and the ORA into his presence, they bow deeply. He smiles at them condescendingly and dismisses them.

They watch from afar as the soldiers go to arrest members of the chorus, drag them off presumably to be executed. BOON KENG and one OCA man go and bow before Watanabe to plead with him. He shrugs, as though not particularly caring either way. Shinozaki covertly hurries to the captive men and secures their release from the soldiers and escorts them back to Boon Keng's group, handing out safe-conduct passes from his pockets.

Repeat Chorus.

Watanabe calls up Shinozaki, displeased, and orders him to return to Tokyo – he takes a bag and departs. Watanabe summons all the OCA men.

JENNY (*refers to notes*) Colonel Watanabe demanded that the Chinese of Singapore and Malaya must make a donation, a friendship gift of to the Government of Syonan, to atone for having supported China in the war. The OCA must collect this money from the people -- or the whole community would suffer. \$50 million was a huge sum.

BOON KENG (*bowing*) Sir we cannot raise this money -- even if we sell all our houses and property.

Watanabe yells. Soldiers shove beat and intimidate the OCA men. They capitulate .. and hobble away.

Mime: Boon Keng with 2 others, with soldiers as body guards, approaches individual Straits Chinese, asks them for money. They give very reluctantly, looking suspiciously at Boon Keng and the Japanese guards

CHORUS

Why is he giving us this pressure?
Why is he working with the oppressor?
Look at him with fear and caution –
Why is he helping this extortion?

Traitor traitor Lim Boon Keng!
Traitor traitor Lim Boon Keng!

The ORA take the money back to Watanabe, he yells that it is not enough, drives them out to collect more.

Boon Keng gestures helplessly – what can I do. As he turns away someone spits at his shadow.

With OCA members, he brings a cheque to Watanabe. Watanabe praises him while he looks miserable.

Watanabe slaps him on the back and produces glasses, toasts him :

WATANABE Arigato! Arigato!

BOON KENG Ah –merci beaucoup.

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Boon Keng returns alone to his house. He collapses into his rattan lounge. Grace comes anxiously hovering over him

GRACE Boon Keng ..

BOON KENG (*weeping*) I should have died before this day – I should have died –

GRACE You mustn't die, who will look after me .. and the children?

BOON KENG *waves Grace away, calls in a high quavering voice* Whiskey! – (he sits alone drinking, muttering to himself) Meh si boh ku. Meh si boh ku.

Margaret's spirit appears

MARGARET Boon Keng ...

BOON KENG Margaret?

MARGARET Don't give up – don't stop fighting, my dear one.

BOON KENG (*Weeping*) I have betrayed my people –

MARGARET No no –

BOON KENG I am helping the tyrants and oppressors –

MARGARET You are doing it for their sake --

BOON KENG I would rather die –

MARGARET You're doing it to save the people. They may never understand. But it's what you have to do.

BOON KENG I am helpless Margaret. I am a weak old man.

MARGARET You are who you always have been. I love you still, I will always love you.

(Margaret sings while Boon Keng seems to doze.

SONG #22: HOLD ME IN YOUR HEART- Reprise

MARGARET

**Hold me close, I'm here, Oh my love,
I'll be with you till time is done
you will know I still love you, where ever I've gone
As long as you hold me still close in your heart!**

**OUTRO I believe I'll see you once more,
forever through the years, our love will endure..
I'll stay with you, I'll stay with you,
in your heart.. your heart!**

Margaret exits

A soldier comes and barks at Boon Keng to go to see the Colonel, he drinks and giggles. Watanabe comes in person to rage at him. Grace comes to hover. Boon Keng toasts Watanabe

BOON KENG Arigato! Merci beaucoup!

(he is very drunk, incapacitated. Watabe stomps out, frustrated)

BOON KENG sits drinking, and the war goes on.

The little girls of SCGS sing a Japanese song for Colonel Watanabe. Same melody as Candle song, with Japanese words

SONG #23: Children of Syonan

Japanese lyrics to be provided.

Section 18 Tribunal

The War ends: the light and music change. The Japanese retreat. The Union Jack rises. The people of Singapore surge across stage and the little girls run around happily. The military tribunal of the First Section is set up and Japanese war criminals are led there in chains, almost hidden by the crowd of Singaporeans who are booing and yelling.

AMPLIFIED VOICE: This military Tribunal charges these officers of the Imperial Japanese Army with crimes against British subjects during the past War.

CROWD *(hooting and jeering)* Justice! Kill the traitors!

VOICE The verdict of the Tribunal is that the accused are guilty and sentenced to execution.

(Crowd bays and shouts as the Japanese are dragged away for execution.)

VOICE This Tribunal will charge certain civilians of Singapore on charges of treason and collaboration with the enemy. Dr Lim Boon Keng.

Boon Keng is led to the raised dock, The crowd jeers. The little girls point and shout, Dr Lim Boon Keng! Grace weeps. It is the moment of supreme humiliation for Boon Keng, as he stands in the dock.

VOICE Dr Lim Boon Keng! You are charged with treason against His Britannic Majesty during the recent War. You are charged with collaboration with the enemy. You are charged with aiding and assisting the enemy in the oppression of the people of Singapore.

BOON KENG I am a subject of the British Empire, I am a son of the Chinese race, I am a Straits Chinese of Singapore.

VOICE Do you wish to answer the charges brought against you?

BOON KENG I have served my people all my days. I have kept faith with them.

Shinozaki steps forward.

SHINOZAKI Let me speak on behalf of Dr Lim Boon Keng

VOICE Matsuo Shinozaki -- The Tribunal has received testimony from many sources that during the Occupation, you personally intervened to save the lives of many hundreds of civilians. You protected them from the military police and looked after their welfare. We thank you for your efforts. We will now hear what you have to say.

SHINOZAKI Dr Lim Boon Keng is my very good friend. He was like a father to me. My Papa! (*eye contact and bow to Boon Keng.*)

At the beginning of the period of Syonan, seeing the harshness of the military administration, I said to Dr Lim that he should form a body to represent the people to the authorities. I would serve as liason and help in any way I could. The intention was to protect the people. Through the Overseas Chinese Association, I and my friend Dr Lim were able to save many individuals and improve conditions for the population. After I was posted back to Tokyo, my successor made use of the Overseas Chinese Association to collect a large sum of money from the people. If the money had not been collected, the authorities would certainly have taken vengeance and punished all. I regret very much the inconvenience caused to the people of Singapore and to Dr Lim Boon Keng. (*He bows to Boon Keng.*)

VOICE The tribunal has considered the testimony of Matsuo Shinozaki, and is pleased to declare that Dr Lim Boon Keng is found not guilty of treason and collaboration with the enemy.

Boon Keng comes down from the dock. His family and a few friends gather around him but the majority still mutter and turn away from him. He walks away slowly, shattered by the experience.

Section 19 The Recluse

JENNY After the Tribunal dismissed the charges against him, Lim Boon Keng retired from all public life. He did not write or make public speeches; he lived as a recluse. Few visitors came to the shabby old house on Paterson Hill.

GRACE Boon Keng is very tired, he is not well. Thank you, but he cannot see any visitors. (*Grace exit*)

BOON KENG sits drinking alone ..Margaret appears

MARGARET Boon Keng!

BOON KENG Margaret! (*he toasts her drunkenly*) Meh si boh ku.

MARG (*reproving takes the glass from him*) That is enough of that, Boon Keng. You mustn't spend all your days drinking alone. You should go out of the house..

BOON KENG Oh .. I do go out sometimes. I walk down by the river, where we used to go courting...

Song #24: SUNLIGHT ON THE WATER

BOON KENG AND MARGARET

BOON KENG Stand and watch the river flowing by,
current dark with shadows down below,
see the eddies idly turn on the waterside,
then they ebb away, they fade, and they go.

**All my days are ripples on the stream,
Time goes by, the years are not my friend,
Now I ask what was it for, my endeavouring,
And I wonder what it means, in the end.**

MARGARET Console your heart and be at rest,
take it easy, just see the sunlight on the water,
The moment passes by, and when the ripples die,
they leave a light eternal!

BOON KENG Why have I been labouring so long?
All the treasury I tried to save!
All the dreams I tried to build were futility,
they were washed away like foam on the wave.

MARGARET All that you had to give was love, over flowing,
in time to come they will remember,
your honour shining bright, your fighting for the right,
these things will live for ever.

BOTH All that I had to give was love, only loving,
shining like sunlight on the river,
this will not fade away, for love will ever stay,
my love will live for ever.

Margaret is gone, BOON KENG sits alone, now more serene.

JENNY My mother remembers how her parents took her to see her great-grand-uncle, in that old house in Paterson Road. She was very small then. Her Pek Kong Chor asked her what she was reading, and he took the paper ring from his cigar, he gave it to her.

(Tommy and Judith enter with the little girl Juliana. BOON KENG greets the girl kindly, he gives her the paper ring, helps her to put it on her finger.)

TOMMY Pek Kong – I brought you the newspaper.

JUDITH Tommy's picture is there! He's with the group going to London –

TOMMY To demand self-government from the Colonial government!

BOON KENG (indulgent of their high expectation) To demand, eh?

TOMMY We will get it one day!

We will throw off Empire's chain! British colony no more –
Independence shall be ours – Freedom here in Singapore!

BOON KENG And the people?

TOMMY Freedom and justice for every race!
Everyone have equal place!

BOON KENG Teach them to tolerate each other –
Learn to live as brother with brother

TOMMY Yes –

BOON KENG Keep this value high above --
There must be kindness, must be love.

JUDITH Yes Pek Kong!

TOMMY One day we will be independent. We will bow to no other nation – not Britain – not Japan.
Not China.

JUDITH Not that Chairman Mao Tse-Tung!

TOMMY Now that the Communists have taken over – they will wipe out everything left of the old China.

BOON KENG Mao Tse Tung! He's one of those May 5th radicals, who want to destroy all of China's
past. For us, descendants of the Chinese race, this is still our heritage!

(he is roused to action) It won't happen! Here in the Nanyang, we are beyond the reach of Peking. I still
have some friends in Singapore. Call them – ask them to come together as men of good will – to
preserve the treasury of Chinese learning and culture.

JUDITH Yes yes, Pek Kong we will help

TOMMY *(is willing but --)* But I don't read Chinese, I don't speak Mandarin.

BOON KENG Let the English-educated Chinese of Singapore form the China Society, to keep the
memory of their heritage alive.

*BOON KENG cheerfully sings one chorus of Promised my Life while people who look like modern Singaporeans come
around, in another jolly Straits Chinese gathering.*

Song #25: Promised my Life – second reprise

BOON KENG

**I must lift them, I must educate,
I must help them, I must teach them,
To these souls my life I dedicate,
I have promised my life!**

Section 20 The China Society

There is an Inauguration ceremony with handshaking and document signing by committee members, with Boon Keng as President, while the SCGS girls dance and sing to music of "Promised my Life."

BOON KENG With the inauguration of this Society, let there be men and women in Singapore, who are educated in the English language of the modern world -- who are also deeply versed in the culture and tradition of their fore-fathers!

ALL Yes – yes -- China Society! (*etc*)

BOON KENG Though darkness should fall over China, here in the Nanyang the flame of learning shall forever burn. (*He lifts a glass and toasts*) The China Society!

ALL The China Society!

BOON KENG (*toasts*) Merci beaucoup!

SONG #25: LAUGH AT LIFE- reprise **ENSEMBLE**

**V1. Laugh at life! be light of heart,
for you know there is no use in regretting,
you have to smile, a little while,
and no troubles will be troubling you.**

**Dance for joy, and raise a song,
make a happy sound of thanks for our living,
so ev'ry day, in ev'ry way,
we will find a time to say,
merci beaucoup.**

**Not long, before we die,
so laugh while the sun is shining,
no use repining, you don't have to cry,
you can laugh at life!**

**V2. Laugh at life, the time is short,
we should never let the grass grow beneath us,
We've got to strive while we're alive,
to achieve so much that we want to do.**

**Dance and sing when light grows dim,
we'll remember all the best of our story,
we'll smile and say at end of day,
we give thanks for our living,
merci beaucoup.**

Meh si boh ku, oh merci beaucoup, for ev'ry thing,

**meh si boh ku, oh merci beaucoup,
we dance and sing,
merci beaucoup
merci beaucoup...!**

Lights fade on ensemble as they raise a toast. JENNY appears and sings solo – then the ensemble join in for finale.

SONG #26 TELL ME WHO YOU ARE reprise

JENNY AND ENSEMBLE

**Tell me who you are, why your story moves my soul,
why it leads me from the life I know, bids me seek for some higher goal!
V2 Tell me how you were, of your passion and your fire,
in the dullness of a world asleep, you awake, you arouse, inspire!**

**C1 Careless time dims the years, unkind, fades the past away,
and who now will recall all the deeds of your day?**

**C2 Who can say what remains of all you hoped and laboured to build,
past defeat, and past despair, your song lingers still!**

**V3 Tell us who you are, you've a message for us all,
through the silence of the years between, speak aloud, let us hear your call!**

**C3 Like a sound from afar, a soft whisper on the wind,
The new echoes arise, on the streets that you knew!**

**C4 Touch us now, share your dream, excite in us your vision of love,
We will sing your song as we remember!**

**BR Voice of your people, we're crying, calling, singing,
here by the river, we know you will not die!**

**v5 Tell me who you are, for your spirit is not gone,
in the city that recalls your name, still your dream, still your song lives on!**

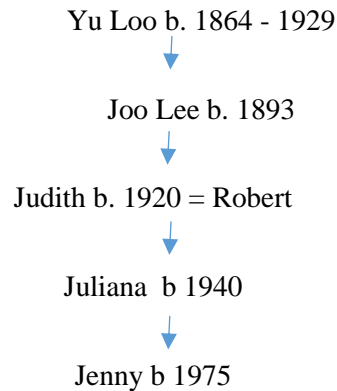
Tell me who you are!

END -----

NOTES

i. Yu Loo's descendants and their ages in various scenes.

Please note that only Yu Loo really existed. Her real family is described in the book *Seven Generations and Counting: The Story of Pang Siew Peck* by Katherine Seow, Singapore: Kepmedia International, 2006



Yu Loo's descendants and their ages at various scenes									
	Date of birth	BOON KENG's nomination, 1895	SCGS celebrates 1904	Boon Keng leaves for China 1921	Boon Keng returns from China 1937	WW2. Sook Ching 1942	BOON KENG old age, founds China Soc 1950	20 17	job
Yu Loo	1864	31	40	57	deceased				
Joo Lee	1893	infant	9	29	44	49			
Judith (married Tommy)	1920			infant	18	22	30		Teacher at SCGS
Tommy	1914				23	28	36		lawyer
Juliana	1940				infant	5	10		doctor
Jenny	1975							42	
BOON KENG	1869	26	35	53	68	73	81	deceased	

ii. Lead Sheets for Four Songs

Sunlight On The Water

Tell Me Who You Are

Laugh At Life

Sambal Blachan

Sunlight on the water Am75A 4-25 bbx

A Amaj7 G E7

G - Am F

V1 Stand and watch the river flowing by, current mark with shadows down so low, see the

C G Am C G Am E7

eddies slowly turn on the water-side, then they drift away, they fade, and they go.

Am - Am F

V2 All my days are rip-ple on the stream, Time goes by, the years are not my friend, Now

C G Am C G A

ask what was it for, my end-des-vouring, And I wonder what it means, in the end.

A C#m7 Bm/D Bm F7 A C#m7 D F7

G1 Con-sole your heart and be at rest, take it ea-sy, Just see the sun light on the wa-ter,

A C#7 F#m7 B/D# Dmaj7 E7 A D E

The moment passes by, and when the rip-ples die, they leave a light e-ter-nal!

A E7 F#m7 G/D# Dmaj7 E7 D Dm

Am you from our shining bright, your fighting for the night, these things will live for ever. (Gm7)

D E7 (G) Both: All that had to give for love, or for loving, disappearing like sunlight on the water,

D ver, this will not fade away, for love will never stay, my love will live for ever.

ak- ak!

Sunlight on the water Am/5A 4-25 bbx - Page 2.

51A TELL ME WHO YOU ARE [fem] A77Bb 3-13 btx 2016-0220

Golden -Slow ev.B Brit 80s Rock
Tempo = 77

Music by Dezz MOEY [C]2015
Words by Stella KON

A AMaj7 Dm Dm A E A A6



VI. Tell me who you are,

A2 AMaj7 Dm7 A2 F#m7



and how I wish I'd known your face, wish I'd known that wis-
dom

A F#m D#m7b5 Dm E7sus E7 A



in your eyes, and your smile, and your kind embrace. V2. Tell me of your

A2 AMaj7 Dm7 A2 F#m7



deeds, how you work such greatest com, share the secrets of

A F#m D#m7b5 Dm E7 F#m7 E7sus E7



hidden heart, of your hope, of your goal, your dream! CH Chorus

F#m C#m D F#m A



time dies the years, in kind, the fades the past away, and

D#m7b5 Dm Dm7 G E7



who now will recall all your life and your face? Like a

C G E7 F7

Bb2 here Bb4|7 G7 ni- ver, I Bb2 now you wil- G7 tel G4 tell me who you

Bb are, G4 E7|7E how you Bb4|7 Bb4|7 red and G7 G7 G7 sus tell me G7 your an- der?

G7 or G7 of you G7 of you joy, your Gb2 ovel Gb2 Tell me

Bb2 Bb2 you are!

54A LAUGH AT LIFE [m-c] Eb135 2-07 bbx 2016-0220

80sPopMedium MIDI Piano [120MST]

Tempo = 135

Music by Dezz MOEY C2015

Words by Stella KON C2015

7BR Eb Cm Eb7 Eb Cm Eb7

Laugh at life, Cm be light of heart Eb7 Dm for you know there is no Cm life in re-get-ting,

If you have Cm friends, a Cm little while, Cm and no troubles will be Cm troubling you, Cm Cm

Dance for joy, Dm and Cm take a song, Cm Dm make a happy sound of Cm dance for our Cm life,

Bbm so ev-ry day, Eb7 in Av-ry way, Bb7 you will, Bb7 find a time to say, Cm then si-bea-coup.

Fb Not long, Cm we die, Cm so augh while the Cm sun is set-ting,

Ebm use re Cm n'g, you Cm didn't have to Cm cry, you can Cm laugh Cm at life... Cm Cm Bb7

Laugh at life, Cm the Cm time is short, Cm Eb we should never let the Cm grass grow so Cm tall us,

Fb We've got to Cm drive while Cm we're al-ive, Bb7 to Cm drive so much Cm that we want to Cm drive Bb7

Dance and sing when Cm light grows d'm, Cm we'll re-mem-ber all the Cm best Cm of our sto-ry,

Eb Cm Fm Bb7 Dm Gm C7
 ♪ we'll smile and say ah end of day, we give thanks for every one, mer- ci beau-coup.
 ♪ Laugh at life, be glad at heart for you know there is no one reg-ret-ting,
 ♪ you have to smile, a little while, and give thanks be-fore we start to for-get
 ♪ mer- ci beau- coup, oh mer- ci beau-coup, for ev-ry thing
 ♪ mer- ci beau- coup, we dance and sing,
 ♪ mer- ci beau- coup...!

SAMBAL BLACHAN [chorus] C136 2-53 btx 2015-1010

Tango7 - Tango dance style
Tempo = 144

Music by Dezz MOEY [C]2015
Words by Stella KON

F E7

C Dm

1 Sam-zal bla-ghan, eh 2 sam-bal bla-ghan. 3 Ah yes 4 of our life, 5 ba-bess it, 6 non-ya likes 7 when 8 and wife, ah, 9 non-ya's pleas-ure, 10 non-ya's pleas-ure, 11 Ah! 12 I will a-gree, 13 I will a-dore our 14 sam-zal bla-ghan, 15 De-dap aka-il 16 buds s-ker when we 17 add this stuff, 18 I let like a friend who helps us 19 deal to laugh! 20 Non-ya's fa-vour, 21 side she saw our, 22 Oh it can be, 23 life is not com-plete with-out this home-grown fla-vour!

Em A7 Dm.

DMB: Cu- Grave is like O- parr. Deu- thing else can sat- is- fyl

R4. Garr-ba bla- chan, e' Sam- bal bla- chan, e'ice G of pu- lfe, C E7

Faa- ba ooce is, Non- ya likes C, E'nan and wife, ah!

E7 C F G7 G A7

D Em.

R4. Sam-bal bla- chan, ah Sam- bal bla- chan, e'ikes A ap- pe- tite, C A7

Ron- ya's ta- ble has to have C, E'ay and night, ah!

R4. Ba- ba takes C, Non- ya makes it, Deu- A ca ma- kan, C A7

Faa' to eat it, Deu and true Per- E'na- na- kan! ah!

C2 Mark of the Non- ya and the

SAMBAL BLACHAN [chorus] C136 2.53 bpm 2015-1010 - Page 2

G#m7b5 C#7b9 F#7

D That's how we know who is so Em. true and beautiful

B Bar-za's pleasure, B Bar-za's treasure, B Bel A vil a-gree, B Be A a-are ut Baran- A za Dbla- A, B Be- A Sap zka-

C How we ove it, C How we ove it, C eam- bal zla- chan arl

C Se- sapl (ar'l)

SAMBAL BLACHAN [chorus] C136 2:53 btx 2015-1010 - Page 3

An Exegesis of

“LIM BOON KENG – THE MUSICAL”

1. Introduction: Why I wrote a musical about Lim Boon Keng.

The original inspiration for writing this work was in contemplation of Lim Boon Keng’s life – a classic tragedy of the rise and fall of a great man. (See Section 4, *Lim Boon Keng as Tragic Hero.*)

Lim Boon Keng was my great-grandfather, my father was his eldest grandson in Singapore. I was twelve years old when my great-grandfather died. In later years I asked my father why our family had not gone to visit his grandfather more often, and he replied that it was painful to see the old man, senile and frail, calling for his whiskey in a quavering voice. On our few visits to the shabby old house at Paterson Hill, I remember him not speaking much, but giving me the paper ring off his cigar to wear on my finger.

As an adult, I learned more of Lim Boon Keng’s earlier years, and was struck by the disjunct between the opprobrium and neglect of his old age, and the high honour and esteem in which he had once been held. I learned that his misfortunes seemed to stem not so much from personal errors or character flaws, but from the forces of history that put him in the wrong place at the wrong time. I felt that an injustice had been done to him and I wanted to set the record straight, to rehabilitate him; this was part of the reason why I began writing a musical about his life. Why the work takes the form of a musical rather than a play is discussed in Section 2.3.

I began working on the musical twenty years ago. Since then Lim Boon Keng’s reputation has been largely rehabilitated, as described in Section 2.2. Nevertheless, I still wanted to write his story. It has taken me a very long time, to shape this story of a historical figure from Singapore’s past, into a work of art which I hope will have meaning and emotional resonance for modern Singaporeans.

I have also written a novel titled *The Scholar and the Dragon*, about a young Confucian student in Singapore in 1906, in which Lim Boon Keng plays a small but important role.

The libretto of *Lim Boon Keng – The Musical* will undoubtedly undergo further changes in future. The theatre industry has a saying that “musicals are not just written – they are rewritten.” I expect that this libretto will be staged as a simple showcase, then perhaps as a small-scale production, before building up to a full production, with rewrites at every stage of the way. The script which is included with this essay is just a stage on a long journey.

2. The Importance of Dr Lim in Singapore History

g) 2.1 Brief Summary of the life of Dr Lim Boon Keng.

Lim Boon Keng (LBK, or Lim) was arguably the most eminent Singaporean of the whole period before Independence. He was born in British Colonial Singapore in 1869, into a humble family. Educated in English at Raffles Institution, he was the first Chinese boy to win the Queen's Scholarship to Edinburgh University. He returned to Singapore in 1893, became a doctor in private practice, and plunged into a career of unparalleled activity as a private citizen in a multitude of spheres. At the age of 26, he was the youngest person ever nominated to the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements. He spoke on public affairs, wrote extensively, helped to publish two newspapers and the Straits Chinese Magazine, and either founded or was active in many civic organisations in Singapore. Some of these causes and organisations are listed in Appendix A. He came to be greatly respected by the Chinese community and was trusted to represent their interests, thus serving as the linchpin between them and the Colonial Government.

LBK was an apostle for the cause of education, which had raised him from humble family beginnings to a high status. His most long-lasting contribution in this area was the founding of Singapore Chinese Girls' School, with Song Ong Siang and others. This effort saw years of struggle, persuasion and fund-raising, before the school was securely established as the premier girls' school that it is today.

Lim Boon Keng believed that the best education for those of Chinese descent was a combination of Western knowledge with the age-old wisdom of China – a thesis which met opposition from both the English educated and the Chinese educated. He taught himself to read Chinese, and ran Mandarin language classes at his home.

LBK identified himself as a member of the Straits Chinese community, who were loyal subjects of the British Empire. During the First World War he supported the British cause by writing, speeches and fund-raising, so that after the war the British awarded him an Order of the British Empire (Khor 17).

In the early 20th Century he was very concerned with political events in China; during these early years he was first a friend and later a political opponent of the Chinese revolutionary leader Sun Yat Sen. On separate occasions he helped Sun Yat Sen, and the great Reformist leader, Kang Yu Wei, find safe haven in Singapore from would-be assassins sent by Imperial China. In opposition to Sun, LBK advocated political reform in China rather than violent revolution, and in support of this cause he ran two newspapers, wrote, travelled, lectured and raised funds. After the success of the Revolution in 1911 he reconciled with Sun.

LBK's fortunes began to decline when at the age of 56 he accepted a position as the first President of the University of Amoy in China. Lim left behind all his Singapore positions and business interests and went to Amoy where he worked for 17 years. It must have seemed to him like a wonderful opportunity to put into practice his life-time theories about education. Unfortunately his vision was at odds with the prevailing zeitgeist in China, and a clash with the famous writer Lu Xun ruined Lim's academic reputation. Lim continued to struggle to keep the University going through great financial difficulties. In 1937 Amoy University was ceded to the Government of China and Lim returned to Singapore, having lost his personal fortune, his academic reputation, and his last years of vigorous life.

In 1942 the Japanese invaded Singapore. To Lim's great distress, the Japanese forced him, now 73 years old, to be the leader of the Overseas-Chinese Association (OCA) fostering co-operation between the Japanese and the local Chinese. The OCA was tasked (on pain of dire consequences for themselves and the whole population) to raise the huge sum of \$50 million from the Chinese community as a "gift" to the Japanese, and the people saw their efforts to do this as extortion on behalf of the conquerors. After the war ended a British military tribunal cleared LBK of the charge of collaboration, but the stain on his reputation lingered and much of the Chinese community continued to see LBK as a Japanese sympathizer and collaborator.

LBK's last years after the war were spent as a recluse, shunning – or shunned by – his people. He emerged into public view once, in 1950, when the new Communist government in China expressed its determination to obliterate the traces of Chinese traditional education and culture – the very things Lim Boon Keng had spent his life in upholding, as the vital moral foundation for Chinese in the modern age. As the last public act of his life, LBK founded the China Society, a body intended to preserve the knowledge of Chinese culture and civilization among the English-educated Straits Chinese.

Had Lim Boon Keng died at the peak of his fame, the Chinese community would have honored him with a huge traditional funeral procession, blocking traffic across the city. In the event, when he died in 1957 his funeral was relatively humble and small. He was interred in the Christian cemetery at Bidadari. Today, his ashes rest in a columbarium in Lim Chu Kang, and the headstone of his grave is preserved in the Garden of Remembrance in Mount Vernon Park.



The headstone of Lim Boon Keng's grave. The stone was removed from Bidadari Cemetery to the Garden of Remembrance in Mount Vernon Park.

2.2 Recent Rehabilitation of LBK's Reputation

In the past quarter-century a good deal has happened to restore LBK's reputation.

Although the common people abandoned LBK in his last years, his importance to the history of Singapore was remembered by people who were continuing to shape that history. When he died in 1957 – the year that Singapore gained self-government from Britain – Mr Lim Yew Hock, the Chief Minister of Singapore, sent a letter to Mrs Lim in which he said, “Dr Lim Boon Keng was one of Singapore's most distinguished citizens, and he brought us all in his life, great honour.” The last words seem particularly intended to contradict the ignominy of his public reputation. (This letter is kept by the family of LBK's son Lim Peng Han).

In the 1980's, as independent Singapore began to reflect on its history, school text books began to mention Lim Boon Keng as one of Singapore's great early pioneers, along with Tan Tock Seng and Hoo Ah Kay. The photograph accompanying the text showed LBK in formal Chinese robes. Perhaps because of this, as late as 1998, Jurgen Rudolph felt it necessary to answer the question “Was Dr Lim Boon Keng a Baba?” because some people thought LBK was a pure “Chinaman.” Rudolph answered affirmatively of course. It was ironic that the question was asked at all, in view of LBK's role as one who was not only a spokesman for the Babas (Straits Chinese or Peranakans) but who sought with evangelistic zeal to modernize and transform his community.

Professor Lee Guan Kin, of Singapore's Nanyang Technological University, became the foremost proponent of the rehabilitation of Lim Boon Keng. Between 1990 and 2005, she conducted what amounted to a one-woman campaign in the field of Chinese-language Nanyang studies. (Huang 15-30)

She wrote books and articles and spoke at various conferences. She proposed Lim Boon Keng as a model of Sino-English biculturalism for Singapore. She urged the authorities at Amoy University to recognize the contribution of Lim Boon Keng.

In 2004 Mr Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister of Singapore, made a speech which brought Lim Boon Keng out of the shadows and into the spotlight. Speaking at the International Conference on National Boundaries and Cultural Configurations, at Nanyang Technological University, he spoke of Lim Boon Keng as “an outstanding example of a bilingual and bicultural Singaporean Chinese,” who had been far ahead of his time in advocating the bilingual model of education which Lee Kuan Yew now called for in modern Singapore. (“Many Cultures, One Common Aim,” Straits Times June 24, 2004). Boon Keng was hailed in the Straits Times as a “Bi-Cultural broker” between Chinese and Western cultures. (Cheong 26)



Today LBK is prominently featured at The Peranakan Museum and the National Museum, and his familiar figure can be found in almost any collection of public photographs of that period of Singapore’s history.

In 2007 the National Library Board organized a series of events to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Lim Boon Keng’s death. These included a Conference entitled “Lim Boon Keng and the Straits Chinese: A Historical Re-appraisal.” The Conference was co-organised by the National Library Board and the NUS Department of History, and sponsored by the Settlement of Dr Lim Boon Keng (1921), and attended by academics from Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Japan.

At Amoy University Lim Boon Keng’s name appears to have been forgotten after he left in 1921. Eventually, largely due to Prof Lee Guan Kin’s prolonged efforts, the University began to recover from what Prof Lee terms its historical amnesia.

The first indication of this was in 1990, in the form of an invitation to LBK’s grandson, Prof Lim Kok Ann, the former Dean of Medicine at the University of Singapore, to deliver a public speech at Amoy University.¹ Amoy University thus extended a gesture of recognition and conciliation to the family of Dr Lim Boon Keng

¹ Prof. Lim, whose professional field was Microbiology and Public Health, delivered a talk on the public health aspects of the HIV Virus. At that time this would have been an unpopular subject for his talk, as China continued to deny that there was any HIV presence in China, but Prof Lim said that this was something China needed to know. I believe this intellectual integrity was Prof Lim’s legacy from his grandfather and his uncle Roibert Lim.

In 2005 the University authorities erected a small pavilion by the lake in LBK's honour. As Boon Keng's name, pronounced Wen Qing in Mandarin, means "Celebrate Learning," this pavilion is most appropriately named the Wen Qing pavilion. His family is very gratified to know that at the Qing Ming festival each year, (a traditional occasion to honour the graves of one's ancestors) the current President of Amoy University pays ceremonial respects to the University's Founder Tan Kah Kee, and the Founding President Lim Boon Keng.

In the past decade, LBK's thoughts on Confucianism, so derided by Lu Xun, have been re-discovered by modern Confucian scholars. They have seen his work as an extraordinary pioneering effort to explain Confucianism in English and to relate it to modern Western thought. Prof Yan Chun Bao of Hainan Normal University has hailed Lim Boon Keng as a writer who made a great and unrecognised contribution towards integrating Confucian teaching with modern thought. ("Afterword," Yan 236). In an ultimate irony, Prof Yan has translated LBK's English essays on Confucius into Chinese, for the benefit of modern Chinese students of Confucius.

Bust of Lim Boon Keng outside the Wen Qing Pavilion at Amoy University, with two of his great-grand-children (the writer and her brother).

Thus Lim Boon Keng's reputation, as a man of idealism, integrity and achievement, has been largely redeemed. But the story of his rise and fall is still worth telling.

2.3 Why the Work takes the Format of a Musical

By 1990 I had written several full-length plays but no musicals; nevertheless, I began an early draft called *Boon Keng* which was highly derivative of the musical *Les Miserables*. In 2002 I began working with the group of Singapore composers and writers which evolved into Musical Theatre Ltd, and over the next decade I learned more about the craft of writing musicals.

A musical is to a play, as an oil painting is to a fine pen drawing. The musical uses broad colourful brushstrokes, where a play can go into intricate fine detail. The musical can present a kaleidoscope of shifting times and places, and switch focus from the broad epic canvas to intense personal emotions. In the non-realistic convention of the musical, great events such as a World War can be presented by symbolic devices such as music and dance.

So one reason why LBK's life seems to call for treatment as a musical, not a play, is because the background is epic, covering the tumultuous sweep of the twentieth century – two World Wars, the

Chinese Revolution, the Japanese Occupation and the rise of Communist China. Yet except for the Japanese Occupation, these great international affairs are a distant background to his life in secure Singapore, where he was an observer and vociferous commentator – writing, lecturing, publishing, and shaping public opinion. These great events will have to be broadly suggested rather than limned in detail.

Another reason for such broad strokes is in the nature of our historical information about Lim Boon Keng's life. His public life is very well documented, in newspaper reports, published articles, speeches, etc. (See Section 3.1). But of his private life, almost no evidence survives, and his first biographer, Khor Eng Hee, has expressed regret that his thesis had to be confined to "The Public Life of Dr Lim Boon Keng" (1). I know of no personal papers of Lim's that have been preserved.

Any depiction of Lim Boon Keng's private life will have to be based on speculative extrapolation from scattered family anecdotes and fragmentary hints gleaned in the published data. If I wrote a play, people might assume – given the usual conventions of theatre – that the narration of his public life was largely based on historical fact; it would be awkward to present, at the same time, a story of his personal life that was largely speculative and not substantiated by documented record. The historical facts of Boon Keng's long and complicated life are a heavy weight that would bog down any drama. Positioning Lim Boon Keng's story as a musical allows a lighter touch with history, and allows the audience to suspend disbelief.

I have romanticized LBK's life in a way appropriate to a musical. His first wife Margaret is portrayed as the great love of his life, and although she dies after ten years of marriage, in later years her spirit returns to comfort him. His second wife Grace is treated less sympathetically. The justification for these portrayals is treated at greater length in Section 3.2.1 of this essay.

The musical genre also allows a non-realistic style, a less reverent attitude to archival history – the stage directions of early drafts suggest that historical personages and events, like Dr Sun Yat Sen's support of the Chinese Revolution, be presented as cartoon caricatures or as figures in a graphic novel. Referencing the tradition of Greek Classical theatre, there is a chorus which dialogues with Boon Keng and comments on the action.

Most of the dialogue is in verse spoken over a musical back ground, thus escaping the constraints of writing naturalistic dialogue for the Singapore stage and the fraught question of what "voice" to use for characters speaking a wide range of languages. The verse ranges from loose sprung verse a la Gerard Manley Hopkins, to more strictly metered couplets which are half-spoken half-sung, blossoming into fully sung phrases which are recurring motifs throughout the work. An example is Boon Keng's motif "I have promised my life!" encapsulating his resolution to bring education to all.

Bushnell remarks that tragedy uses a different form and language from comedy and history (47-51). The form of the musical allows the compression of and heightening of emotion through song and music, so that it becomes a story about one man's emotional journey, his passions and struggles. Only thus can the life of a historical Singaporean personage be made into the stuff of tragedy.

3. Lim Boon Keng's Life – Facts and Fiction

3.1 Available Historical Record of LBK's Life

In 2007 the National Library Board published *Lim Boon Keng: A Life to Remember - A Select Annotated Bibliography*, listing the major sources about and by Lim Boon Keng. The bulk of contemporary materials are in English; there are books, articles and speeches he wrote, in his constant effort to enlighten, educate and reform his society.

After LBK's move to Amoy in 1921 the flood of writings slowed to a trickle. It seems that LBK did not produce any new works in Chinese, except for his translation of the Chinese classic, the *Li Sao*, into English under the title of *An Elegy on Encountering Sorrows*. In my quest for more information, I commissioned a student translation of Lee Guan Kin's important Chinese-language book, *The Thought of Lim Boon Keng*, but found that this book did not add much new information to the existing English-language materials.

As far as I know, no personal writings of Lim Boon Keng survive. Any letters, journals, private notes, have been lost in the traumas of war, exile, and displacement of families and home. Perhaps there were not many. The impression of Lim Boon Keng is of an intensely private man, who threw his energies into his public persona, but revealed little of his interior life to anyone else.

3.2 Speculation and Extrapolation On The Private Life of LBK

3.2.1 The First and Second Wives – Margaret and Grace.

The union of Lim Boon Keng in 1896 with his first wife, Margaret Wong Tuan Keng, produced four sons in ten years of marriage. His second marriage in 1908 to Grace Yin Pek Ha produced one daughter and a son through almost half a century; in 1917 LBK had an illegitimate son born to Irene Lim.

Extrapolating from these bald facts, I have placed Margaret in the musical as the great love of LBK's life, and Grace as a more selfish character. I have pictured Lim Boon Keng's first marriage as happily passionate, his second as cold and unloving.

Was it really so? No family anecdotes refer to Margaret, who died in 1905. About Grace, who died in 1972, filial respect would preclude any critical comments.

Facts: Margaret's father was Wong Nai Siong, an American-educated pastor of the Foochow Methodist Church (which has a strong presence in Singapore to this day.) He was a visionary who shared Boon Keng's reforming zeal, and for a while they ran a newspaper together. Margaret was said to have been "a refined, enlightened and well-educated woman who had visited England and America," and "one of the first Chinese women to have been educated in the United States" (*A Life to Remember*, "Family"). She married Boon Keng at the beginning of his spectacular rise to eminence. Thoroughly bilingual, she helped to teach Mandarin classes at Boon Keng's home and taught at SCGS.

I have portrayed Margaret as Boon Keng's ideal soulmate, sharing his ideas on women's liberation and education, English-Chinese bi-culturalism, and all that made up his vision that was far in advance of his times. Without Margaret's companionship, Boon Keng had no one who fully understood and sympathized with him.

Boon Keng married again about 2 years after Margaret's death. There are a few unattributable, unrecorded mutters in the family circle, saying that Grace's marriage to Boon Keng was not a happy one.

Grace married Boon Keng at the height of his career in 1908, when his fame and fortune were well established. She became a leader of social organisations such as the Chinese Womens' Association and the Singapore Chinese Orphanage. I extrapolate that she was attached to the perks and position of being Boon Keng's wife. An aunt of mine, brought up in Amoy by Grace, in later years refused to let her son take a certain job because it was "not good enough for the grandson of Dr Lim Boon Keng." It is a fair guess that she had been taught by Grace to think that the family of Lim Boon Keng were a higher order of being than the common run of humanity.

Boon Keng may have married Grace in order to find a mother for his four young sons, but no happy family life followed. Robert, the eldest, was at once sent away to school in Britain, and his brother Francis soon after. Margaret's third son, Walter Kho Leng, (my grand-father) was apparently Grace's favourite. She kept him close to her side till adulthood and forbade him to leave home to study in Edinburgh, till he first got married and sired a son to provide an heir for the next generation. Walter's three children became part of Grace's household in Amoy, with her own children Ena and Peng Han. Boon Keng's illegitimate son, Peng Thiam, was also part of the household in Amoy; in later years, Peng Thiam had no good things to say about Grace's treatment of him.

Upon Boon Keng's death, Grace (like Margaret, a pastor's daughter) insisted on giving him a Christian funeral with a Western gravestone, claiming that he had been baptized on his deathbed. This seems highly unlikely, given LBK's life-long rational Theism (as we might describe his reformed version of Confucianism.) If his funeral had been according to Chinese tradition, the names of all his sons would have had to be inscribed upon the gravestone. My father suggested this may have been Grace's strategy to leave Peng Thiam's name out of the record.

Grace urged Boon Keng to take up the Presidency of Amoy University because she wanted to return to her birthplace and family home in nearby Kulangsu (Khor, 37). When the Japanese occupied Singapore, they pressurized LBK to co-operate with them by making Grace kneel in the hot sun for hours until he capitulated (National Library Board, "Last Years").

In the musical I have portrayed her as a shallow and selfish woman. I must take on the burden of perhaps having done an injustice to Grace Lim Pek Ha.

3.2.2 Robert, the Elephant in the Room.

Margaret's first son, Robert Lim Kho Seng, is the elephant in the room – the invisible presence which no one mentions, yet whose weight influences everything that happens.

Robert was born in 1897. At the age of eight years old, he was sent away to school in Edinburgh and never returned to live in Singapore. He went on to become known as the "Father of Medicine in China." He was Surgeon-General and Minister of Health of the Republic of China, and head of the Chinese Red Cross.

In 1947 Robert Lim left China ahead of the Communist takeover. When Robert Lim arrived in America he was almost penniless – unlike many public officials of China then, who enriched themselves by stripping the assets of their fiefdoms. But, my father said proudly, every ambulance in China Red Cross had its full complement of first aid equipment and spare parts for the vehicles. Robert Lim's friends in America helped him find employment and he became an illustrious Professor of Physiology at the University of Illinois. (Davenport, and National Library Board "Family.") His career is more fully annotated on the Internet, than is Lim Boon Keng's.

Returning to the subject of Robert's youth -- although we may think it barbaric to send an eight-year-old away to school half a world away, we know from Kipling that it was not uncommon for the British,

whose ways an Anglophile like LBK might have emulated, to send their sons “Home” to be educated. Boon Keng himself had gone to Edinburgh on a Queen’s scholarship at the age of 16, and stayed there for seven transformative years. Yet how could any Chinese father, even one as liberated from traditional structures as Lim Boon Keng, send his first-born son away for so far and so long? I would guess that it was newly-married Grace, who insisted on sending Robert away. Many years later, my father, Lim Kok Ann said in an exculpatory vein, “Perhaps a young woman could not be expected to take on four sons in addition to her own family.”

Margaret’s third son, was Walter, the father of Lim Kok Ann. He was the only son who remained with the family, and after taking an M.A at Edinburgh University, he lived in Amoy at the home of his father, the President, and taught English Literature at the University. Francis, the second son, went to Britain. John, the fourth son, was with Lim Boon Keng in Amoy for some years and according to family legend was a Godfather of the dockside gangs on the Amoy waterfront, but he eventually settled in America.

I am bothered by the sanitized picture of Lim Boon Keng in Singapore and later in Amoy, the great man sitting with his wife Grace, that leader of society, surrounded by their small ideal family, while somewhere out there is Robert, a brilliant scholar, making it on his own.

The absence of Robert, Lim Boon Keng’s most eminent son, from Boon Keng’s life, is a family rift that has gone unremarked. About how it affected Lim Boon Keng, we can only speculate.

3.2.3. LBK – Not in Touch with His Own Emotions.

Lim Boon Keng had four sisters and three brothers. Their parents died when he was 12 years old. He was brought up by grand-parents and educated himself through voracious reading at the home of a family friend. Later he became a protégé of Mr Hullett, the Principal of Raffles Institution, who groomed him for the Queen’s Scholarship. After winning the scholarship he left for Edinburgh at the age of 18, and remained in Britain till the age of 25.

I see LBK as a young man living in an exciting life of mental adventure, with new vistas opening up, so that personal relationships became increasingly less important. The eight years in Edinburgh increased his human isolation, surrounded by anti-Asian prejudice, valued only for his mind. In loneliness, he learned to bury his personal feelings, perhaps developing the “stiff upper lip” prized by the British on whom he modeled himself. He becomes someone in the pop-psychology phrase, “not in touch with his feelings,” a deliberate insensitivity not uncommon in his Victorian generation. He maintained a jovial and forceful

public persona, throwing his energies into the great, impersonal causes he dealt with, while inwardly he refused to deal with messy personal relationships.

In writing the musical, I have assumed that this emotional numbness was a reaction to the loss of his first love, Margaret, which may be a romanticisation of the fact that this is just the way he was -- by training and disposition.

I would suggest that LBK displayed the signs of borderline Asperger's syndrome – high intellectual ability and achievement, coupled with having some difficulty with human relationships and emotions. And since Asperger's is an inheritable trait, it is relevant to mention that I see these traits in some of Boon Keng's descendants. Members of my family often seem to show his tendency to live in the life of the mind at the expense of human ties; although they may function very well in society and hold demanding jobs, social interaction is not their primary mode of functioning and can require exhausting effort. When they put out this effort they can be jovial, wise-cracking, jokers who keep everyone laughing -- but they are not gregarious by nature. I extrapolate backwards, that this was Lim Boon Keng's character.

For whatever reason, Lim Boon Keng seems to have shirked the emotional demands of family life. Thus he allowed Robert to be, in effect, severed from his family. Furthermore, in conversation with the writer, Dr Lim Peng Thiam said that when he lived as LBK's illegitimate son in the household in Amoy, he was bullied by Grace and treated like a male Cinderella. Perhaps Lim had an understanding with Grace -- as many men did in the matriarchal Peranakan society to which LBK belonged -- that the husband looks after affairs outside the house, but domestic matters are left to the wife. Or else perhaps he was simply henpecked. It is ironic and sad, that the great social reformer allowed these wrongs within his own household; I think this stemmed from his inability to deal with a difficult domestic relationship.

Perhaps it is Lim Boon Keng's emotional reserve that has made it so difficult for me to write a musical about him. Until the most recent draft of the musical, he came across as a stock figure with a mouth full of public oratory -- the real man still hidden behind his theories and ideals. Even after death, he continues to resist showing his private self.

3.2.4. Sense of humour -- Meh Si Boh Ku

I have said that the character of Lim Boon Keng, as I surmise, included periods of retreat into intellectual pursuits, and anti-social withdrawal; however, it also included a very attractive public face as a lively public speaker, raconteur and a bon-vivant. At the numerous social gatherings and entertainments which

came with his position, he may well have been the life and soul of the party. Friends who knew him remember him dancing at cabarets and dinner parties even in his old age.

Moreover, he had an irreverent sense of humour and a love of word-play, a familial characteristic that can be recognized in several of his descendants. In a speech to the medical students, according to family anecdote, he told them that “as a doctor, you must have patience – or you will have no patients!” In Minutes of the august deliberations of the Legislative Council, is recorded somewhere his light-hearted remark that he hopes to have some powers of foresight, even though he has to wear spectacles.

Such puckish irreverence is reflected in one great bon mot, which is recorded by Lim Kok Ann in a videotape in the archives of The Peranakan Museum. This was Lim Boon Keng’s favourite drinking toast, “Meh si boh ku!” It is a phrase in Hokkien (LBK’s mother dialect) that sounds like the French “Merci Beaucoup”, appropriate for a drinking toast. But in Hokkien “meh si boh ku” means, “Not long (before) we die,” a macabre sentiment that would have struck his Chinese hearers as inauspicious, downright ill-omened.

LBK’s son by Grace, Lim Peng Han, once explained to me that “Not long before we die” expresses LBK’s bitterness at the end of his life, a willingness to die soon. But I think otherwise. I think that as a student in Edinburgh, Boon Keng would have been familiar with the ancient drinking song “Gaudeamus Igitur,” whose Latin words say in translation:

*Let us therefore rejoice,
While we are young;
After our youth,
After a troublesome old age
The ground will hold us.*

(“Gaudeamus Igitur - English Translation.”)

These rather morbid words are commonly sung by carousing students, filled with youthful confidence that they will live forever.

I think that Boon Keng, with his fondness for wordplay, noticed the bi-lingual pun “Merci Beaucoup/Meh Si Boh Ku” early in life, and enjoyed scandalizing people with it on social occasions. I imagine him bringing it out light-heartedly in his earlier years, like the student he was, and later in life coming to a deeper realization of its implications of human mortality.

i) 3.2.5 Song Ong Siang

I have depicted a very warm and close friendship between Boon Keng and his life-long friend Song Ong Siang. They were classmates in the elite Queen's scholar's class at Raffles Institution, worked together on the major project of founding and supporting the Singapore Chinese Girls School, and co-edited the Straits Chinese Magazine for twelve years, writing most of the material themselves. I feel safe in assuming that they had the deep friendship of old schoolmates and co-workers towards a shared vision -- perhaps one of the purest kinds of friendship that exists, uncomplicated by hormonal tensions or emotional outbursts.

4. Lim Boon Keng As A Tragic Hero

4.1 What Kind of a Tragedy is Lim Boon Keng's?

In her book *Tragedy - A Short Introduction*, Rebecca Bushnell writes of the nature of tragedy, and describes the concept of the tragic hero. In this section I ask whether the protagonist, Boon Keng, fits the mould of the classical tragic hero. Or rather, since Bushnell shows that the concepts of tragedy and the tragic hero have changed over time as theatre itself has changed, perhaps I should instead ask "What kind of tragic hero is he?" What is the nature of the tragedy before us?

Bushnell says: "We seek meaning in tragedy, looking there for knowledge gained through suffering or simply the strange reassurance that what happened was necessary, that it had to be so" (53). In this section I try to show that the story of Lim Boon Keng's life, as portrayed in the musical, offers some sense of

- Meaning
- Tragic inevitability (" the reassurance that what happened was necessary")
- Insight gained through suffering

What is it to search for Meaning? We feel that Man lives in a universe of chaotic, inexplicable suffering, and it seems in some way to relieve our despair if we can believe that our suffering was in some way necessary. But the mechanism of how "necessity" works, how we find this meaning, depends so much on our beliefs and culture, that the beliefs which underpin Classical Drama have little relevance in our own age.

In her section "Reversal: The Tragedy of Fortune," Bushnell says that much of tragedy's evolution hinges on this question: who or what indeed is to blame for the tragic fall? (55).

She explains that the Ancient Greeks refer to fate, *Moirai*, which seems to relentlessly pursue man, as the furies pursue Orestes; such is the curse on the House of Atreus in the *Oresteia*, pursuing the family for generations (56). In *The Bacchae*, the tragedy is generated by the will of the god who leads Pentheus to his downfall – for the sin of opposing the deity (6). For the Greeks, “Fate” and the “will of the god” can be in opposition, as the gods themselves are subject to the dictates of *Moirai*; we moderns may have difficulty in getting our minds around that concept, if we have been brought up to the idea of a transcendent Deity whose Will shapes the universe.

For the morality plays of medieval Europe, like those which culminated in *Faustus*, the meaning of suffering was that it was God’s punishment for sin -- the suffering of the sinner is so deserved, so inevitable, that there is no sense of new insight, and the sense of great tragedy is not there (Bushnell 59). In our modern age God has largely fallen out of the equation, and neither does the idea of an ineluctable Fate or Destiny work for us as a plot-driver.

We may perhaps find a secular equivalent of Greek fate or *moira*, in the notion of historical necessity. Thus *Lim Boon Keng* is set against the tumultuous background of two world wars and the Chinese Revolution. As we watch the show we will not wonder what the outcome of his actions might be, but feel that these events are inevitable and fixed in time. Bushnell quotes Terry Eagleton: “Tragedy is the present lived as though it were the past, tempering the excitement of a “What comes next” with the consoling certitudes of an ending we read back at each point into the evolving action” (53). History is fixed, the painful events of life are unavoidable. We may however discover meaning in the response of the protagonist to these events – in the choices he makes, and how he responds to his suffering.

In Section 7.8 I show how *Lim Boon Keng* in this respect resembles Orson Welles’ movie *Citizen Kane*, as described by Bucknell (63). As we watch *Lim Boon Keng* our interest should be in LBK’s response to the historical events of his time. Did he have any choice in what he did? Does his response to these events lead to any new insight?

There are points in LBK’s story when he does have a choice, and responds with suitable heroism. In choosing to found the girls’ school (SCGS), he displays great ability in drawing together rival parties, and tenacity and determination proceeding against opposition. In deciding to take up the offer to leave Singapore to become the Principal of Amoy University, he heroically sacrifices social position and wealth for a life far from his comfort zone, which ultimately brings him into opprobrium and poverty. Finally in agreeing to become chairman of the puppet Overseas Chinese Association, he sacrifices his moral rectitude in order to protect the people of Singapore; the sacrifice of his integrity is a fate worse than

death, leading to humiliation, despair, and the final degradation of facing a British Military Tribunal on a charge of purported collaboration with the enemy.

The plot therefore conforms to Aristotle's description of the Tragedy of Reversal, the downfall of an eminent personage from his high estate (Bushnell 55).

The "meaning we find in tragedy" (Bushnell 53), may be banally simplistic, a truism -- or perhaps one should say, "a great universal truth" -- but it was something that the protagonist did not know at the beginning of the story, and has come to learn through suffering. It gives us a sense of completion, an emotional resolution.

In *The Bacchae* the message is "The gods must be obeyed." In *Les Miserables* the Musical, it seems to be "when we reach Heaven we will find justice." In *Lim Boon Keng* the insight is given in the final song, a drinking song called "Merci Beaucoup." After a life culminating in unrewarded struggle and unjust accusation, Boon Keng gives thanks for life. And although (in the convention of musical theatre) this song first appears in Act One and is reprised for the finale, there is a great difference in this sentiment as expressed by a 26 year-old idealist at a high point of his career, and what it means to Boon Keng at the age of 81. He, and the audience, find in the song a deeper insight, an acceptance of everything life has thrown at him. He arrives at this acceptance through the song "Sunlight on the Water," and it is expressed in the final rendition of "Laugh at Life."

One might see a Classical parallel in Sophocles' Oedipus, who comes to realise that he has been a pawn of the forces of fate, a mere puppet of destiny (Bushnell,57). His response is to blind himself – a shocking gesture of anger and defiance, asserting that he still has power to take his destiny into his own hands in this one respect. Similarly, Boon Keng realises at the end of his life that all his efforts have been frustrated by the tyranny of historical fate. His response is to defy fate by laughing, dancing, and singing a drinking song, asserting the triumph of the human spirit over despair.

This finale conveys the insight or understanding which resolves the sufferings of the earlier part of the show, and gives the audience a kind of emotional satisfaction or closure. It is this which lifts *Lim Boon Keng* above comedy or historical narrative, into tragedy.

4.2 Did Lim Have A Great Character Flaw Leading to Tragedy?

Aristotle recognises the kind of tragedy in which the protagonist's downfall flows from some mistake he makes (*hamartia*) "of great weight and consequence" (Bushnell 55). The "mistake" made was understood

in the morality plays of medieval Europe as sin or weakness, and the protagonist's downfall was due to divine judgement upon the sin.

The secular equivalent in modern times seems to be the "one-defect" theory of tragedy – in which "harmartia," is understood as a character weakness or flaw, or a mistake that might have been made with good intent. It is exemplified by Hamlet, whose one flaw is his inability to decide to kill the King. As a child I saw Laurence Olivier's film version of *Hamlet*, and was much impressed by the opening quotation scrolling down the screen: "So oft it happens, in particular men... carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect." (Although it is arguable whether Hamlet's problem is actually indecision, like a consumer undecided between competing products; the Prince is decisive enough when it comes to leaping aboard pirate ships and stabbing people behind arrasses.)

Boon Keng's "one defect" might be seen as his singleminded attachment to his cherished ideal, of building an educational system based on Confucian morality. Prof Wang Gang Wu has said "there was no question that Lim Boon Keng was obsessed by Confucianism," (175) but in section 5.3 of this paper I will argue that his zealous support for Confucianism did not amount to an "obsession." He was led by this ideal to take up the position at Amoy University; there he laboured for 17 years, while the money ran out, and progressive intellectuals elsewhere in China derided him as a backward reactionary. He struggled to keep the University going by personally travelling to raise funds.

Perhaps LBK should have realised that he was fighting a doomed and futile battle, and gone back to Singapore. But this very tenacity and intractability had enabled him to achieve many great tasks in the past, such as the founding of schools and of KE College of Medicine. Like Aristotle's *harmatia* when it takes the shape of a mistake made with good intentions, his tenacity is a flaw which in other circumstances would have been a virtue.

I see some resemblance between Boon Keng and Sophocles' Oedipus, who, apparently a type-A control freak, insists on pushing the inquiry into the death of the king, long after everyone else would prefer to drop the matter, with disastrous results for himself. But as in Boon Keng's case, this tenacity of character is not something for which he is penalised or punished. The tragedy is about what fate, or history, dumps on this man.

Mr Lee Yew Moon has suggested in conversation, that Lim Boon Keng's great character flaw was an over-readiness to compromise – thus though LBK originally opposed Sun Yat Sen on whether China should be modernised by Reform or by Revolution, after the success of the Chinese Revolution, he was willing to work with Sun. To me this is not a deviation from his principles, just pragmatism – as the Revolution was already an accomplished fact. Similarly, in his later years at Amoy University, when the

University's adoption of Confucian principles was evidently a lost cause, LBK pragmatically soft-pedalled his promotion of Confucianism while privately still believing in it.

His greatest character flaw, I have pointed out in section 3.2.3, was probably an emotional distancing, and a failure to handle personal relationships especially within his own family. But as far as I can tell, this flaw had no impact on his career and did not contribute to his tragic downfall.

5. Lim Boon Keng and Chinese Education

5.1 Lim Boon Keng's bilingualism

Lim Boon Keng's father and grandfather were Chinese-educated traders. As a child LBK was sent to bein Chinese-language education in the temple of the Hokkien Clan Association. (Khor 1). Shortly thereafter he was sent to the Government School in Cross Street where his English education began.

Khor's biography relates that in Edinburgh LBK was shunned by students from China who regarded the English-speaking youth as "not Chinese"; and that he was humiliated when a British professor requested him to translate words on a Chinese scroll, which he was unable to do (Khor 4). Thereafter Boon Keng began to learn Chinese in earnest, in later years with the help of his wife Margaret and his father-in-law Wong Nai Siong. In 1926 he addressed the students at Amoy University in English. (Wang 166) It seems likely that Lim had acquired a good knowledge of spoken and written Chinese, and some literary education, but did not have the deep proficiency to give public lectures in Chinese, and to debate with classical scholars on their own terms.

Back in Singapore, in the 1890's, he was surrounded by the Straits Chinese, who spoke local dialects at home and were literate only in English; and the Chinese-educated traders, almost all of whom spoke southern dialects such as Cantonese, Hokkien or Teochew. Even the few highly-educated scholars among them would have read the Chinese Classics in their own dialects.

To this community LBK announced his conviction that all of Chinese descent, male and female, should be educated to speak and write in Mandarin, and that the Confucian Classics should form the basis of this education. Saying this, he managed to offend the English- educated, dialect-speakers, and gender-role traditionalists. In 1898 LBK started Mandarin classes at his home. In 1906 he founded five Mandarin-language schools in Java, and in 1911 he persuaded a wealthy businessman to found the Mandarin-language Chung Hwa Girls' School in Singapore.

He also said that Confucian studies must form the moral basis of Chinese education. He seems prescient in saying that the new Chinese nation would descend into chaos if it based itself on atheistic science without a moral underpinning. He admired the moral values of Christianity, and its great social achievements, but believed it was culturally unsuitable for Chinese and furthermore was permeated with elements of irrational superstition. In 12 important scholarly articles in the *Straits Chinese Magazine*, he outlined a modernized or reformed Confucianism, based on rational principles.

Lim Boon Keng's emphasis on bi-lingualism and biculturalism was so far ahead from the nationalistic currents of his day, that he met opposition at every turn, but half a century later, Lee Kuan Yew referred with admiration to LBK's work, as the foundation for bicultural education in Singapore. The concept of bi-lingual education, once controversial and revolutionary, has become part of Singapore's institutional wisdom.

5.2 Lim Boon Keng – the English-speaking Confucianist.

As a child Lim Boon Keng had briefly studied the Confucian Classics in the Hokkien clan temple. It may have been in Edinburgh that he began to read Confucius, in English translation. He eventually became convinced that Confucianism was the only viable ethical educational system for the Chinese -- most especially for the English-educated Straits Chinese who had been cut off from their moral and ethical heritage by losing touch with the Chinese language. In 1894 – 5 he wrote a series of twelve articles in the *Straits Chinese Magazine*, to explain and promote Confucianism. He was twenty-five years old when he wrote these articles, and they constituted, as it were, his personal apologia and confession of faith in Confucianism, which he held to for the rest of his life.

What LBK promulgated was not the official Confucianism of the state of China – which he called “the mummy of true Confucianism,” and “dogmatic, formal and conventional. ... a monstrous system of rigid formalism” (Lim, “Confucianism in the Far East” 44). Neither was it the ignorant and superstitious practice of the Straits Chinese, mixed with Taoist and Buddhist forms of devotion. In his essay “*Confucian Cosmogony and Theism*” Lim presents a reformed Confucianism, based on rational principles. Lim compared Confucian Theism with the Deism of 17th Century Europe, saying that Confucius used the symbolic name of Heaven to refer to a non-anthropomorphic supreme power. He writes: “It should be enough to recognize the majesty and benevolence of God, and to identify the Unconditioned and Infinite with the sublime symbol, which in all lands, has been used as a name for God.” This quote illustrates Lim's writing style, with its lengthy periods and elevated vocabulary (45).

Much as Lim admired the moral structures and achievements of Christianity, he thought Christian beliefs were unscientific and irrational. He tried to show that Confucianism was totally rational; it was pragmatic

and scientific in its avoidance of unproveable theological speculation; it was compatible with modern scientific theories such as Darwinism.² (Lim, “*Confucian View of Human Nature*”).

Lim Boon Keng saw Confucianism as a moral system with a sound rational basis, and this was why – thirty years after writing the articles in the *Straits Chinese Magazine* – he strove to make Confucianism the basis of liberal education at Amoy University.

5.3 Lim Boon Keng’s Idea of a University.

In 1921 the millionaire Tan Kah Kee founded Amoy University, fulfilling a lofty goal inspired by his friend Lim Boon Keng. LBK accepted Tan Kah Kee’s invitation to become the first President. In the first few years of LBK’s tenure, he erected new buildings which he named after Confucian virtues, and established the University’s motto as “strive for excellence,” a phrase from the Confucian Book of Rites.

In the commemorative volume *On the Tenth Anniversary of the Foundation of Amoy University*, published in 1931, Lim Boon Keng set out the founding principles on which he had tried to build the University. He wanted it to provide a wide-ranging liberal education which would integrate modern Western learning with moral education.

Lim believed that the strength and prosperity of Western countries was due to the influence of religion, shaping their people’s minds and characters. (“Introduction” Yan 8) He wanted Confucianism to play a similar role in shaping the new Chinese education, to that which Christianity played in Western education. He said: “The true object of the University is to create national leaders ... Our aim is to produce the ideal man – the gentleman or lady with the refinement which should be the outcome of a liberal education... taught to think, to reason, and to exercise his will, so that he may live up to his knowledge and may exercise love as the basis of his moral conduct.” (“On the Tenth Anniversary of the Foundation of Amoy University” 12). Such a gentleman would be the Confucian *Chuntze*, the highly civilised scholar whose title is usually translated, somewhat inadequately, as “gentleman.” The quotation above, especially Lim’s wish that the gentleman “may exercise love as the basis of his moral conduct,” suggests that Lim believed that Confucian education would produce not just a cold acceptance of ethical principles, but a deep emotional commitment to the Confucian ideal of Brotherly love. (“On the Tenth Anniversary of the Foundation of Amoy University” 139.)

² Lim writes that the basic Confucian virtue of filial piety is derived from a natural human impulse to care for one’s own family, and this impulse is a product of Darwinian evolution.

The document also contains an account of the various departments of the University, student life and activity, and an appeal for financial support for the University from the public; it gives the impression of a writer deeply concerned with moral values.

It is clear that Confucianism was deeply integral to Lim Boon Keng's idea of a Chinese University. In his mind it was the indispensable moral underpinning of an institution which would shape the character of China's future generations.

5.4 The Lu Xun controversy

In his essay titled "Lu Xun, Lim Boon Keng and Confucianism," Prof Wang Gungwu describes Lim Boon Keng's clash in 1926 – 27 with the eminent Chinese intellectual Lu Xun. (164-175).

In 1926 LBK set up a new Institute of Sinology at Amoy University to promote Chinese traditional studies. The pro-tem head of the Institute was literary luminary Lin Yu-Tang, who invited the noted writer Lu Xun to join the institute. Lin did not tell Lu Xun about Lim Boon Keng's Confucian ideas, even though Lin would have known that they would be totally unacceptable to Lu Xun. For Lu Xun was the leader of the Chinese Reformist intellectuals known as the May 4th group, (Wang 166) whose aim was to discard the baggage of Chinese traditional literature and culture. His writing style was caustic and contentious. As Prof Wang explains, "The pro-Confucian President probably did not know that he had recruited an anti-Confucian with the sharpest pen in China" (166).

A few days after Lu Xun arrived in Amoy, someone told him about Lim Boon Keng's intentions to make Amoy University a bastion of Confucianism (164). When Lu Xun met the President he was not impressed, describing him as "a Chinese of British Nationality who cannot avoid speaking of Confucius whenever he opens his mouth" (174).

In the next couple of weeks Lim made a speech – in English – to the student body, on the topic "Are the teachings of Confucius applicable today?" explaining, of course, why he thought they were indeed relevant. Four days later Lu Xun addressed the whole university body, which included many who must have been agog to hear the star-quality new professor, and he gave just the opposite message, attacking Confucius. Prof Wang suggests that Lim's refusal to publish or comment on this part of Lu Xun's talk shows how much he was hurt by it (170).

There is no record of Lu Xun and Lim Boon Keng corresponding, or even meeting for discussion. Prof Wang comments that “[t]here seemed to have been no opportunity for a dialogue between two essentially modern men.” (176.) On the one hand Lu Xun apparently neither knew nor cared that Lim proposed a modernised and reformed Confucianism, far different from the archaic version that the May 4th intellectuals spurned. On the other hand, Lim had done little to spread this reformed version. He was at this time “vigorously engaged in trying to build an engineering school and eventually a school of medicine” (Wang 175). Busy with administrative work, and handicapped by being unable to make speeches in Mandarin, he left the running of the Sinology Department to a group of trusted scholars. But these men were dinosaurs, Confucian traditionalists, and moreover included many who were allied with Lu Xun’s old enemies from previous encounters in Beijing (Wang 164).

Lu Xun had contracted to work at Amoy University for two years, but after only four months he resigned his post and went to another university in Guangzhou. He expressed his great dissatisfaction in letters and in his diary. The Chinese intellectual world knew of this tumultuous departure, and heard his side of the story from his correspondence (Wang 172). Lu Xun’s influence was great enough to damage Lim Boon Keng’s reputation in the eyes of several generations of China’s new intelligentsia, including those who were in charge of Amoy University after it was handed over to the Nationalist Government in 1931, and then taken over by the People’s Republic of China after 1949.

When I visited Amoy University in 1990, there was a gigantic statue on the campus of the illustrious Lu Xun who had spent only four months there, but no memorial to the First President who had labored there for seventeen years. This was an indication of how little LBK was still esteemed, at Amoy University.

Professor Wang provides a full account (164-175) of the factors leading to Lu Xun’s departure; he explains that “[among] these factors, Lim Boon Keng’s Confucianism was minor but symptomatic.” He continues: “... there is no question that Lim Boon Keng was obsessive about his Confucianism.” (175). I feel that Prof Wang’s use of “obsessive” to describe LBK is rather too strong.

5.5 Was Lim Boon Keng “Obsessed” by Confucianism?

The online Oxford Dictionary defines “Obsessed” as “having an idea or thought that continually preoccupies or intrudes on a person’s mind” (“Obsessed”).

No doubt Lim Boon Keng talked a lot about Confucianism at Amoy University – he was probably quite a bore on the subject, though Lu Xun’s description of him as one who “cannot avoid speaking of Confucianism whenever he opens his mouth” may be hyperbole from a waspish commentator (Wang 174). However I would suggest that despite Lim Boon Keng’s personal devotion to Confucianism, he was

not a crank or crackpot, and it was only in the special circumstances of Amoy University that he saw an opportunity to put his long-held ideals into practice.

Confucianism was not a dominant strand in Lim's long career, and it hardly surfaced in his public work in Singapore. In his 1901 book *The Chinese Crisis from Within* there are only two references to Confucius within 220 pages. Similarly in his 1915 speech, later reprinted as "*The Unity of the British Empire: why the Straits Chinese should interest themselves in the War*" the name of Confucius is mentioned only twice in 28 pages³.

We may also look at his writings about Singapore Chinese Girls' School (which was founded in 1895 by Lim Boon Keng, Song Ong Siang and others). Its goal, he wrote, was "educating our children in Chinese, Malay and English, as well as in the ordinary rudiments of modern culture." (Ooi 10). The school was to be run like an English school, and "although the school would be strictly secular, the founders were also deeply concerned that children must be taught morals too." (Ooi 10). There is thus a concern for moral education, but no mention of Confucianism.

In 1931, five years after Lu Xun's disastrous sojourn in Amoy, Lim wrote "*On the Tenth Anniversary of The University of Amoy*". Perhaps made wary because of that encounter, Lim hardly uses the word "Confucianism" in this essay, referring rather to "National culture." He was able therefore to temper the expression of his views to suit circumstances – as befitting his long and successful career in public life.

Lim Boon Keng engaged in many spheres of activity as well as education, including the Singapore Municipal Council, the Straits Chinese Legislative Council, the King Edward VII Medical College, and his various commercial interests. He was highly respected in these fields. In 1897, when Lim turned down an invitation by the Chinese Government to serve in their London Embassy, the Straits Budget commented: "The honorable and learned Lim Boon Keng has shown his accustomed good sense" (qtd in Khor 30). This indicates that his peers regarded Lim Boon Keng as a sensible and right-thinking person, not one so obsessed by Confucianism as to allow his pet subject to keep surfacing, like King Charles' head, in everything he wrote and said.

5.6 Lim Boon Keng -- a Chinese Educator Ahead of His Time.

Whether someone's enthusiasm is disproportionate or "obsessive" is a subjective judgement to be made by those who know him or his work. To some extent, it will depend on how seriously we take his work –

³ The references are to "Confucius and Jesus" as religious figures, and "the Age of Confucius" as a chronological marker.

we are more likely to call it an “obsession” when the subject is something we perceive as trivial or nonsensical, than when the cause is something we perceive as highly respectable. It is therefore relevant to say that in recent years Lim Boon Keng’s scholarly reputation as a Confucian scholar is on its way to being rehabilitated. As Professor Wang has pointed out, Lim Boon Keng’s Chinese contemporaries dismissed him as a half-educated cultural parvenu, outmoded and reactionary (172). However, modern Confucian scholars have re-discovered Lim Boon Keng’s writings, and recognize his extraordinary pioneering effort to explain Confucianism in English and to relate it to modern Western thought.

For instance, Prof Yan Chun Bao of Hainan Normal University has hailed Lim Boon Keng as a writer who made a great and unrecognised contribution towards integrating Confucian teaching with modern thought. Yan has translated Lim’s articles on Confucianism in the *Straits Chinese Magazine*, and reprinted them together with the English originals, in his book “*Essays of Lim Boon Keng on Confucianism*. Yan in his Introduction says regretfully, “Dr Lim devoted himself to study and propagandize Confucianism all his life... However we can’t find the name of Dr Lim either in the History of Chinese Philosophy or the History of Confucianism. Dr Lim’s name was unknown, just like a long-vanished legend.” (1).

A very eminent modern Confucian scholar, Prof Tu Weiming,⁴ has provided a Foreword to Yan’s book, entitled “*Lim Boon Keng – An English-speaking Confucian*.” He says: “Lim Boon Keng’s promotion of Confucianism and the Classics a century ago is in many ways in accord with the present revived interest in Chinese culture.” (ix). He continues, “I believe it is time we re-examine Lim Boon Keng’s illumination of Confucianism a century ago”(x).

Another contemporary scholar, Christine Duran, comments on Lim’s original and modern interpretation of Confucianism in a paper titled “The Chinese Origins of Democracy: Dynamic Confucianism in Singapore,” explaining that “[d]irectly contradicting Western assumptions about the rigidity and authoritarianism of Confucianism, Lim offered an interpretation which highlighted its dynamic, progressive political potential. In particular, he developed the case for Confucianism as a source of democratic political impetus, and thus as a challenge to the autocratic, elitist nature of the British system of colonial rule” (Duran 9).

The above references go to show that Lim Boon Keng’s ideas have become more widely accepted, as many people have recognized the need for a moral underpinning to the pursuit of Westernisation and

⁴ Prof Tu Weiming is Peking University Chair Professor (2010-), the Founder and Director of the Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies (IAHS, 2010-), the Director of World Ethics Center of Peking University (2010-), and the Chair Professor of Harvard-Yenching Chinese History, Chinese Philosophy, and Confucianism Studies of Harvard University (1999-) His website, titled “China’s New Confucianism” is at <http://tuweiming.net/>

modernisation. In 1982 Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the Prime Minister of Singapore, saw this need and set up a Committee to study Confucian teaching in Singapore schools. He asked the Committee, including Prof Tu, whether Confucian ethics could be meaningfully taught in English. Prof Tu said that it was possible, citing “Lim Boon Keng’s experiment in promoting Confucianism in English in Singapore.” (viii)

Wang Gungwu says that after the conflict with Lu Xun, “All those who have written on this topic in China had nothing but rude things to say about Lim Boon Keng.” (Wang 184, note 50). Prof Tu, in his 2015 foreword to Yan’s book, writes “I firmly believe that if we were to meet Lim, we would definitely find him a balanced, amiable and peaceful person.” (ix) A personal encomium like this is so unusual in an academic discourse, that perhaps we may take Prof Tu’s comment as intended to redress the “rude things” said by earlier Chinese scholars. Prof Tu in calling Lim “balanced and amiable,” seems to say that Lim was not “obsessed” with Confucianism (ix).

With these evaluations of his character by people who knew his work, I conclude by suggesting that Lim Boon Keng was not a wild-eyed and obsessive dreamer – but a sensible man trying to implement a vision of Chinese education which was, unfortunately, in the wrong place at the wrong time.

5.7 The Li Sao

During his tenure at Amoy University, LBK undertook a translation into English of the great Chinese classic the *Li Sao* by the poet Qi Yuan (c. 338 -288 BC). The translation was published in 1929 as *An Elegy on Encountering Sorrows*.

LBK provided a translation of the Chinese poem into English blank verse, as well as careful notes on the meaning of the text. There are Forwards by international luminaries including Prof H. A Giles (xxi-xxii) the greatest English-language authority on Chinese studies of his time, the Indian poet and Nobel Prize winner Rabindranath Tagore (xxiii-xxiv) and an eminent Classical Chinese scholar, Dr Chen Huan Chang (xxv).

This work may have been intended to boost LBK’s scholarly reputation internationally, as a counterweight to the devastating criticisms levelled in China by Lu Xun. It also was a model for bi-cultural scholarship of the kind he wanted Amoy University to uphold. The faculty of Amoy University now included many Western-trained scientists from America, and LBK consulted them to produce copious annotations of abstruse phrases and allusions in the *Li Sao*, and various explanatory notes and

articles, referring to astrology, botany, and pharmacology. The resultant work gave Western readers a unique glimpse into ancient Chinese science.

I copy below the final stanza of LBK's translation, in which the poet declares his disappointment in failing to find someone worthy to rule his country. He declares his intention to kill himself and become a political martyr like P'eng Hsien.

*Adieu!
Alas! It's all o'er. There is no man in the state!
There's none that does know me!
Why cherish I still the old fatherland?
Since none's good enough to rule it well with me,
I shall then follow P'eng Hsien to his home! (98)*

The verse is infelicitous to modern ears, but the scholarship and research of the work remain remarkable.

I find *An Elegy on Encountering Sorrows* particularly interesting for the light it casts on the intellectual world that Lim inhabited. The range of people who wrote Forwards and Introductions for his book show him as a global citizen – an outstanding member of the emerging class of English-speaking Asians who would lead a new world order (See Section 6) .

The *Elegy on Encountering Sorrows* is also particularly interesting set in the context of the last years of LBK's life in Singapore after the Second World War. Like Qu Yuan, he was unjustly reviled as a traitor, yet clung to his principles. There is a deeply dramatic resonance in lines such as “Though hacked to pieces, I shall never change! How can my heart be forced, then, to recant?” (*The Li Sao – An Elegy on Encountering Sorrows* 72) and “I shall repress my heart and cool my zeal; I'll bear the blame and wipe off all the shame” (*The Li Sao – An Elegy on Encountering Sorrows* 74).

In the draft called *Warrior of the Mind* I wrote a couple of scenes to highlight this ironic resonance, setting the lines to the exciting beat of the drums of the Dragon Boat race which to this day is held throughout the Sinophone world, in honour of Qu Yuan. However, when I decided to keep the focus of the musical strictly in Singapore, cutting out events in China, these scenes had to go.

5.8 Using this Material in the Musical.

Lim Boon Keng's emphases on bi-lingualism and biculturalism were so far ahead of the nationalistic currents of his day, that he met opposition at every turn. Half a century later, Lee Kuan Yew paid homage to what LBK had written as the foundation for bicultural education in Singapore. Today, these principles

are so much part of Singapore's "received wisdom" that I had trouble making them exciting and startling in the musical. So I reluctantly decided not to emphasise this matter in the musical – not to have several scenes and songs devoted to it. One reason is purely pragmatic – such scenes and songs would inevitably have to be bilingual, an interesting artistic challenge, but one beyond my own linguistic skills.

Further, anything said in favour of biculturalism in the musical will, inevitably, sound like Singapore Government propaganda from the 1980's – stale and irritatingly jingoistic. All I can do, in the musical, is to show how much opposition LBK's ideas met when they first appeared. I have to portray him as a voice crying in the wilderness, a martyr unknown till long after his death.

In a similar way, the 17 years in Amoy, and the great Lu Xun controversy, shape the downward arc of LBK's tragedy, and for one draft of the work (Section 7.7) I had actually written one Act about this period, including a section on the *Li Sao*. But at a reading conducted in early March 2016, reviewers pointed out why this Act would not fit into the musical and should be omitted.

This is because *Lim Boon Keng – The Musical* is an epic about the history of Singapore, as much as it is the story of one man. And in the minds of Singaporeans, in the minds of all at the reading, the events of the Japanese Occupation were traumatic and earth-shaking events, in comparison with which a literary controversy in 1930's Amoy had little significance.

6. The Complicated Loyalties of Lim Boon Keng

Singapore in Lim Boon Keng's day was much divided into various factions. Lim Boon Keng himself seemed to see no contradiction between his various roles. I think he had an over-riding vision of a great world-wide community of enlightened men from every nation, striving together to attain peaceful advance and uplift for all.

In Singapore there were Boon Keng's own people, the Straits Chinese (also known as the Peranakans, or as the Babas and Nonyas) traditionally loyal to the British Empire, who sent their sons to English language schools and learned no Chinese. They regarded his swing towards Chinese culture as a betrayal of his Baba people.

Politically he was a subject of the British Empire, but got involved in radical Chinese politics -- thus the British questioned his loyalty to the Empire in the early years. (However we have seen that in 1918 the British awarded him an O.B.E., and in 1945 the British Military Tribunal cleared him of the charge of collusion with the enemy.)

Being a supporter of the reign of the Emperor, he was regarded as a traitor by Nationalist Chinese – and with suspicion by the British. Since he supported a reform of the Imperial Court, he was distrusted by the Old Guard of Chinese mandarins around the throne.

Chinese intellectuals regarded him as “not a real Chinese” because of his lack of Chinese culture; and although he learned to speak Chinese, at Amoy University he was not sufficiently confident to give official speeches in Mandarin. And in the vituperative battles (in newspaper articles) with Sun Yat Sun, and those who called for violent overthrow of the Chinese Emperor, LBK was called a traitor to the Chinese Nationalist cause.

I think in Boon Keng’s mind they all were sons of Han, whether they were Babas or Chinese intellectuals, Reformers or Revolutionaries, sharing a common desire for the uplift of their ancient nation. Even when he engaged in strongly-worded combat with his immediate opponents, he saw an over-arching common goal.

Neither was Lim Boon Keng a narrow racist. In daily work in Singapore, he worked with men of different races and cultures. We are told that he was able to converse with his patients in English, Hokkien, Malay, Baba Malay, Cantonese and Teochew; he also learned Japanese, French, German, Latin, and Greek (NLB, “Mandarin Classes”).

On the world stage, LBK was one of a limited number of Asians who had gained recognition in the Western world. He corresponded with Rabindranath Tagore, who contributed a kindly-worded Forward to *The Li Sao: An Elegy on Encountering Sorrows*; in all probability he corresponded with Gandhi and Nehru. He may have seen himself as part of a brotherhood of the first generation of English-educated Asians, rooted in their different cultures, but sharing in a commonwealth of enlightened ideas.

There were many other races and cultures in Singapore, besides the Chinese. Although they do not figure largely in Boon Keng’s story, he had friends from all races, and his policies as a Municipal Councilor and Legislative Councilor were to the benefit of all. In the last recorded interviews before he died, he appealed for tolerance and understanding within society – thus warning against the narrow factionalism which had shadowed so much of his life.

7. Evolution of the Musical: Stages in Development over Two Decades

In 1994, I wrote the first of many different versions of the musical about Lim Boon Keng. Each version went through many revisions and rewrites. Appendix B to this essay contains the final drafts of each

successive version. (In the earliest case, this is a scanned copy of a print-out from a dot-matrix printer, the original floppy-disc files now being irretrievable.)

The work *Blue Willow House* completed in 2004 was split into two 45- minute musicals, *Blue Willow House* with music by Kenneth Lyen, and *Victorian Days* with music by Chester Tan, which were both produced by Musical Theatre Ltd in 2006. None of the other scripts have been produced.

In the notes below, I trace how some elements of the musical appeared in early drafts and persisted to the final version (while other elements disappeared from sight). Songs mentioned in this context are just conceptual drafts, a title and a few lines of blank verse. The music and the lyrics did not take form till the final version.

7.1 *Boon Keng* 1994

For my first attempt at a musical on Lim Boon Keng, Khor's thesis was my primary source, as well as archival materials such as the *Straits Chinese Magazine* and the *Proceedings of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council*. As a result the emphasis was on LBK's career in Singapore in the English speaking world.

Boon Keng (1994) is a rock musical for four voices, the singers being expected to double other minor parts between themselves. The main role is Lim Boon Keng; the second is Tisa, a visitant from modern Singapore. She is the great-grand-daughter of Lim Boon Keng, and she is very angry with him because according to what she has heard, he was a traitor to his people, letting her inherit a family burden of shame and disgrace. The third character is Fang, an activist from China, full of revolutionary zeal, pouring rancorous scorn on LBK's attempt to integrate into Chinese culture. The fourth character is the Governor representing the might of the British Empire, doubling with Wong who represents the English - educated Straits Chinese.

In 1994 I had no experience in writing lyrics to music, and my prosody in this work is greatly influenced by Kipling and by the musical *Les Miserables*. For example:

FANG: Little servant of the English,
 You who always tread their dance,
 If you want to work for China,
 Now's the time to take your chance!
 I have come to seek the comrades
 Who will fight the fight with me,
 To bring home a revolution,
 that will set our people free!

BOON KENG: I believe that peace will conquer

Gentle words will still prevail
Night of barbarism over,
Men of violence still must fail..
I believe -- all men can live like brothers
I believe all men can live in peace.

There is also an early version of the song “Laugh at Life” (Meh Si Boh Ku), which persists into the current versions of the musical.

7.2 Blue Willow House (2004)

Blue Willow House is a musical about Singapore in the 1880's, based on two books of social history by James Francis Warren: *Ricksha Coolies* and *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san: Prostitutes in Singapore, 1870-1940*. Music was by Kenneth Lyen.

The story is set in Singapore in 1885, the British Emporium where everything is for sale. Idealistic young Dr Lim Boon Keng rescues a girl from a brothel, the “Blue Willow House” of the title. He is moved to dedicate his life to helping the masses. The musical ends with Boon Keng leading the street people in a reflection of their historical presence in Singapore, in an anthem resounding to the torrential downpour of tropical rain.

BOON KENG

For all of us are passing, like leaves that fall in storm –
When rain comes like blessing, new life will be born.

CHORUS

Hear the rain, hear the rain,
how it comes, it comes –

How it comes how it drums
On the trees On the seas
On the grass On the street
On the dust At our feet
Hear the rain!
Hear it rushing hear it gushing
Hear it roar hear it pour
Hear it flow hear it grow
Hear the rain!

BOON KENG

Our spirits will linger, on the streets where we have been
the footsteps we leave, in the future shall be seen.
In the songs of the city our joy and sorrow remain.
You will hear our voices, in the sound of the falling rain.

7.3 Blue Willow House 2006

A 45-minute musical using materials from the full-length *Blue Willow House*.

7.4 Victorian Days 2006

This was a 45-minute musical about a young doctor called Albert, who devotes himself to a life of public service, after the girl he loves falls victim to the epidemic of venereal disease described in James Warren's book *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san: prostitutes in Singapore, 1870- 1940*. It very loosely references the young Boon Keng's dedication of his life to public service, with a song "One Voice" in which he declares his intention to be the voice of the people.

The short musicals *Blue Willow House* and *Victorian Days* were produced by Musical Theatre Ltd in 2006, as part of the series *Five Foot Broadway – New Wave*.

7.5 Rickshaw Boy 2008

This was an attempt to rewrite the material of *Blue Willow House* and *Victorian Days* into a full-length musical which was NOT about Lim Boon Keng, although he appeared as a minor character. The work was never produced.

7.6 Boon Keng 2008

This full length musical focused on Boon Keng's friendship with Song Ong Siang, and their founding of Singapore Chinese Girls' School (SCGS). Some of their dialogue happens while they are playing tennis, some while Boon Keng is tirelessly riding a bicycle, symbolising his phenomenal activity. The format of the musical is like a TED talk with interactive video background.

The interlocutor from the future, instead of being LBK's great grand-daughter, is Jenny, a teacher from SCGS, and there is a chorus of little girls from SCGS. The little girls' "Swallow Song," and "Losing a Friend" in which Song Ong Siang regrets his severance from LBK, appear in this draft and reappear in *Warrior of the Mind*.

7.7 Baba Boon Keng 2009

Other titles considered for this version were *The Legend of Dr Lim Boon Keng* and *Boon Keng of Singapore*.

The script, still using the format of a TED-talk video, underlines the role of the Straits Chinese (Babas, or Peranakans) in building modern Singapore.

In this version Margaret, Boon Keng's first wife, and his love for her take on new importance. She dies young, but in later years her spirit returns to encourage Boon Keng. Songs for Margaret first conceptualised here, and which are carried over to the final version, include "I Don't want to Marry a Baba" and "By Your side."

The visitor from Singapore's future is now an anonymous singer who sings the great introductory song, "Tell Me Who you Are."

7.8 Lim Boon Keng - Warrior of the Mind (2016)

This is the version of the Musical which I wrote between 2014 and 2016, for the NTU Creative Writing MA submission. The central idea was the love story of Lim Boon Keng and Margaret. The "traveller from the future" was now Margo, the grand-daughter of Margaret, with the haunting song "Tell Me who You Are" as she tries to unravel her ancestor's past. Most importantly, almost all of the songs were completed with lyrics set to music from composer Desmond Moey. A new character introduced was Boon Keng's sister Yu Loo, a historical personage whose seventh-generation descendant Rebecca Seow recently wrote a book about the family.

The libretto and music were presented to a small selected audience on two separate days in March 2016.

1. The feedback from this audience suggested that (as explained in Section 5.8 of this essay) the Amoy University period of LBK's life, though important to him personally, will not fit well into this musical for contemporary Singapore.

I decided that I must find a way to encapsulate those seventeen years into a narrative leading to the aged and almost destitute LBK returning to Singapore, after his Amoy adventure. If I have done this successfully, the Amoy years will appear as does a calamity in Greek tragedy, where the disaster happens off-stage, but whose repercussions shape the protagonist's fate.

2. The reviewers did not like the device of the big TED-talk video.

3. The audience said they had no feeling for the character of Lim Boon Keng – no sense of who he was, or of any character arc for him. I realized that this musical did not show LBK taking action – and it did

not show what impelled him to act, or what he thought and felt about it. I had not in fact succeeded in fulfilling the promise of “Tell Me Who You Are.”

4. The story arc was pedestrian. Reviewers suggested possibly change it to start with LBK’s trial before the British War Crimes Tribunal.

5. I also felt that I should revert to the small cast of the earlier drafts. My instinct then was to keep this as an intimate story – the story of one man, not fleshed out with many different characters.

7.8 Lim Boon Keng –The Musical 2016

After receiving feedback on *Warrior of the Mind*, I decided that I needed to re-think the whole structure of the musical. I had tried to structure this work on the lines of the musical *Les Miserables* – the story of one man's life, told chronologically with a background of contemporary historical events. The resultant script, *Warrior of the Mind*, was one might say adequately workmanlike but not stirring, not inspiring. The chronological format was too clumsy, and the attempt to tell LBK’s whole life story took up so much “screen-time” that there was no room for personality development – Boon Keng’s personality did not come through.

I also decided that the use of a format resembling TED talks was a mistake. That format tempted me to load in all the copious historical data, leading to an information overload for the audience. Were I to include all the available data, I would have written a history essay, not a musical. More significantly, a TED talk, full of information, would lead the audience into intellectualization — it would take them into their heads, away from their hearts which is where I want them to be.

At this point in my thinking I read Arthur Waley's translations of the Noh plays of Japan. I was called to remembrance of my roots as a playwright (Kon, *Emily of Emerald Hilla* and *Three Stellar Plays*.) In these earlier plays I did not use the conventions of Western “realistic” theatre, but various devices suggested by Asian traditional forms of theatre. (Kon, “Cross-cultural influences in the Work of a Singapore Writer.”) Arthur Waley's book reminded me of these strategies, which are also common to Greek theatre.

One such strategy is to have a lot of the story narrated by one of the actors, such as the historical background, or battles and disasters that happen off-stage. What is acted on stage will simply be the reactions of the characters to these events. Thus I could compress the historical matter, and focus on LBK’s emotions and reactions.

Another device common to Ancient Greek and Japanese Noh theatre, is the presence of a chorus, who dialogue with the main characters. I realized that this Chorus is the community of the Straits Chinese (also

known as the Babas or Peranakans). These are Boon Keng's own people, his friends and family and wider society. It is they whom he strives to modernize, they who often obstruct his efforts, and they who reject him in the end. By focusing on the Babas, I keep all the action of the story in Singapore, and do not need to set any scenes in China or Europe.

I decided that the musical would not be structured chronologically but thematically. I had done this before; in *Emily of Emerald Hill* the character narrates various events flitting back and forth through time, in apparently no particular order; in fact, the organizing principle is Emily's progressive self-revelation to the audience. For LBK, the organizing principle of the story became the question of his various conflicting loyalties, as described in Section 6 of this paper. I owe to Mr Lee Yew Moon the suggestion to open the musical with the scene at the worst point of LBK's humiliation and degradation, in which he is brought before a British Military Tribunal on a charge of treason and collaboration with the enemy. People who knew Boon Keng told his story, such as his friend Song Ong Siang, and his father-in-law Wong Nai Siong. Their narratives did not have to be in chronological order, and apparently address the question of whether LBK was a traitor. But the question for the musical is not whether LBK was a traitor to the British Empire. We are never really in doubt, this question just serves as a plot driver. The real theme of this musical is how a man who has achieved an illustrious career copes with the fall, in his old age, into disrespect and humiliation.

It was only after preparing a new outline of *Lim Boon Keng*, on the lines described above, that I realised that this structure is very similar to the Orson Welle's movie *Citizen Kane* based on the life of Randolph Hearst. Bushnell summarises *Citizen Kane* (63). The movie begins with the death of Kane, followed by a news-reel documentary laying out the story of his life. "What story is then left to be told?" Bushnell asks (64). In subsequent scenes various people who knew him give their viewpoints on his life, his character and motivations and what it meant in the end. "As in Greek tragedy," Bushnell says (64), "*Citizen Kane* retells a story that has already been told, so the tension lies not in discovering the ending, but in seeing how the ending will be achieved and in grasping the meaning of the key to Kane's life."

Similarly in *Lim Boon Keng* the interest is not in discovering whether LBK was a traitor, but in seeing how the accusation of treachery came about and how it worked out.

9. The Prosody of the Musical

The music for the songs is by Mr Desmond Moey, a composer who has won local song-writing awards and was invited to compose music for the National Day Parade 1997. Desmond and I have written four full-length musicals: *Lost in Transit*, *Peter and Pierre*, *Merlion*, and *Emily the Musical*.

The music for the songs usually comes before the lyrics. I tell Desmond the general feeling I want for the song, the mood and theme. When he gives me the music I write the lyrics to his melody. I prefer doing this rather than writing the words first and asking composer to fit music to the words, so that the composer can have freedom to structure the music as he thinks best; then the words can follow his structure.

The fit of the words to the notes is not easy, as Desmond's music is often rather intricate. The emphasis of each syllable must correspond with the rhythmic pattern of the melody. Each phrase must be "singable," keeping the lyric qualities of the music. I have learned much from Desmond over the years, as we revise and rewrite the songs.

Lyrics for songs in a musical differ from poetry. Modern poetry appeals more to the intellect than the senses; it is not metricated and the meaning is densely packed, requiring close attention from the hearer; indeed it often seems to have severed its connection with the spoken word, and to be intended for a reader who can go back and revisit the words on the page.

In a musical we use the songs to express emotion, and as part of the dramatic action. I want the audience at a musical to hear a song as an emotional experience, part of the journey on which I am taking them. I do not want them to intellectualise, to concentrate on the meaning of the words; I want them to listen to the music at a gut level, and take in the words without thinking about them. So the words cannot be too densely packed. The words should never get in the way of the music; they should help the music express the feelings of the song.

A musical should not be like a "play with songs" – large stretches of ordinary dialogue with characters occasionally bursting into song. In the musical *Lim Boon Keng* I decided to put the large chunks of "information" into separate narrative speeches. The remainder of the dialogue, I decided to put as much as possible into rhymed verse. I had done this in *Emily the Musical*, with rather qualified success, as the actors were not used to the idea of speaking verse on stage. I believe that with more guidance of the actors, the verse should work as well as Shakespearean verse in traditional theatre. Thus we would have a mode of speech on stage which will be, as Bushnell says, the heightened language of tragedy, (47 -51) which differentiates it from the language of everyday experience.

I have for many years been trying to write verse to be spoken by actors, that is based upon the natural rhythms of Singapore speech. The verse is based on four stresses to the line rather than the English pentameter. It appears in plays such as "Runner of Marathon," "Trial" and "Dragon's Teeth Gate." In earlier years, directors and actors in Singapore were uncomfortable with metered dialogue, and a director of *Trial* even had the actor repeat phrases and parts of lines, to deconstruct the verse. I hope that a new

generation of theatre practitioners will be able to handle the verse of my latest work, and find it adds gravitas to the tragedy of *Lim Boon Keng*.

The last song written for the musical was Song # 24: “Sunlight on the Water.” Margaret’s spirit urges the aged Boon Keng to take a kind of transcendental comfort from the cycles of nature, and to realise that the integrity and honour of his struggle are more significant than success or failure. I realized after the song was completed, that the mood and theme closely resemble the song “Night follows Daytime,”⁵ which I wrote in 1958 when I was fifteen years old. It formed the conclusion of “*The Orinsil*,” a Tolkien-inspired fantasy novel which was my first major piece of work.

This philosophy, the deepest truth that I could express in my youth, speaks again in “Sunlight on the Water,” unchanged by the years. I find here a thematic return to my beginning, which gives me a sense of home-coming and closure.

⁵ Nothing of earth is there lasting endures,
Neither the kingdoms of men nor their fame
Soon they are gone and no memory lingers,
and still a new people arise just the same.
To joy and to sorrow at last comes an ending,
And an ending to splendor and glory and might.
Slumber falls soft and enfolds them in silence,
Night follows daytide and dawn follows night.

Then after both grief and delight long have vanished,
remains only having played truly one’s part.
It is not the end of the struggle that matters,
But if it was done with full faith and full heart.
Only the having been true then will linger,
All else be forgotten, the dark and the light.
Then rest, knowing “All I could do, I have done.”
Night follows daytide, and dawn follows night.

Storms may arise and the world may seem darkened,
Yet after the storm still the sun shall be seen,
Take comfort and stand, turn your face to the future,
nothing can cancel the good that has been.
No storm lasts for ever. Be thou strong, be thou steadfast,
Till at last comes a day of unlesening light.
Till that time when all darkness forever is banished,
Night follows daytide and dawn follows night.

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APPENDIX A

2) List of Lim Boon Keng's Activities and Affiliations

1. Positions with Colonial Government

Unofficial Member - Straits Settlements Legislative Council five three-year terms between 1895 and 1921.

Member of Singapore Municipal Council (1905 – 1897)

Member of Chinese Advisory Board.) (1897 – 1898, 1913-1922.

Justice of the Peace 1897

1907 – 1910 – Taught pharmacology and therapeutics at the Government Medical School – voluntary.

2. Membership of Civic Organisations in Singapore

Singapore Volunteer Corps – member 1901-1905

1896 – 1910 Committee of Raffles Library and Museum.

1897 – founded Chinese Philomathic Society, a Baba association devoted to the study of Western Literature, Western music and the Chinese language.

1897 – with Song Ong Siang, founded the English language *Straits Chinese Magazine*, a quarterly journal carrying articles of Western and Eastern Culture.

1900 – with Song Ong Siang, founded Straits Chinese British Association

1906 With SC Yin, founded Anti-Opium Society. Opened an Opium refuge centre.

1913- 21 Chairman of Board of Directors of *Malaya Tribune*, an English language newspaper, which he founded with others in 1913.

Others (dates unknown) President – Straits Philosophical Society. Also Involved in Social clubs – Chinese Recreation Club, Weekly Entertainment Club, Garden Club, City Club.

1942 Forced by Japanese to be President of Overseas Chinese Association, tasked to raise \$50 million as a gift to the Japanese.

1950- Founded the China Society – for Singapore Chinese to know more about Chinese culture.

3. Activities connected with Chinese Politics.

1898 With Khoo Seok Wan Founded a newspaper, , Tien Nan Shin Pao to support the Reform movement

1899 With Wong Nai Siong Took over and ran another newspaper Jit Shin Pao, , to support reform.

1906 With others, founded Singapore Tong-MengHui (Revolutionary League) a group which opposed the Manchu Govt in China.

1913 – became President of the Singapore Kuomintang.

1911 Appointed by the Machu Government as Medical Adviser to the Ministry of the Interior; Inspector General of Hospitals in Beijing; delegate to international medical conferences in Paris, and Rome, director of International Hygiene Exhibition in Dresden

1912 – appointed as Sun Yat Sen’s confidential secretary and personal physician. He resigned from these posts soon after.

4. Major campaigns and causes

1893-95 Anti-Opium campaign – series of public lectures and articles.

1899 Campaign against the Chinese queue (which was a symbol of Manchu bondage)

Education -- 1899 with Song Ong Siang and others, started Singapore Chinese Girls School to provide Education for Chinese girls.

1898 – Speak Mandarin campaign - started Mandarin classes at his home.

1902 - 20 Tried to persuade Colonial Government to provide Mandarin language education for Chinese students.

1906 – visited Java and founded five Mandarin language schools.

1910 – fund raising for the King Edward V!! Memorial Fund, which was donated to the Medical school

1914 – 16 Fund-raising for the Prince of Wales Relief Fund –British Red Cross and for purchase of war planes for Britain

1914 – 16 During World War I he wrote and spoke to persuade the Straits Chinese to support the British Empire’s struggle.

5. Business Activities

1898 With Tan Chay Yan , Lee Choon Guan and others, established Sembawang Rubber Plantations Ltd and Tempines Para and Coconut Plantations Ltd.

1920 With Lim Nee Soon and others, founded Overseas Assurance Company.

1912, With Lee Choon Guan and others, established Chinese Commercial Bank Ltd.

1920 – Was a founding Director of Ho Hong Bank.

1919 – with Lim Nee Soon and others, founded Overseas Chinese Bank and was the first Chairman.

With Lim Nee Soon and others, founded United Saw Mills of Singapore.

Shareholder of Straits Trading Co.

6. Books and articles by Lim Boon Keng

1901 *The Chinese Crisis from Within*

1915 *The Unity of the British Empire* – why Straits Chinese should interest themselves in the War.

1927 – *Tragedies of Eastern Life* – An introduction to the problems of social psychology. (fiction.)

1917. *The Great War from the Confucian point of view*, and kindred topics, being lectures delivered during 1914 – 1917.

1929 *The Li Sao – An Elegy on Encountering Sorrows*.

1936 *The City of Amoy, now named Sze-Ming*, or The Island that remembers the Ming.

1931 *The Quintessence of Chinese Culture*

1897 - 1907 About .98 articles in *Straits Chinese Magazine*, under various pseudonyms. Articles in *Transactions of the Straits Philosophical Society*, *Proceedings of the Straits Philosophical Society*, *Journal of Straits Medical Association*.

APPENDIX B

Scripts of Previous Versions of LIM BOON KENG THE MUSICAL.

8. *Boon Keng, 1993*
9. *Blue Willow House 2004*
10. *Victorian Days (2006)*
11. *Rickshaw Boy 2008*
12. *Baba Boon Keng 2009 (Outline)*
13. *Lim Boon Keng – Warrior of the Mind 2015*

LIM BOON

KENG

1993

A rock Musical for four voices

1993

MAIN PARTS

LIM

TISA

FANG

GOVERNOR/WONG

Can reduce to three parts by doubling Governor\Wong. Tisa also sings Mrs Lim. Optional Chorus.

visuals: projector shows Year and place and national flags.

TISA STRIDES
CENTRE STAGE:
AN AGGRESSIVE
AND TOTALLY
CONTEMPORARY
YOUNG WOMAN,
POWERDRESSED

strident and
modern

TISA

What do these memories mean to me?
What do I care how you all used to be.
You've had your time and your race is
run,
Now it's my turn for my day in the
sun.
Why should I care about issues long
dead
I have no feeling for the tears that
you shed.
Though I'm your child well it's no big
deal,
It makes no difference to the way I
feel.

What does it matter from where you
once came
It's here and today I must play my own
game.
Whether you struggled and whether you
won
Has nothing to do with my work to be
done.
Though you're my ancestors so what
does it mean
You've left me nothing but colour of
skin.
I live in a nation which you never
knew
I've my own life and work to do.

(RECITATIVE)

As a matter of fact ...
there is something I want to give you
the blame --
one ancestor brings my nothing but
shame.
I am ashamed to admit before men --
My great grandfather was Dr Lim Boon
Keng.

DR LIM BOON
KENG STEPS
OUT OF THE
SHADOWS. HE
WEARS A BLACK
TAILCOAT.

motif: "reason and
goodwill"

still
kindly and urbane

LIM

Young woman, it's interesting
that your anger is so strong
I'm surprised that any child of mine
should think that I've done wrong
Now let us talk together
With reason and good will
And tell me what you've heard of me
THat makes you speak so ill.

TISA

Dr Lim Boon Keng you were my father's
father's dad
The Chinese hero Fang Zhenli said you
were rotten bad
He wrote you were a traitor, to your
people and your race
He said that you deserved to die in
shame and in disgrace!

LIM

Well this is quite distressing
That this is said of me
The years have not been gentle
To my post-humous memory ...
And so my great-grand daughter
When you read this bad review
Did you not ask your father then
How much of this was true?

TINA MUCH
STRUCK

TINA
RELUCTANTLY
SITS DOWN TO
LISTEN. LIM
NARRATES.

DATELINE:
SINGAPORE
1987
LIM IS A
SCHOOLBOY
SITTING IN A
CORNER WITH
BOOKS

TISA

My mum divorced my father then the
stupid bastard died.
She quarrelled with your family, you
are rotten all inside.
I know what's said about you, by
gossips in the town
You betrayed your faithful comrades
and you let your people down.

LIM

There is one thing I am sure of
Though there's none to take my part
Any child born of my children
Will have justice in her heart.
I am sure you have a feeling
That demands to see fair play
There's two sides to every story
Will you let me have my say....

LIM

(RECITATIVE)

I was born in a Singapore house In
October the eighteenth day

TINA

I thought you were born in China

LIM

My father came from Penang and we all
spoke Malay ...

I went to the government school in
Cross street and did well
I moved to the Raffles Institution and
discovered a magical spell..
I found in the pages of books all the
friends that I ever would need ...
There's a world of ideas and ideals
opened up to a boy who can read....

WONG NARRATES

The headmaster tutored the boy, he
found him as quick as a whip
He coached him and coaxed him and as
we all know
he soon got the Queens scholarship

"far from
home" blends
into faint
bagpipes

first hint of
"promised my life"
motif

LIM

Britain! Scotland! SEVEN years to
study medicine in Edinburgh!
What a chance for a boy from the
streets of Singapore!

[I am leaving home
I will never forget the ones left
behind
The one whos are still lost in
darkness and ignorance
I will use my life to serve my people
I have promised my life]

SCENE TWO
Edinburgh

DATELINE:
EDINBURGH
1887

LIM IS A
SCHOLAR WITH
BOOKS UNDER
HIS ARM.

HE ENCOUNTERS
FANG: A
CHINESE
STUDENT IN A
DARK BLUE
GOWN

LIM

I am very pleased to meet you
I'm a foreign student too
Come and shake my hand my brother
I'm a Chinese just like you

I'm a friend to all good men
And my name is Lim Boon Keng.

FANG

"hate" motif:
pounding and rancorous

I am Fang Yuzhen from China
But I don't know who you are
You may call yourself a Chinese
But to me you look bizarre.
I have come to learn in Britain
But I know my way is best
I will study what is needed
Take the good and leave the rest
You've become just like the rulers
You have taken all their part
You have gone across to join them
You're a white man in your heart.

LIM

You and I are surely brothers
It's so obvious in my face
Since my forebears came from China
You and I are both One race.

FANG

But you do not speak my language
And you do not read my books
True allegiance to my nation
Is in more than just your looks.
You can chatter in their English
Like the birds sing in the trees
You should call yourself a Briton
For I swear you're not Chinese!

CONNOISSEUR

Mr Lim can I ask your assistance good
sir

I've just bought this scroll, I'm a
great connoisseur

Now here are some words at the top of
the screen

My dear Mr Lim tell me what do they
mean.

LIM

I regret to have to tell you
I can't do the thing you ask
Here you need a scholar's learning
I can't help you with this task.

CONNOISSEUR

Oh I'm sure you'r too modest it won't
take you much time

The words are so few and the strokes
are so fine

The wisdom of China, her great
history,

My good Mr Lim won't you read them for
me.

LIM

It is true I blush to tell you
Though I know it seems absurd
I do not know Chinese writing
And I cannot read a word.

EXIT FANG.

ENTER: A
CONNOISSEUR,
SLIGHTLY
CAMPY.
HE HOLDS A
BIG CHINESE
SCROLL

LIM MOVES
AWAY ABASHED
FROM
CONNOISSEUR
WHO FADES
OUT.

LIM PUTS
ASIDE BOOK,
HAVING
FINISHED
STUDIES.

[Shall I go back to Singapore? Should I return or should I stay?]

[At home my people are backward -- they will not understand me -- My people are sleeping in a night of ignorance. Will I return to Singapore? I could be happy here -- where people share my ideas ... at the home of ideals. Here I could be a respected scientist.

But I have promised -- to serve my brothers
I will not forget them --
I will strive to serve them --
this is what I have promised --
I have promised my life...]

SCENE THREE

I speak for my people

LIM

DATELINE
"Singapore
1895"

My friends, my brothers, here I am,
I am Lim Boon Keng, I am at your
service ...

Who is suffering -- who is in pain
Who's troubled by death and disease -
Let me help you, let me heal you
Let me bring you ease
Come with your troubles
come by night or day
come whether rich or poor
you'll not be turned away.

WONG
ENTERS

WONG

DR Lim Boon Keng you're a clever young
man
You can speak for our people if anyone
can
On the Legislative Council we must
have one to represent,
And we have all decided you're the one
who should be sent.

TIZA BREAKS
IN ANGRILY,
THROWING DOWN
THE HISTORY
BOOK

TIZA

So it's true!
You sat on the white man's council,
Worked with them for twenty years.
They rewarded you with a medal.
They paid you with praise and cheers.

LIM

I had to do it to help my people
This is how I was able to serve
If I had refused to do my duty
Then blame I'd deserve.

TIZA

"hate" motif

The British were our rulers
The ones who trod us down
You licked their boots you bastard
SERVED the Empire and the crown!
You collaborated fully and you helped
the ruling men
You betrayed the people's interest
You're the traitor Lim Boon Keng!

BRITISH
GOVERNOR
APPEARS
(Bass)

LIM
[I believe all men on earth are
brothers
Everywhere are people who mean good
I'll work with them]

I will go to those who are above us
though their rule is heavy
they are not evil men

I speak for my brothers sir
You have the power -- they are in
your hand
Be merciful and ease their heavy
burden..

[GOVERNOR MAKES A SHORT SUPERCILIOUS
REPLY]

[LIM MAKES A SHORT BUT ELOQUENT
SPPECH]

[GOVERNOR REPLIES WITH GRUDGING
RESPECT]

CHORUS OF
LABOURERS

LABOURER'S CHORUS

We are the silent ones
we do not not speak
we do not dare
we submit to our master's command
You are young
you are unafraid
speak for us all
speak to the rulers of the land

LIM
[I will speak for my people --
I will speak for the silent ones-- -
This is what I must do--
I have promised my life!]

SCENE FOUR
Mrs Lim Boon Keng

WONG

Dr Lim Boon Keng you are universally
respected
An young man like you shuld be quite
well connected.
We'll match you with the family of a
learned gentleman
Daughter of a Chinese scholar shall be
Mrs Lim Boon Keng.

MRS LIM BOON
KENG APPEARS

A mincing demure
gavotte? polka?

MRS LIM BOON KENG

The private life -- of a public man
Is not for revelation to the general
eye...

I know my duty
as a great man's helpmeet
My task is to protect him
from routine daily cares
To keep his house
and his children all in order
And provide the meals he eats
and clothes he wears ...

THE private wife, -- of a public man --
has a power of her o wn that she can
exercise ..

When he comes home from office
He takes off his public face
When he steps into my house
he is just a common man ...
[etc]

[Mrs Lim catalogs his achievements as
scholar of Malay, friend of GHandi and
Nehru. from her own point of view]

SCENE FIVE

"Peace is far stronger"

GOVERNOR
SPEAKS TO LIM

GOVERNOR

Under the sway of the British flag
This island prospers and is content
In the world outside there are rumours
of war

There are troubles I wish to prevent.
We have discovered a man in hiding
here

The Chinese government wants to get
him back

They have requested me to hand him
over

To put him to torture and the rack.

Dr Lim I have come to trust your
advice

Shall I give him or let him go free.
This rebel's fate is for you to decide

This man from China, Fang Zhen Li.

FANG ENTERS,
BOUND. WEARS
BLUE TUNIC,
WHITE BAGGY
TROUSERS,
BOOTS.

LIM

I know this man, he is no common
soldier

He works for what he believes just
like me.

He'll do no harm to this country
You can let him go: I'll be his
guarantee.

FANG FREED

"hate" motif

FANG

So, it's the white man's slave again,
still licking at his masters' shoes.
You know nothing of world events,
you haven't heard the glorious news.

[fang says that Lim is allied with the
class oppressors. General talk about
class struggle. Lim mentions that he
now studies Chinese classics, Fang is
not impressed.

Lim helps Fang to get on a boat and
leave Singapore.]

TINA

Boon Keng I have to ask you
Why you let that man go free?
He is full of hate and anger
he will be your enemy.

BOON KENG

I believe all men on earth are brothers.
I believe that reason will prevail.

TINA

I think you made a mistake
in releasing Fang Zhen Li.
That man's ideas are dangerous
To security.

You had a chance to get rid of him,
You should have taken a harder line.
You know, in running a country,
we can't afford to be kind.

BOON KENG

I believe all men on earth are brothers.
I believe all men can live in peace.

SONG: "PEACE" , BOON KENG

Peace -- is far stronger --
Than the sword, than the gun.
Peace -- can light up the world --
Like the sun, like the sun.
Peace -- can change the hearts of men,
bring the light into their eyes
When the darkness disappears
The sun will rise.

Love -- can remake the world
No more fear, no more war.
Heal all the bitter hurt,
Peace shall reign, evermore.
Heart speaking straight to heart
no more conflict, no more lies
truth ever will prevail
Dawn will rise.

TINA

(is deeply impressed by his sincerity and conviction)
If only the world was really so beautiful!

BOON KENG

I believe it is.

TINA

If only everyone else saw it that way.

BOON KENG

I've given
I gave my life to working for peace!
It's better to live for peace, than to die for war!

SCENE SIX
"Laugh at Life"

LIM WITH
CHORUS OF
STRAITS
CHINESE.
AFTER DINNER:
VERY JOLLY,
WITH BRANDY
AND CIGARS

WONG

Speech! Speech! Fill the doctor's
glass again --

LIM

Brandy stimulates the liver and the
brain ---

WONG

He's waited patiently to speak his
little piece ---

LIM

a doctor must have "patience" or his
"patients" won't increase --

Here's a little story
you might like to hear
In this jolly party
full of good cheer
Seems there was this Chinese man went
to London town
Tried to learn the English but he
couldn't get the sound.

WONG

Hurry with your story doctor, we can
hardly wait.

LIM

Now these words are Hokien, I will
have to translate.

"Goo e kiu cow" -- bull is called a
pup
"kow e kiu lor" -- a pup is called a
deer
"It's a crazy lingo," said the yokel
giving up,
"The language that the English speak
is really very queer."

CHORUS

"Goo kiu cow" -- bull is called a pup
"kow kiu lor" -- a pup is called a
deer
Very funny story, fill the doctor's
cup,
If you've got another story we would

scene six "Laugh at Life"

really like to hear. 17

life is very laugh at life.
short.

LIM
I've another
anecdote
let me tell
the joke
as the brandy
goes around
and the
cigars smoke.
D'you know
what they say
in France
to show their
gratitude
what the
Frenchmen say
in thanks
to our ears
is rude.

WONG
Hurry with
your story
doctor, we
can hardly
wait.

LIM
Now these
words are
French and I
will have to
transalate.

"Merci
beaucoup --
Thank you
they reply.
"Mehsee bohku
-- very soon
we die!"
When the
Frenchmen
thank you
with the
manners
they've been
taught,
They warn us
that the days
must fly and

CHORUS
"Merci
beaucoup --
Thank you
they reply.
"Mehsi bohku
-- very soon
we die!"
When the
French are
thanking us
all their
very best
They're
telling us
that very
soon we all
are going
west!

LIM AND
CHORUS
Let's be
merry ha ha
ha ha
Be cheery
ha ha ha
ha
why should we
sigh and look
down on the
floor
there's
plenty of
grief without
looking for
more
there is
trouble
enough and
there's no
use to frown
so you might
as well joke
and dance
like a clown
so laugh,
laugh while
you can,

LIM DANCES

let's be jolly ha ha ha ha
play folly ha ha ha ha
it doesn't do good to be filled with
regret
when things go wrong we must try to
forget
you needn't keep mourning and grieving
my friend
for the seasons are short and death
comes as the end
so laugh,
laugh while you live,
laugh at life.

GOVERNOR
APPEARS

GOVERNOR
In the world outside I hear the rumble
of guns
The empires are greedy and grasping
for more
There are threats of uprising and
revolution
The nations of Europe are arming for
War....

LIM

Oh God -- if you exist --
Why do you let the world destroy
itself?
Why must hate divide the nations,
why must they fight?
O God, if you are there,
for the sake of the people,
the ones who will suffer,
don't let there be war ...

Yet I believe the dawn of reason is
approaching

quartet (words need to
be more powerful and
immediate, I am not
sure of the rhythms)

Look a dawn of hope is breaking
Lift your heart and lift your eyes
And the darkened land is waking
A new sun begins to rise

FANG ON OTHER
SIDE OF STAGE

FANG
The flames of rebellion are rising
The people arise in their rage
We will overthrow the tyrants
We will bring a better age
Blood will bring in a new nation
Fire attend its recreation
When the people -- arise.

TISA
Peace ---- in my heart
Peace I never knew before
Joy welling up again
Life begins once more
Love makes me new again
Light --fills my eyes
Hope is coming in the morning
Dawn will rise

BOON KENG

I believe all men on earth are brothers.
I believe all men can live in peace.

SONG: "PEACE" , BOON KENG

Peace -- is far stronger --
Than the sword, than the gun.
Peace -- can light up the world --
Like the sun, like the sun.
Peace -- can change the hearts of men,
bring the light into their eyes
When the darkness disappears
The sun will rise.

Love -- can remake the world
No more fear, no more war.
Heal all the bitter hurt,
Peace shall reign, evermore.
Heart speaking straight to heart
no more conflict, no more lies
truth ever will prevail
Dawn will rise.

TINA

(is deeply impressed by his sincerity and conviction)
If only the world was really so beautiful!

BOON KENG

I believe it is.

TINA

If only everyone else saw it that way.

BOON KENG

I've given
I gave my life to working for peace!
It's better to live for peace, than to die for war!

(Fang enters. He harangues the Immigrant workers, who join in his song.)

REVOLUTIONARY SONG. (FANG)

The sun is rising! The world is turning!
The fires are waking, the land is burning!
The people hearken, this is the hour
When they shall waken, and show their power!

(refrain)

Arise, Arise!
Come march beneath the
red and angry skies

Obey -- our mother country's call
Today -- we fight to win or fall
Our blood shall run until the victory's won
Arise, arise!

The people waken! Their rage is blazing!
They stand in anger! It's quite amazing!
Throw down the tyrant, in sweeping flood
We build a new age, reborn in blood!

GOVERNOR

The guns of war are roaring
The night is full of flame
The nations clash in conflict
The earth is racked with pain
The peoples cry in tumult
A darkness fills the skies
The storm is growing wilder
The angry waters rise.

FINALE: ENSEMBLE: whole cast on stage.

FANG

The sun is rising! The world is turning!
The fires are waking, the land is burning!
The people hearken, this is the hour
When they shall waken, and show their power!
(refrain) Arise, Arise!

(The chorus of immigrants joins in the refrain and continues on.)

GOVERNOR

The guns of war are roaring
The night is full of flame
The nations clash in conflict
The earth is racked with pain
(continue on with extra verses as required)

BOON KENG

Peace -- is far stronger --
Than the sword, than the gun.
Peace -- can light up the world --
Like the sun, like the sun.
Peace -- can change the hearts of men,
bring the light into their eyes
When the darkness disappears
The sun will rise.

(TINA joins Boon Keng on the second verse in counter melody, and continue on.)

BABAS

In our happy little island war is not a great big threat

If they fight a war in Europe well of course we'll much regret.
Soldiers shooting in the trenches, airplanes zooming through the
skies,
Here the traders will be laughing, when our rubber prices rise!

e-three

Scene 6: SINGAPORE 1919

(Curtain rises on the Babas, applauding and cheering, as the British Governor awards Boon Keng a medal.) Boon Keng is now aged 50: in a white suit with a neat white beard. Rather like Bernard Shaw.)

GOVERNOR

Now that the War is over,
For your support in the fight
In the cause of justice and right,
Here's a medal from our gracious king --
The Order of the British Empire!

(Babas applaud --- Governor exit.)

BABA TAN

Come on Boon Keng -- let's have a drink!
pours drinks)

BOON KENG

taking drink) Merci beaucoup!

BABA TAN

Let's all salute Dr Lim Boon Keng!
His life has been spent in doing good
to all his fellow men.
His long career of public service
so freely given,
deserves this honour and notice.
Let's honour one of Singapore's great men.
Dr Lim Boon Keng!

ALL

(toasting him) Dr Lim Boon Keng!

BOON KENG

How kind of you. I always only want to "serve" --
I don't want to "deserve" or to "reserve," only to "serve" --
general laughter at this witty pun -- I do try to "preserve" good
things whenever possible -- *(more laughter)* And I myself am "well-
preserved," though age is on the way --
(more silly jokes ... then he raises his glass to everyone) Merci beaucoup!
Mehsi boh ku!

SONG: "LAUGH AT LIFE" BOON KENG AND CHORUS SING AND DANCE

Let's be merry ha ha ha ha

Be cheery ha ha ha ha

why should we sigh and look down on the floor

there's plenty of grief without looking for more

so you might as well joke and dance like a clown
so laugh,
laugh while you can,
laugh at life.

Let's be jolly ha ha ha ha
play folly ha ha ha ha
it doesn't do good to be filled with regret
when things go wrong we must try to forget
you needn't keep mourning and grieving my friend
for the seasons are short and death comes as the end
so laugh,
laugh while you live,
laugh at life.

BABA TAN

TAN KAH KEE speaks.

An invitation comes to Lim Boon Keng,
to take up a post
as the head of a new
University.
a position of honour and respect --
of labour and responsibility.
In China,
in Fukien province,
In the town of Amoy --
As the president of Tan Kah Kee's University of Amoy.

BOON KENG

Should I go?
Should I leave my home?
Here where I was born,
my streets, my familiar places
Where people smile and speak to me,
I know their faces.
My people whom I've served,
I've served them for a lifetime,
and the years are not my friend

But if I go -- there's a new world to build ..
there's work for me to do
I can't refuse!
My duty calls me --
this is what I have vowed --
I have promised my life!

(REPRISE light a torch of learning")

FANG

So here comes the Englishman
Now he's got a Chinese tongue
Thinks he'll tell us what to do
How our country should be run!
Greetings, Lim Boon Keng!
I wish health and success to you!

LIM

I believe that we can work together.
It's not so strange that I am here.
The ancient books, the wisdom of our fathers,
This is the common learning that we share.

FANG

Nothing that you know is needed
We are starting out again
All the old must be discarded
Nothing of the past remain.

LIM

I think you should consider again
You shouldn't wipe out all your history yet
Don't throw away the riches of your heritage
Don't do something you might regret.

FANG

We who fought and shed our blood
Earned our office by our deeds.
You never risked your life with us
You don't know what China needs!

LIM

We can co-operate my friend
We're both learned in East and West
We can build a world together
take from all sides what is best.

FANG

My enemies' friend is my foe
My comrades have fought by my side
You'll never be one of our people
You've no share in our power and pride!

(Sixteen years pass in a flicker of lights, while TINA OR BABA TAN gives a voice over commentary)

COMMENTARY

Sixteen years he's the President --
Sounds like a grand old job for a grand old man --
Sixteen years hard labour --

Ain't no money,
Ain't no cash,
Ain't no way to run a U - ni - versity
Ain't no friends,
Ain't no co-operation
Ain't no job for a gentle man

Gotta run gotta run gotta run

Begging for hand-outs,
begging for dough,
trotting and travelling in raising funds
Begging for support
begging for help
ain't no job for an aging man

Gotta run gotta run gotta run

FANG

(recites)

Go back Boon Keng --
Go back to your tropical island
You have done no good here --
in all these sixteen years.

Give up your futile struggle.
There's no more here for you --
Excepting tears.

BOON KENG

I had hoped that we could work together --
To build a new and better world --
I have spent my strength in this vain struggle.
Now I return..
In Singapore, my friends have all grown old
In sixteen years, the people have forgotten me,
they don't know my name, they don't remember what I've done
I am weary,
and the years are not my friends.

SCENE 8. "Singapore 1935"

(Boon Keng sits in an old-fashioned chair, looking old and lonely. Tisa looks at him from her place in modern times, she feels compassion for his isolation and for the disappointment of his noble ideals.)

(song: "LIKE A WHITE BIRD", TINA)

Like a white bird
you spread out your wings to fly

Like a bright cloud

You shine on your way

Like a night star
Agleam in a stormy sky
Oh yes like a star that shines till the coming of day ---

And the bird doesn't fall and the cloud doesn't turn
Though there's no one going their way
And the star still glows
through the gale through the night
As it waits for the coming of light.

SCENE 9. "SINGAPORE 1940

*(Ominous music and lighting heralds the outbreak of the Second World War.
stage -- LABOURERS, BABAS, GOVERNOR.)*

GOVERNOR

Across the world the guns of war are raging
An empire's glory stumbles to its knees
Our British might is broken down and trampled
Beneath the armies -- of the Japanese.

LABOURERS

We are the ones who work till we drop
What do we care who rules on top
All we want is to earn our rice
If there's war we pay the price.

BABAS

All we ever wanted was to live our life in peace
Buy our shares and sell our rubber while our dividends increase
NONYA I don't want my son to soldier, learn to march and shoot
gun
BABA CHEE If there's war I'll buy a ticket, pack my bags and sta
to run.

LABOURERS)ahyah ahyah ahyah, don't let war come ahya.

BABAS)Oh yeah oh yeah oh yeah, hope war won't come oh yeah

BOON KENG

Oh God -- if there is a God --
will you let my brothers suffer?
Must they flee the guns that kill uncaring
must children starve because their fathers die ..
under harsh rule my brothers labour
they weep in silence underneath a cruel law
from the new rulers
the conquerors of war ...

Oh God, if you are there --
don't let me live to see this bitter time
I do not want to see this day.

(War music increases -- ends with slow fall of British flag replaced by Japanese flag. Tramp of invading army. Baba Chee, trying to flee the country, delays to salvage his valuables -- and misses the last boat out. Singapore occupied by Japanese.)

GOVERNOR

The ones who ruled are led in chains as captives
Their order now replaced by alien law
Dark hour of turmoil and upheaval --
The Occupation -- of Singapore.

(The people are in great distress.)

BABAS

Here's an awful situation, now I feel so insecure
All my cherished pleasures vanished, nothing now is safe and sure.
NONYA Town is full of rape and looting, law and order all forgot
BABA CHEE Every day more executions, you or I could just be shot.

LABOURERS

This is our blood on the street
We are the losers in defeat
Somebody find some help for us
Somebody lift the load from us
Somebody speak a word for us

LABOURERS AND BABAS (softly)

Hear our call hear our cry
Oh yeah oh yeah oh yeah / Ahya ahya ahya

BABA CHEE

An order comes to DR Lim Boon Keng
To work on a Friendship committee
To get the people to live in co-existence
with the enemy.

BOON KENG

Should I go?
How can I work with men of blood
who killed my people, killed my brothers
I am tired of struggling with anger and hate
and the years are not my friend.

But if I go -- there are lives I can save
There is work for me to do ----
I can't refuse.
My duty calls me -
this is what I have vowed --
I have promised my life!

I will go to those who rule us
I will speak to them
Though their rule is hard upon us
They are not evil men.

(Boon Keng bows humbly to the shadowy figure of the Japanese general)

I speak for my people sir.
you have the power, they are in your hand
Be merciful and ease their suffering ...

GOVERNOR

Across the sky the light of death is blazing
The earth's aflame, the world is torn apart
The cities die, the continents are burning
Until war ends ~~and a new age~~ and a new age will start.

(The war ends. The Japanese flag is replaced by the British one.)
"Singapore 1945"

[The war is over. People have to pick up the pieces and rebuild.
So much has been lost.]

TISA AND CHORUS

[Remember how it used to be --
remember the old days gone by
when there was no rush no hurry
simple day gone by ...]

BABA CHEE

Across the seas there's turmoil still in China
No end in sight to her long bloodstained story.
The angry men still cry for revolution,
the land is split between their factions full of hate.

(FANG strides on to stage)

FANG

Dr Lim Boon Keng
Collaborator!
You helped the Japanese!
You are a traitor!

(The labourers believe Fang's accusations.)

LIM

Let us not quarrel now. We both are old.
The guns of war still tear our mother land
And violent men still rage in violence --
My brother -- take my hand.

FANG

I have nothing to say to you now till the day that I die.
You are no brother of mine and you never have been

My country goes on its own way without you
We have our destiny, soon a new age will begin!

(Fang strides away and returns to China. In China -- gunfire breaks out -- the Chinese nationalist flag is conquered by the Red Chinese flag. Fang is dragged on stage, bound, to face a firing squad. He sings his last heroic song.)

FANG

The sun is rising! The world is turning!
The fires are waking, the land is burning!
The people hearken, this is the hour
When they shall waken, and show their power!

Arise, Arise!
Obey -- our mother country's call
Today -- we fight to win or fall
Our blood shall run until the victory's won
Arise, arise!

Shots: Fang falls dead.

Boon Keng sits in his rattan chair -- sipping whiskey -- looking on at this. He is inactive -- isolated -- ignored and forgotten by the community.

Lights go up, hard and bright. We return to the museum and the present day. Tina -- as an MP -- addresses the audience, the people of Singapore. The tone is valedictory rather than gung-ho)

TINA

Dr Lim Boon Keng died on the first day of 1957. In that year, Singapore took the first steps towards full, democratic self-government. In that year Mr Lee Kuan Yew accompanied a delegation to London, to bring back Singapore's first Constitution. It was in the same year that Mr Lee Kuan Yew was first elected as a representative to the Singapore Legislative Council. When Dr Lim died, Mr Lee sent a message recognising Dr Lim's contribution to Singapore.

Dr Lim Boon Keng was Singapore's first great champion of democracy. He was a voice for those who dared not speak for themselves. He was the people's spokesman, to their rulers. Today we are an independent and self-governing nation. As we learn to share in the responsibilities of ruling ourselves, let us remember Lim Boon Keng's commitment to the people's right to be involved in government. In daring to stand up and speak up, let us be inspired by Lim Boon Keng's fearless public stand.

Today we are finding our sense of identity as Singaporeans. Like Lim Boon Keng, we search to know our own roots -- while also taking in the best elements from other cultures, East and West. We have begun to find a voice which is distinctively our own. We are learning to sing our own song, unlike that of any other people.

As we build our new nation together -- let us be inspired by Lim Boon Keng's faith in humanity, and his spirit of good will to all men. May his name always be remembered in Singapore -- Lim Boon Keng -- ~~always inspire us~~ -- a great man -- a great democrat -- a great Singaporean.

(Mood music and lighting. The scrim glows. Central picture of Lim Boon Keng at his most noble lights up. Tina gazes at it and sings an idealistic song, earnest rather than rousing.)

SONG: Song that will never Die, TINA

Now the silent days are over
When we dared to speak no word
Now we boldly raise our voices
Now our own song shall be heard.
So with one heart undivided
All mistrust and fear shall end
And the one who once was stranger
We shall learn to call a friend.

REFRAIN

Sing a song never sung before
Where we see the red and white fly
Like a whisper we find a voice of own
As we learn to lift our heads up high --
And the whisper shall grow to a chorus
Which shall swell to a resonant cry
And our voices shall rise till they fill the skies
With a song that will never die.

(We go back to see LBK sitting in his chair -- alive but very pitiful. Elegaic mood music -- "like a white bird" theme.)

BABA CHEE

I remember the funeral of Dr Lim Boon Keng,
on the second day of nineteen fifty-seven.
There were no drums and banners at his funeral
No grand procession for the grand old man.
His people had forgotten him ----
before he died ----
His final days were passed in silence,
he had outlived his fame,
a cloud upon his name,
his day was done.

TINA

I saw him once when I was young.
My father brought me to his house,
to meet a famous figure,

this leader of his people,
Dr Lim Boon Keng.

(Boon Keng rises and staggers in a circle, whiskey glass in hand. Begins to sing, in his cracked and quavery voice -- so pathetic. His voice grows stronger, he lifts his head, he is no longer tottering but dancing -- joyously defying death and calamity, affirming the triumph of the human spirit.)

BOON KENG

Let's be merry ha ha ha ha
Be cheery ha ha ha ha
why should we sigh and look down on the floor
there's plenty of grief without looking for more
there is trouble enough and there's no use to frown
so you might as well joke and dance like a clown
so laugh,
laugh while you can,
laugh at life.

Let's be jolly ha ha ha ha
play folly ha ha ha ha
it doesn't do good to be filled with regret
when things go wrong we must try to forget
you needn't keep mourning and grieving my friend
for the seasons are short and death comes as the end
so laugh,
laugh while you live,
laugh at life.

(As his song and dance ends, the scrim rises -- to reveal a multitude of Singaporeans, from past and present day. -- singing a stirring anthem of patriotism and hope.)

"SONG THAT WILL NEVER DIE" Ensemble

Now the silent days are over
When we dared to speak no word
Now we boldly raise our voices
Now our own song shall be heard.
So with one heart undivided
All mistrust and fear shall end
And the one who once was stranger
We shall learn to call a friend.

REFRAIN

Sing a song never sung before
Where we see the red and white fly
Like a whisper we find a voice of own
As we learn to lift our heads up high --
And the whisper shall grow to a chorus
Which shall swell to a resonant cry
And our voices shall rise till they fill the skies

With a song that will never die.

Vs 2. I will reach out to my brother
I will look into his eyes
Trust and friendship ever growing
Smile to gentle smile replies.
Listen to your brother singing
Join the tune so clear and free
All the people sing together
In a joyful harmony.

VS 3 We will sing our song together
Raise the chorus loud again
As we build a proud new nation
In the brotherhood of men.
Near and far goodwill shall flourish
Till all wars and conflict cease
And all people join together
In a mighty song of peace.

REFRAIN

Sing a song never sung before
Where we see the red and white fly
Like a whisper we find a voice of own
As we learn to lift our heads up high --
And the whisper shall grow to a chorus
Which shall swell to a resonant cry
And our voices shall rise till they fill the skies
With a song that will never die.

**** the end ****

3) BLUE WILLOW HOUSE

4) Draft Eight (8.4)

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This document contains:

Outline

List of Songs

List of Characters

Libretto

BLUE WILLOW HOUSE

Singapore 1885: the British Emporium where everything is for sale. Idealistic Lim Boon Keng rescues a girl from the brothels – and dedicates his life to helping the masses.

*Blue Willow House is a musical about Singapore in the 1880's, based on two books of social history by James Francis Warren: *Rickshaw Coolies* and *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san: prostitutes in Singapore, 1870- 1940.**

Musical score by Kenneth Lyen.

"The puller's world of work pulsed with hunger, poverty, rush and death" ..

***Rickshaw Coolie* by James Francis Warren.**

Outline 8. 4

1. Prologue: Singapore, 1905. Lim Boon Keng introduces the modern city of Singapore commenting on floods of migrant workers.
2. In a village in China, Beneath the willow tree, Ah Lin is approached by a recruiter, the Mama, to work in Singapore. Mama promises her wealth. Ah Lin says she wants to earn money for a dowry so that she can find a good husband, have a family of her own and lead an idyllic life "beneath the willow tree." She takes her bundle of clothes and follows Mama to Macau Street, Singapore.

3. On Macao Street, ricksha coolies sing of their lives that “pulse with hunger, poverty, rush and death.” **“Run Run Run.”** Lim Boon Keng appears as a commentator and observer. He meets Kong the soup hawker— and May Lee the old prostitute. Lim is appalled by the violence and misery of the streets – he protests passionately: “If it’s right that men labour and break their back, then the sun is cold and the sky is black.” He asks: “Is there more to living than just staying alive?”

The Gangster Boss appears: boasting that he controls the street: he owns rickshas and collects money from coolies for hiring rickshaw. One coolie, indebted due to illness, pleads to take the rickshaw on credit. Boss refuses – complaining of the burden on rickshaw owners like himself by government regulations. Infuriated by the coolie’s pleas, he shoots and injures the man to silence him.

Mama and Ah Lin arrive in Macau Street, Mama explains that Ah Lin is totally in her power. They briefly meet Marakusa the geisha. Boss greets Mama as a colleague, congratulating her on the new acquisition. Ah Lin, seeing the brothel, realizes that she has to work as a prostitute but she is cowed by the Boss’s sexual threats and enters Blue Willow House.

4. **Baba Ong’s House.** The babas are rich and complacent, and sing of themselves as **“Children of Singapore.”** They have heard threats of coolie strikes—they see the flood of labour from Chinas as dirty and uneducated, fit only for manual labour, women fit only to be sex toys, and they spread disease. Lim asks whether the coolies are aliens or brothers. He reflects on the flood of humanity pouring in: he asks the Babas “Is there more to your living than enjoying your life?”
5. **Macao Street, evening** As evening falls, Marakusa on her balcony sings how she sacrificed herself to be a courtesan for her parents’ sake: now she is eternally disgraced and can never return home. (*Fujiyama I see you no more*) Mama and Kong sing of the realities of the business: **“Flesh Trade.”** Baba Ong comes to bargain with Mamma, for a girl for his son’s first experience.

Lim returns to Macao Street. As it starts to rain, Lim sings Rain Song with the street people -- an assertion of hope for a better life some day.

6. Interior Blue Willow House: Ah Lin laments her loss: "They stole from me –my life, my hopes --- my willow tree." But she decides not to despair, and to believe that one day she will find love.

The older prostitute, May Lee, says bitterly "Welcome little girl to the world of three minute love." Mama explains what every prostitute should know. Ah Lin with courageous idealism sings, **"I Believe in Love (that lasts forever)." (trio)**

7. Back at Baba Ong's house Baba Ong tells James of the treat in store. James is puzzled. He was taught that **"Women are the Fairer sex"** to be placed on a pedestal.
8. **Macau Street:** Ah Lin is brought to James in the "bridal room." James decides not to do it. The young pair become – friends. As night passes, the stalwart coolie Hong Chai, loitering under Marakusa's window, sings of his hopeless passion for her. **("I look up at your Window.")**
9. **Morning after:** James and Ah Lin have each grown **"Fond of You."** James asks Mama to release her. Mama calls the Boss to chase him away.
10. **Macao Street:** The girls of the brothel prepare to celebrate the traditional festival of the legendary love of the Cowherd and the Weaving Maid: Marakusa, feeling curious, interviews Ah Lin. Ah Lin sings **"A Flower on a tree:"** telling that because James treated her with respect, she has found new self respect and can hold her head high. The girl's faith and innocence touch the older woman's heart and evoke her sympathy.

First ACT FINALE

INTERVAL

11. James gets encouragement from Lim that the law is on his side.
12. May Lee sweeps the floor -- bitterly singing that her life was used up and **"Thrown away."** Ah Lin befriends her. May Lee gives her a gift of a western gown, once belonging to her dead sister.
- 13.

James, comes to the brothel, to persuade Ah Lin to flee with him to the police station and freedom. But they are betrayed by Kong, who hopes to get a cash reward but is disappointed. Mama calls the Boss to deal with James: he is tied up – to wait for the tide and be drowned that night, while Ah Lin is threatened with rape by the Boss that night. Marakusa's maid tells her mistress what is happening. Marakusa summons Hong Chai and asks him to win her favour by saving James: reward: one night of love.

14. Evening, Macao Street: The festival is on: the girls sing their pretty folk song, "**Seven Sisters.**" As the gangsters laze around, soup-seller Kong touts his aphrodisiac soup in a raunchy song, **Bulls' Balls Brew.** The Boss kicks his soup pot over, incurring his enmity. Hong Chai challenges gangster boss to a duel – Kong takes bets – Hong Chai wounds the Boss, James flees in the confusion.
15. In Marakusa's parlour, she rewards Hong Chai with one night of love, with an erotic song -- "When you hold me near".

The Boss, enraged by his humiliation by Hong Chai, vents his frustration by calling a "strike": he will not allow any of the coolies to take his rental rickshaws out. ("**Stop work!**") The coolies riot. Baba Ong laments that the town is paralysed, (not yet written) James seeks Lim's help.

A police lieutenant asks LIM to intervene in the rickshaw strike

The coolies sit around idling and singing glumly about their fate. ("**Wheel keeps turning.**"
Reprise Run Run Run)

Lim and James show up – in a motor car! Lim confronts Boss and wrests moral control from him. Boss seizes Ah Lin to use as a shield. Heroic Hong Chai attacks Boss and is killed. Kong disarms the Boss. Hong Chai dies in Marakusa's arms. Marakusa mourns him as a "true samurai" and kills herself in order to join him in death (reprise "**Fujiyama**" and "**When you hold me near**")

16. Lim Boon Keng reflects on their death: "It is better to die for a dream, than to live asleep. " Life is meaningful if you have something to die for, something to live for.

Cast Finale: Reprise of Rain Song.

Blue Willow House (version 8.3)

List of Songs

Song Title	Sung by	Music done	Words done
Willow Leaves	Ah Lin/Mama/girls		
RUN RUN RUN	Chorus of Rickshaw pullers	√	
Children of Singapore	Chorus of Babas		
What is life for?	Lim Boon Keng		
Fujiyama I see you no more	Marakusa		
THE FLESH TRADE	Mama and Kong		
I believe in love <i>TRIO</i>	May Lee, Ah Lin, Mama	√	
Women are the Fairer Sex	James		
I look up to your Window	Hong Chai	√ CD available	
Fond of You	James and Ah Lin		
Introduction to Seven Stars	The girls		
A Flower on a Tree	Ah Lin		No
First Act Finale	?		No
INTERVAL			
Thrown Away	May Lee	√ ?	
Bulls' balls brew	Kong	√	
Seven Sisters, full version	The girls		
When you hold me near	Marakusa, Hong Chai		
The Wheel must turn (Reprise Run Run Run)	The coolies		

Reprise Fujiyama	Marakusa, Hong Chai		
Reprise When you hold me near	Marakusa		
What is Life For	Lim Boon Keng		
RUN RUN RUN (reprise)	Chorus of Rickshaw pullers		
Finale			No

List of characters

LIM BOON KENG already prominent as a community leader and member of Legislative Council, aged 36

AH LIN girl, 16

MAMA brothel keeper, middle aged female

KONG A crippled soup-hawker, a dirty old man age 55

MAY LEE A prostitute, age 32

BABA ONG Wealthy Straits Chinese gentleman, age 55

JAMES His son, 16

MARAKUSA A Japanese courtesan age 28

THE BOSS cartoon gangster, age 40

HONG CHAI A hunky porter-coolie, age 21

Marakusa's little maid. A white senior Police Officer.

Rickshaw Coolies, gangsters, prostitutes, a couple of brothel customers, Babas and Nonyas.

1. Prologue

Projected on the curtain: cityscape of old Singapore, vivid and bright. Title: Singapore, 1905.

Spotlight in front of curtain: Lim Boon Keng – aged 36, dapper in white tropical suit, carnation in buttonhole, black goatee.

LBK

The world is waking as a new century unfolds,
A day is dawning, like none before
A modern age transforms empires and nations –
We hail the future, here in Singapore.
Fortunate under enlightened rule,
we are blessed with prosperity.
Progress and peace are ours, in this fine city!
From a dark history our fathers fled,
Built a community and settled down.
Now the old countries are looking to our beacon,
The poor and the desperate, are flooding into town.
New times, new people at our door –
New questions for us here in Singapore!

2. "Willow Leaves"

Title: A village in China. Projected onto scrim curtain: graphic of willow tree, Chinese village house.

AH LIN

Gentle willow tree

Leaning low above my home

Little river flowing by below

See the willow leaf

Fall upon the stream,

Floating in a dream

Who knows where she goes,

Who knows where the stream will go.

MAMA enters: a middle-aged woman, big-city sophisticate, jade bangle, 19ng cigarette holder. She makes a recruitment pitch.

MAMA

Little village girl! You'll find work in Singapore

Find a decent trade,

Be a ladies maid

Learn to make some money

Learn to cook and sew and make the bed!

AH LIN

Poor and all alone,

I'm an orphan without home,
Maybe here's a way I can survive,
With dowry in my hand,
I can find a man,
I could be a mother and a wife.

MAMA

Streets are lined with silver
Life will be so good
Easy work, you'll do it on your head!

AH LIN

One day I'll return,
I will be a bride,
There'll be someone who will care for me,
Happy little home,
Family of my own,
Underneath the willow tree!

MAMA

(in the background, in counterpoint)

Easy to get rich
Easy work to do,
You can do it standing on your head,
No long office day,

Labour very light,
just like -- lying in bed!

Ah Lin takes her bundle of clothes and follows Mama out.

3. Macau Street

Title: Macao Street, Singapore. Scrim curtain lifts to reveal the set of Macau Street, with its brothels and rows of rickshas. We see exterior of the brothel Blue Willow House, and opposite, the house of the Japanese courtesan Marakusa.

The gathered rickshaw pullers sing:

RUN RUN RUN

Who want to live like der ricksha puller

work all day like a bloody fool ah

run like der rat dat is stuck in trap

an still got to run run run

Run run run for der wheels don't stop

run run run till der day you drop

how can live in dis kind of way

to run an run all day

Run run run, der back can break

run run run, der leg can't take

sun still burn but der wheels must turn
you just must run an run.

Run gotta run like a mad (mad) dog
why we are born wi der bad luck
why we are born to be ricksha coolie
still gotta run and run

(Various voices solo)

How can a poor man save his money --
spend too much on der girlie honey --
opium vice – an throw der dice --

(All) Dat's how der money run!

(Solo) Now I old and I work too long
what will I do when I no more strong
soon one day dis heart can bust
den my ricksha stop at last

(Various voices, solo)

Pull der car for der whole dam day --
work like hell for der dam poor pay --
six sen one mile damn cheap buy, yi,

(All) six sen damn cheap buy!

Run run run for der wheels don't stop

Run run run till der day you drop

(solo) life no hope for the ricksha coolie,

run till der day you die, yi.

(All) run till der day you die!

Run gotta run like a mad (mad) dog

why we are born wi der bad luck

why we are born to be ricksha coolie

still gotta run and run.

Most of the coolies exit. Street traffic: Kong the soup seller shouting “Hot Hot soup!” Marakusa’s maid; coolies, Hong Chai, *May Lin*. *Lim Boon Keng* appears – *like a spirit hovering, not really there*.

KONG

Hot hot soup! Best of bull! Bull’s penis soup! Best of bull!

LIM

Who are you friend? What is your story ?

KONG

I used to pull a ricksha too, until one day I bust a gut (indicates hernia)

I used to screw till my thing turned black,

Now I sell my soup to help others rut!

LIM

Look at this man, crippled and torn,

By the work where he was employed

Look at this man, diseased and unclean –

Look at this man, whom life has destroyed!

May Lin at the door of Blue Willow House solicits Lim.

MAY LIN

Come – sir – try our hospitality.

We'll give you more than a cup of tea.

LIM

Woman, why live like this --don't you know the danger –

When you give yourself to every passing stranger.

MAY LIN

Don't kid yourself, I don't give free!

What other life is there for me!

(MAY LEE goes inside. LIM is distressed, burning with indignation.)

LIM

Look at this woman, old and unwell

Cursed in this body that men have enjoyed.

Look at this woman, without any hope --

Look at this woman whom life has destroyed!

This isn't the way that things should be,

This isn't a world that I want to see!

This is as wrong as a world without air,
Heaven above, this is unfair!
If it's right that men labour and break their back,
The sun should die and the sky turn black!
If it's right that women be used and sold,
Then water is dry and the fire is cold!
Why is this happening here at our door?
Where is the justice in Singapore?

Why did these people travel the world
To find misery here instead of some gold
Why do they suffer and slave every day
To get what we give them – some pitiful pay!
Do they struggle for nothing except to survive?
Is there more to life except staying alive?

(exit. The Gangster Boss swaggers down the street.)

BOSS

This Macao Street is like my family, it's under my friendly eye!
Every Mama in the brothels, every uncle cooking up opium,
owes me the time of day.
Every little sister in the stews, every brother between the rickshaw shafts –
All are objects of my concern!

Not a cockroach scurries here, but under my “protection.”

A COOLIE

Big Brother – help me –help me please –

BOSS

I am so kind, my heart is so good,

I will help you any way I can.

COOLIE

Give me credit for the rickshaw hire.

BOSS

Am I hearing right? You want to take my ricksha --without pay?

COOLIE

Just give me a chance, for just one day.

BOSS

No way!

COOLIE

I have no money, I have got trouble --

BOSS

Trouble! You think you’ve got trouble! Let me tell you, friend,

Owning a ricksha fleet like me, it’s trouble without end.

Belts and lights and vehicle repairs, money spend no stop,

So many damn regulations from those bastards at the top,

Victimizing rickshaw owners! Make my life so hard!

And saps like you, think I can let you take my rickshaw for free,

No fee?

COOLIE (groveling and pleading)

I've been sick, I couldn't work for weeks, I couldn't earn –

BOSS

You've been sick huh? You know what else the government puts on me –

Ricksha puller must be in good health!

A scrawny, coughing skeleton like you, is not allowed!

I let you hire my rickshaw and I could get fined a load!

COOLIE

Please please big brother help me --

BOSS (furious)

Shut up! Stop whining!

(He fingers his pistol, but the coolie groveling at his feet doesn't see this)

COOLIE

Brother, Brother, you've got to help me –

BOSS (enraged, shoots him in the shoulder. The man writhes on the ground. Other coolies take him away.) Haah! (he regains his temper) I am in control on this street – I am Big Brother!

I will take care of all problems – one way or another!)

Mama enters with Ah Lin.

MAMA

Now, my girl, you call me Mama!

AH LIN (Obeying)

Mama!

MAMA

Do not be afraid girl, I will look after you,

I will be beside you, all the day long.

In this place you haven't a friend,

You don't know the streets or the foreign tongue.

I will take care of you, daughter dear!

You owe me lots for your transport here.

You'll work for free till you pay the debt –

It might be a few years yet!

AH LIN

I will work hard!

(Mama nods meaningfully. From her house opposite comes the aristocratic geisha Marakusa, accompanied by her maid carrying her parasol. Mama is immensely respectful to Marakusa.)

MAMA

Marakusa san! This is my new girl!

MARAKUSA

A pretty child,

No doubt the men will all be wild.

MAMA (rapidly counseling Ah Lin)

Many Japanese ladies in town, none are greater –
Than Marakusa –san. You should emulate her!

AH LIN (to Marakusa, brightly)

I won't be lazy, I'll work very hard, I won't stand still.

MARAKUSA

Is she still --- ignorant? (Mamma nods.)

AH LIN

I will learn fast!

MARAKUSA (With pity)

I'm sure you will.

The Boss meets them and tries to be charming to Marakusa.

BOSS

Marakusa-san! What a pleasure to see you.

MARAKUSA (gives him a tiny bow).

I was just going. Don't let me get in your way.

BOSS

Delighted, dear lady. (sexily) I shall call on your house some day!

MARAKUSA (graciously)

Yes do come by, let me see if my calendar's clear.

I might have a space for you – (aside) – some time next year!

Marakusa goes on her way with her maid. The Boss talks to Mama.

MAMA This is the new goods I've just brought back.

BOSS: Let's have a look at her. (He seizes Ah Lin's face in his hand and says lewdly:) Look, little girl, what I've got here! Let me just show it to you! (He shows her his pistol and pokes her with it – symbolic molestation. She is terrified.)

MAMA The goods will fetch a better price – when they are still in mint condition!

BOSS Yes, yes ... I might just enjoy myself. (he continues the symbolic rape.)
How do you like to feel it?

MAMA Well don't you want to get some money?

BOSS I suppose there is no hurry for me. (reluctantly he lets Ah Lin go. She shrinks away from him, hides behind Mama. Mama leads her to the door of Blue Willow House.)

MAMA

Now this is my place– Blue Willow House.

This is where you will work – for better or worse!

(Ah Lin looks at the brothel and finally gets the point)

AH LIN

What kind of place have you brought me to?

What kind of work do you want me to do?

MAMA: You'll work as one of my girls.

AH LIN: I won't do it! I won't be a whore!

MAMA: Get inside!

(She seizes a heavy stick and strikes Ah Lin viciously. Ah Lin is knocked to the ground, screams and writhes under the blows. She tries to flee. The Boss grabs her.)

BOSS

Little girl, what's all this din?

Give her to me. I will break her in.

(Ah Lin cowers)

MAMA (To Ah Lin) Is that what you want?

BOSS:

She'll forget these airs and graces

Once I've put her through her paces.

AH LIN: No -- No!

MAMA: Get inside.

(Ah Lin stumbles ahead of Mama, into the brothel.)

(Quick revolve of set reveals the interior of the brothel: where girls sit around in tawdry finery.)

GIRLS

Willow leaves afloat

On the swiftly flowing stream

Drifting to a dark and stormy sea.

Little willow leaf,

It's no use to cry,

Learn to say goodbye

Leave behind your dream

Leave behind your willow tree.

Scene 4: THE BABAS

Title: The house of Baba Ong.

A Chorus of Babas and Nonyas: refined and effete. A few Nonyas in Western dress of the period.

“Children of Singapore”

CHORUS

We are the ones who were born in this land,
Here where our people settled before,
Fathers and families making our home,
Children of Singapore.

1. Others may come to work for a while,
One day they’ll leave, they will be gone
We who were born here still will remain,
This is where we belong.
Singapore born and Singapore bred
Here we will live, we will reside
Rooted in place, planted in site,
here we will stay and abide.

2. Born of the country and bred to its ways
customs and culture we borrowed on loan
we cook up a mixture of fusion cuisine

The babas talk among themselves ; Lim Boon Keng (who is a Baba) engages them. (Note: one of these Baba voices could be a Nonya. However, since Nonyas were kept in seclusion and did not join men's discussions, she would have to comment from behind an enclosure

BABA 1: Baba Ong what's the news?

BABA ONG: Nothing special –

BABA 2 The coolies are making trouble again!

BABA 1 Not another strike

BABA ONG Oh no not again

BABA 1 So inconvenient.

BABA 2 Too many migrants coming from China now --

BABA 1 So dirty, they bring in disease

BABA ONG Ignorant and uneducated, can't speak a word of the King's English

BABA 1 We don't want them settLin here for good!

BOON KENG These who you call ignorant – speak the tongue of Confucious which you have forgotten!

Their struggle is like your fathers' struggle – don't you remember?

BABA 2 Thousands of migrants are crowding the city

BABA 1 Fit for the heaviest labour

BABA ONG The women are just like toys.

BABA 1 Would you want one of them living next door?

BOON KENG How shall we cope with this social upheaval? How do we deal with these folk in our midst?

Are they a curse to us or a blessing? Are they aliens, or brothers like us?

(His soliloquy as the Babas and Nonyas exit)

Look at these gentlemen polished and proud

Passing their days in comfort and ease

Look at these ladies, lovely and fine,

Caring for house and kitchen decrees.

What does it mean at the end of the day,

That Nonyas and Babas were smiling away –

Is your goal for each day to be happy and blithe?

Is there more to living, than enjoying your life?

(Exit)

Macao Street, early evening. Ricksha coolies are resting in the street. A well-to-do pedestrian comes out of brothel and tries to get transport: He pokes the coolies with his stick, or nudges them with his foot.

PEDESTRIAN Ricksha! Ricksha!

1ST COOLIE (not budging, yelling rudely) Time for me to rest!

2ND COOLIE (same) Time for me to eat!

Pedestrian gives up and walks away.

Marakusa appears on her balcony, plays her samisen and sings.

MARAKUSA'S SONG

Fujiyama, I see you no more.

Far, the cherry blossom

Here, only jungle

Samurai's daughter, no returning

Fujiyama, I see you no more.

Honour – is parents still alive

saved by my sacrifice,

Death -- is a daughter's fate

Lost in disgrace

Turn away from the rising sun.

Samurai's daughter, dead in shame

Only my samisen cries at night

Fujiyama, I return no more.

Maid enters.

MAID

Mistress, your visitor is here,

the fat old captain who comes each year.

MARAKUSA

Take him to my parlour,

he knows the way.

Samurai's daughter, comb your hair high –

Smile and give good value – for the price they pay!

Maid and Marakusa exit.

Kong limps across the stage crying his wares.

KONG

Hot -- soup. Black balls brew. Penis of bull. Hot hot soup.

Mama emerges from Blue Willow House.

"THE FLESH TRADE"

MAMA:

Here we have in Singapore

a hundred thousand single men

I import the quality goods

to meet their natural yen.

Hundred thousand men without women,

Believe me there's a demand.

It's a solid consumer base.

KONG

Look at the customers stand --

in line!

MAMA

It's fine --

I need to travel the region

to source for new recruits

I pay for insurance protection

and help with labour disputes.

My prices are extremely basic,

with due market regard:

Of course they still want it cheaper:

KONG

Every coolie has a hard ---

luck tale!

MAMA

No sale!

In this line of work

Good profits can be made

I'm a businesswoman

in the Flesh Trade!

MAMA

I provide an essential service

keeps workers' frustration down

You won't get sex-crazed coolies

to scare the fine ladies in town.

Gents from high society

Turn up at my door

But when we meet in Orchard Road,

they've never seen me before.

BOTH

Pretending that they don't know –

That they never go –

To the Flesh Trade !

(Baba Ong arrives in a rickshaw)

KONG

Someone is coming –

MAMA

Hey, it's Baba Ong,

Knew him when he was young and strong.

(Kong makes himself scarce while Baba Ong approaches Mama in front of the brothel.)

Now he's head of a family too.

(To Ong) Good day, what can I do for you.

ONG

I don't want a girl today.

MAMA

(aside) Then why the hell did you walk this way?

ONG

It's not for me, you can be sure

MAMA

(aside) I remember the devil you were.

ONG

There's a young man I will bring, still has got his inno-cence
You should provide a suitable girl, for his first exper-i-ence.

MAMA

I understand just what you need, for this important task
I have got a clever old girl, to teach him all he could ask.

ONG

No not one of your aged whores! That's not what I mean.
I want somebody fresh. I want a woman guaranteed clean.

MAMA

In that case -- There's a girl just landed from China shore.
Not yet touched. Guaranteed pure.
But – this commodity is costly.

ONG

How much?

MAMA

What she's got -- I can sell one time only.

This asset once gone is irreplaceable,

but your boy will benefit, unmistakable...

Two hundred.

ONG

Ridiculous!

MAMA

One eighty.

ONG

One.

MAMA

One fifty.

ONG

One twenty.

MAMA

One thirty.

ONG

Done.

To be paid after delivery day –
after I've checked that she's all you say.

MAMA

You'll have all the proof you need,
satisfaction guaranteed.

(Ong leaves the street.)

So the deal is done, profit will be made --

That's how business goes -- In the Flesh Trade!

(Kong reappears)

KONG and MAMA

Buying and selling have their appeals

Cutting the sweet deals --

In the Flesh Trade!

Back to the exterior of Macao Street. Coolies sit fanning themselves because of heat and sing hopelessly”

ALL

Will the world ever change? Will it ever improve?

Has our life any meaning? Can things ever move?

RAIN SONG (i)

Lim Boon Keng

LIM

So hot, so weary the day, our hope is small

But listen to thunder rolling -- A promise – that rain will fall.

Don't ever give up hoping don't despair,

Look for the falling torrents, to refresh the air.

CHORUS

Hear the rain hear the rain

how it comes –

it comes –

LIM

I believe it's coming, there will be relief,

Life will always conquer, bring an end to grief.

One day rain will fall, water for our thirst,

Blessing from the sky, rain to heal the earth.

(Street people enter, with umbrellas, to sing chorus)

CHORUS

Hear the rain Hear the rain

How it comes how it drums

On the trees On the seas

On the grass On the street

On the dust At our feet

Hear the rain!

Hear it rushing hear it gushing

Hear it roaring hear it pouring

Hear it grow hear it flow

Hear the rain!

Scene 6 "I Believe in Love"

Interior Blue Willow House. Ah Lin is alone, waiting to be dressed.

AH LIN

What will become of me, trapped in this place?

All I can see is shame and disgrace.

How can these people just take from me

My hopes and my dreams – my willow tree!

I will not give in, I won't let it be true!

If I am strong, I will find a way through –

I'll find someone to love! I'll be mother and wife!

I'll find a way to have a good life –

I won't despair, I will not grieve –

I'll keep on hoping, and I will believe!

Mama enters with May Lin: They bring a red outfit, a travesty of a bridal costume, in which they dress Ah Lin

MAY LEE

Welcome little girl to the world of three minute love!

Of men who use you to serve their need,

Take your body for their greed –

AH LIN

Will they be kind? Will they be good to me?

MAY LEE

They won't ask you how you feel,
They won't care if your smile is real.
You are only a piece of meat
To relieve their rage and heat.

AH LIN

Will there be someone – who will care for me?

MAY LEE

These are men who only care
To get the pleasure their money buys
They only thrust – to spend their lust –
And never look into your eyes!

MAMA

First lesson every girl should know,
when working in this line
Never forget that time is money,
don't let the men waste time.
Maybe he's lonely and wants to talk,
talking doesn't pay,
so shake his stick and bring him off quick
and send him on his way.

Tell 'em they're great and say they're strong

But don't let them take all night

Quick turnover is what you want,

So just learn to expedite.

MAY LEE

Welcome little girl to the world of three minute love ---

AH LIN

Somewhere there's somebody who will really care,

I do believe it's true --

MAY LEE Men who use you to serve their need

take your body for their greed

AH LIN

Somehow I will meet him, make a life to share,

Such a love can be, I do believe.

Somehow there's some way two people can decide

Always to be together,

He will take my hand and I will be his bride,

Somehow this can be, yes I believe --

I will know I'm safe, when he holds me near

He'll be strong and kind, there's nothing I need fear

I won't be afraid

MAY LEE They won't ask you how you feel

when I'm in his arms

MAY LEE They won't care if your smile is real

trusting he will keep me

MAY LEE You are only a piece of meat , to relieve their rage and heat.

far from grief and harm.

Some day he'll find me and take me far away

MAY LEE Welcome little girl to the world of three minute love etc

MAMA First thing every girl should know, when working in this line... etc

Somewhere we'll be together,

love to lift the darkness,

love to fill each day,

I believe that love will last for ever --

Some day we'll find each other and we'll know it's true

someday we'll be together --

Love to light a lifetime,

love to see us through,

I believe that love will last for ever.

Scene 7 “Women are the Fairer Sex”

Baba Ong’s Mansion.

Baba Ong enters with James – Ong has just told James of the treat in store for him tonight!)

JAMES

Father I am stunned, by this sudden plan.

ONG

It’s time you knew the facts of life, It’s time that you became a man.

JAMES

I don’t know what to say. I know I’m young and green.

ONG

Papa’s fixed up everything. It will be safe and clean.

One day you will thank me for starting you off right,

You’ll have the advantage of that first important night.

JAMES

I know you’ve always done your best for me.

ONG

I only want you son –to be the best you can be!

BOTH

A father is always anxious, that his son should go ahead,
He provides the education that will stand him in good stead
A father is always eager, to help his son excel,
With tuition and with practical, the boy will sure do well.

ONG

(Clapping James on the shoulder) Tonight, son! (Exit)

JAMES

I am bemused. I am confused.
My Father's kindly, generous thought –
Goes right against all I was taught.

JAMES "Women are the fairer sex."

Women are the fairer sex,
my teachers said in school
Whom we must honour and respect,
that is the rule.
a creature pure and beautiful, one takes to wife,
a woman virtuous and good, inspires one's life.
women are the gentle sex,
is what I have been taught.

whom men should treasure and protect,
yes so they ought.

Whose tender touch and graceful care refine our coarser state –
the noble, almost-goddess queen,
who is man's promised mate!

I don't quite understand what my father said to me,
It goes against all that I've learned, what women ought to be!

Women are not just for sex!

Their pedestal is sure:

They are not simply vice objects,
they should be pure.

This was the high morality, my teachers did repeat:

I wonder if my teachers ever heard of Macao Street!

Immediate scene change to:

“Bridal Suite” in Blue Willow House. James, extremely uncomfortable, is conducted into the room by His father and Mama. AH LIN, dressed in red suit, sits in the bed, terrified. The elders exit. James glances uncomfortably around.

JAMES

What should I say? what should I do?

She – is frightened too.

What should I think? What should I say?

I can't do this! there's no way!

This is an impossible situation –

I can't meet my father's expectation!

(He sits down glumly on the bed with his back to AH LIN)

Girl, don't be scared. I'm not going to touch you.

I will spend the night – far away from you.

(AH LIN peeks at him. After a few minutes she rises, fetches tea from the side table and brings it to James.)

AH LIN

Please sir, do you mean it? You're not going to do it?

JAMES

Don't know what I'll tell my father.

AH LIN

Mama will be angry, she will beat me harder ...

JAMES

Poor girl, you seem as shy as me ...

Why are you here?

AH LIN

I am not free.

JAMES

They forced you in, against your resolve? (She nods sadly)

I'm sorry that I've been involved.

AH LIN

Sir, you are kind.

JAMES

Now what can we do,

So the woman won't punish you ...

Maybe we could fake it,

pretend that we did make it ...

(AH LIN tentatively pulls the bedsheets loose, James does so too)

AH LIN

Like this

JAMES

Yes!

(they both get into the spirit, throwing sheets and pillows around.)

AH LIN

Mama expects to see some proof –

the blood upon the cloth.

JAMES

Right! Bloodstains!

(with a grin he opens his penknife,, carefully cuts his finger and drips blood on the sheet. AH LIN is tremendously impressed.)

AH LIN

How can this be?

You shed your blood for me!

JAMES

I'll say we had terrific sex!

And – some sound effects!

(He bounces on the bed... AH LIN giggles and bounces on the other side – they yelp oh! and ah! in imitation of sex – and finally collapse, giggling breathlessly. It's a nice sweet feeling, as they fall asleep together like two small children.)

*Quick scene revolve to
Exterior of Macao Street.*

Kong the soup seller cries his wares.

KONG Hot hot soup! Best of bull!

The stalwart coolie Hong Chai enters – to linger under Marakusa's window. Kong approaches him and is refused.

KONG

Hong Chai, you're here again,

loitering below Marakusa's window!

Forget that one, take my advice –

You'd save for seven years to get her price!

You love-sick fool, give up that dream –

You're lowest of the low, and she's the geisha queen!

KONG exits. Marakusa's shadow falls on the screen of her window.

Hong Chai sings:

I LOOK UP AT YOUR WINDOW

Dark, down where I stand --

Light, up where you are

I look at your window

Like someone seeking a star

Longingly I gaze

where your lights glow

Hoping that your shadow

falls on me below.

Night draws to the dawn

I'm lingering here

Knowing that I must be

where you are near.

Though so many men

pass through your door

They do not matter,

I love you more.

If fate had been more kind

if I'd had wealth or fame

I'd tell you of my love

and I would dare to speak your name

In another life

I'd have you as my own

I would give you all

and you'd smile for me alone

Don't you see me waiting

through the sun and through the rain

don't you hear the echo

of my loneliness and pain.

Why can't you send some sign

so I know you've heard my cry

Just give me one good reason

I should either live or die.

Hope holds on no more

How long can I last

Deeper pain I suffer
Each day that stumbles past
What else do I have
What can I do
Only this one thing --
Have to love you

In my aching heart
I know this is true --
Though the whole world would end,
I must love you!

Scene revolve back to "Bridal Suite"

James and AH LIN awake the next morning.

JAMES

What is this I feel, this is something new,
Growing up inside, when I look at you

AH LIN

What is going on, What is this I feel,
Can this thing be love, tell me is it real ..

BOTH

Goodbye, it was nice, spending time with you.

Don't know if we'll meet again, sort of hope we do ..

Don't know if I'll see you again,

don't know how, don't know when

But if we, somehow, somewhere do,

I could be -- very -- fond of you.

(MAMA enters)

MAMA Good morning sir, I hope my girl was good,

I hope you're satisfied.

JAMES

I want to take this girl away, so she won't work here any more.

MAMA:(aside)

Little boy, you tasted sweets, now you want to own the store)

JAMES

I want to bring her home to stay.

MAMA (aside)

(What do you think your father will say!)

JAMES

Will you let Ah Lin go free?

MAMA

Everything can be done – for a fee!

JAMES (Outraged)

Do you think you can just sell her?

MAMA

My capital outlay adds to the price –

and expected returns for her working life.

How much can you pay?

JAMES

You think she's a slave?

MAMA looks at him and sounds an alarm. BOSS enters and chases James away.

BOSS: Get out of here kid.

MAMA *to Ah Lin*) You must have made quite an impression on him!

BOSS Is that so! (*He looks at Ah Lin with interest and she shrinks from him.*)

In front of the curtain, James talks to Dr Lim.

LIM My lad,

Marakusa and Ah Lin.

Macao Street. On the five foot way outside Blue Willow House, the prostitutes prepare for the Seven Sisters festival, hanging up lanterns and paper offerings. Mama beckons to Hong Chai: he helps to carry a table out of the house, she pays him. He sits down nearby, looking statuesque. The girls set up paper offerings for burning – sets of seven each, of perfume, cosmetics, female toiletries. They also set up a table of real toiletries for blessing. (these details from CS Wong’s “Cycle of Chinese Festivals.”)

The girls softly sing a snatch of song while working:

SEVEN STARS (i)

Girls of Blue Willow House

Seven stars that shine above,

One of them left her home for love!

Seven sisters in the sky,

one was lost and we can’t say why!

Seven stars that shine so bright,

kindly look on us tonight!

Seven sisters pure and fair,

Listen to the maiden’s prayer!

Mama enters with Gangster Boss and points to the dinner table.)

MAMA

After the ceremonial, please join us for a meal.

BOSS

My boys will want to “celebrate.”

MAMA

I know how they feel.

*Marakusa comes from her house bringing some toiletries
MAMA meets her.*

MAMA

There is a festival drawing near,

That we celebrate every year.

We call it the Seven Sisters' day,

The girls make offerings and pray.

MARAKUSA

In my land too the legend has stayed,

Of the Cowherd and the Weaving maid.

I'd like to take part when you prepare,

So let me contribute a share.

*(Mama is very pleased. Marakusa adds her toiletries to the table. Ah Lin stands at the table
of offerings – seemingly making a fervent prayer. Marakusa watches her curiously.*

MARAKUSA

Little girl – what do you wish for?

AH LIN

(shyly) For a true and constant lover –

MARAKUSA

And do you hope that such a thing can be?

(Intrigued, Marakusa—getting permission from Mama with a glance –draws Ah
Lin aside, into her own parlour)

AH LIN

I do believe that there is hope for me –

MARAKUSA

Child, you've started in this bitter life –

And yet you dream you could be someone's wife!

AH LIN sings with Marakusa's remarks interspersed.

AH LIN

Somewhere there's somebody who will really care,

I do believe it's true --

MARAKUSA

Little girl, you're so naïve –

You still have faith, you still believe

You still think that dreams come true,

Will that fancy see you through –

AH LIN (“A Flower on a Tree.”)

(This is a summary of the verses which are yet to be written)

*You lifted me up, you made me feel beautiful,
you made me feel good about myself.
I was like a leaf crushed by the rain,.
Fallen on the earth in the mud.*

*You lifted me up and made me feel
like a blossom in a garden,
Like a flower on a tree,
pure with untouched petals,
beyond the possibility of contamination.*

*You touched my life, you smiled and you looked into my eyes:
your smile lifted me up.*

MARAKUSA

You are still so young and pure,

Can that innocence endure –

Will you keep that childish grace,

After years within this place –

*(While Ah Lin sings, Marakusa sees Hong Chai's silhouette, projected by exterior sunlight,
against her window screen)*

MARAKUSA

Soon your freshness will depart –

And yet, for now, you touch my heart!

*(Marakusa gives Ah Lin a present of some perfume and sends her back across the street.
Marakusa remains alone, gazing pensively towards the screen door.)*

FIRST ACT FINALE, A MEDLEY OF THE VARIOUS THEMES.

INTERVAL

12. James is captured

In front of curtain – Lim talks to James.

LIM

You were right to come to me, my lad,

Such forced abuse is very bad.

There's a law to prevent this social ill,

Of girls being held against their will.

She must go to the Englishman's Police Station,

And they will see to her liberation!

James shakes Lim's hand gratefully and hurries off, full of determination.

Scene changes to afternoon in Blue Willow House. Offering table for the evening ceremony is ready. There is also a dinner table set with red cloth, stools, bowls and chopsticks for three diners

MAMMA

May Lee! The place is in a mess.

Clean up the room. Pick up that dress.

Mama leaves. May Lee goes about her work – throwing out faded flowers -- -- picking up discarded clothes. She sings:

THROWN AWAY (May Lee)

Look at me I used to be
the highest paid of any grade
of working girls in Singapore
a courtesan for any man
who'd pay my fee to lie with me
you should have seen them line up at my door!
But all too fast the years have passed
and now my room's an empty tomb
for no one wants to take an aging whore!

Here's how it is when you're growing old
with no cash to save and no love to hold
no one cares that I once was young
nobody bothers what I've become
like flowers that fade as their freshness is lost
at the end of the day they are thrown in the dust
look at the way that my life has been
what was it for, what does it mean

Ah -- I was bought -- and sold for pay--
used up -- and worn out -- and thrown away!

Now I wait and curse my fate,

no one will share my long despair

or hear my cry

pain is all that lies ahead

and men's abuse -- until I'm dead!

Until – I – die!

Ah -- I was bought -- and sold for pay--

used up -- and worn out -- and thrown away!

May Lee turns back to her work and finds that Ah Lin has kindly come to help her pick up some of her stuff.

AH LIN

Older sister, don't despair.

Surely there's hope for us elsewhere.

Though we are caged in this vicious abode,

Does it have to be the end of the road?

Can we get out?!

MAY LEE

I don't know any other trade.

AH LIN

Be a seamstress, or a ladies' maid.

MAY LEE

You're still young, perhaps for you,
There is something you can do...
You remind me of someone who passed away,
a sister of mine, who was young and gay.
I meant to give her this modern dress:
Take it and may your life be blessed.

(She gives Ah Lin a garment in a brocade bag. Ah Lin hold it up against herself. It is a fashionable Edwardian morning dress in palest pink, with all accessories provided.)

AH LIN

Oh! Look at me!

MAY LEE

What a beauty you could be!

AH LIN

I could be – in this gown –

As fine as any Lady in town!

(Meanwhile James arrives in a rickshaw. He comes to the door and calls softly ...)

JAMES: Ah Lin!

(Scene quickly revolves to show Macao Street exterior, as Ah Lin opens the door.)

AH LIN: It's you!

JAMES (urgently)

The doctor told me, there's a law,
Protecting girls in Singapore.
She has no claim, she has no hold,

if only you are brave and bold!

AH LIN

What must I do?

JAMES

Leave right now, just come with me –

We'll go to the police and you'll be free!

AH LIN

I'll get my things –

(She darts back into the house for her belongings. Kong the soup seller has noticed this.)

KONG

Here is something going on – is there profit here for me?

Can I tell the Boss the news – sell it for a fee?

Boss! Hot information!

(Kong makes gimme-money gesture, but the Boss slaps his request down and orders him)

BOSS

Speak up, you louse!

KONG (whining resentfully)

He's stealing a girl from Blue Willow House! --

(Mama runs out at the commotion)

KONG

Aren't you gonna pay me?

BOSS

Get lost!

MAMA

What's this?

It's the kid who wanted to take young Miss!

JAMES (Confronts mama and Boss)

I have come to **emancipate** this girl you're holding here!

MAMA

Don't you know she likes the work, she calls me her Mommy Dear.

JAMES

You must let her go!

MAMA

You say? (The Boss steps to her side) On what authority?

JAMES

(ringingly) In the name of the rights of humanity!

BOSS

(amused) Is he – real?

(Boss threatens. James makes a break and reaches the street – but two gangsters grab him there; under the startled eyes of Marakusa and her maid, they beat James and drag him half-conscious back to the brothel.)

BOSS

Now how to dispose of this upstart lad?

MAMA

He came alone.

Kill him quick. It won't be known.

Just shoot him now!

BOSS

(fingering his pistol)

That's not bad –

But it leaves a bullet for cops to find.

The river is what comes to mind.

(To his men) At midnight when the tide is high,

Just drop him in and say bye-bye.

(They drag James away.)

MAMA (Turns to Ah Lin)

As for you, girl – wicked, ungrateful –

BOSS

She needs some teaching to put her right –

Send her down to my place tonight.

(to Ah Lin) You don't understand your duty yet –

I'll give you a lesson you won't forget.

(Rapidly we move to Marakusa's house – where Marakusa and maid saw all that happened. Marakusa takes off a belt from her waist and hands it to her maid.)

MARAKUSA

Go and find that man, the one who hangs around,

Tell him there's a favour, he can do for me.

Tell him I need help, for my little friend,

Can he help her lover to be free!

Tell him, when he's done the task that I've imposed,

One night he shall enjoy – what this enclosed!

(Maid takes the belt and leaves.)

Seven Sisters Festival.

Macao Street. Inside Blue Willow House James sits, gagged and tied to a chair. Outside there is a holiday atmosphere, the street people sit around and relax, including Marakusa and her maid, while the girls of Blue Willow House sing a pretty folk song.

SEVEN SISTERS

(Girls' chorus)

Cowherd once defied the Gods, all for the love of the Weaving Maid:

River of stars between them flowed, painful penalty that they paid

Still their love is so deep and true, even though they are far apart:

Faithful lovers eternally, constant for ever in the heart.

Seven stars once shone so fair,

Only six now twinkle there!

Seven sisters who used to play,

Weep for the one who went away!

Seven stars in sky of blue,

Help all lovers to be true!

Seven sisters clean and pure,

Help to make all love endure!

Merciful Heaven saw their plight, parted each side of the Milky Way:

Once in a year they may unite, meet each other for just one day.

Birds fly up in the seventh moon, feathers of white and darkest gloss:

Wing to wingtip set in the sky, making a bridge for the lovers to cross.

Seven stars that shine above,

One of them left her home for love!

Seven sisters in the sky,

one was lost and we can't say why!

Seven stars that shine so bright,

kindly look on us tonight!

Seven sisters pure and fair,

Listen to the maiden's prayer!

(The mood turns darker as the Gangster Boss arrives. He sits with Mama and Marakusa at the table to dine, his men squat behind. The girls bring bowls of food to the street people as Mama's hospitality. Ah Lien surreptitiously goes to JAMES inside the house and gives him a drink. The Boss doesn't notice as he's wining and dining. May Lien is trying to sit on his knee and entice him, he mostly ignores her.

Hong Chai enters quietly – and stand leaning on his pole. Kong the soup seller hawks his wares.

BULLS' BALLS BREW

Kong

Hot hot soup here!

Best of bull here!

Come all and sample this time-honoured potion,
Penis of bull in a powerful brew!
Spices and herbs in traditional portion,
Taste it and test it for what it will do!

There's cinnamon and cardamom
And sesame to help along
And aniseed to do the deed
In the bulls' balls brew!

To vitalize and energize,
To magnify and amplify,
To lengthen and to strengthen
Drink bull's balls brew!

(Let) this tonic aid you fornicate,
For sex to be such ecstasy
For vigour like Niagara
For lassitude of attitude
For paleness of your maleness
Or for limpness of your business
It's BIG BLACK BULL'S BALLS BREW.

(BOSS beckons to Kong)

BOSS

Give me a bowl.

HONG CHAI

Better make it two...

(mockingly) You need the strength. I'll pay for you.

BOSS

What--!!

HONG CHAI

Man like you needs lots of help,
to bully women and make them yelp.

(He tosses a coin to Kong, contemptuously gesturing for him to give soup to Boss.)

BOSS

You want to die?

HONG CHAI

Do you dare to face a man
With a weapon in his hand?

BOSS

You crazy or what? (He restrains his gangsters from fighting)

HONG CHAI (making with martial arts business)

You scared?

BOSS

Boy, you'll wish you never dared ---

(Boss and Hong strip off for the fight.)

KONG (to Boss, untactfully) Better have the soup to strength you –

Boss

You insulting me too? (He kicks over the soup pot. Kong glares.)

COOLIE 2

I bet our Boss will take him apart.

KONG

Lay your wagers before they start!

(The coolies form an arena: Kong takes bets.)

COOLIE 1

Fifty cents on the boy.

KONG

Won't take it.

COOLIE 2

Fifty cents he lasts one minute.

COOLIE 3

And a dollar he don't make it.

As the fight proceeds the coolies greet each blow with yells like football spectators, full of aggression and savagery.

In breaks in the fighting – we see Marakusa's maid scuttle across to Ah Lin – holding big scissors. The two girls tiptoe into the house – and with difficulty, cut JAMES free. He escapes.

Hong Chai manages to fell the Boss with a mighty blow – shouting –

HONG CHAI

For Marakusa!

Boss lies flat . Marakusa's maid comes to Hong Chai, carrying a blue silk kimono – and leads him into Marakusa's house.)

In Marakusa's parlour. Hong is bathed and dressed in a blue silk kimono. Maid seats him on a cushion with a cup of sake. Marakusa sits opposite side of room, plays and sings. She removes her outer kimono and remains fully clad in a shining white inner kimono. The maid holds one end of her red sash. Marakusa moves slowly around Hong Chai, playing symbolic bondage games with the sash.

WHEN YOU HOLD ME NEAR Marakusa and Hong

MARAKUSA

Make yourself easy. We can take it slow.

We have time together. Time for love to grow.
We will find the way to make every minute shine
When you hold me in your arms and you put your lips on mine.

HONG CHAI

Tell me is it real, tell me is it true,
This is really me, This is really you.
Still I can't believe it,
Both of us are here,
All I ever wanted, having you so near.

BOTH Hold me, we're going to rise,
Hold me, we'll reach the skies,
When you are holding me close,
When you hold me near.

BOTH (bridge) Love so sweet – love so deep –
Am I dreaming, am I asleep –

MARAKUSA

Don't you worry, Don't you fret.
Nothing here that you'll ever regret.
All you need is to close your eyes,
And I'll lift you into the skies ..

HONG CHAI Don't know whether it's night or day,

All the world is fading away

Nothing matters except your love,

When you hold me near,

When you hold me near

BOTH I feel that I'm going to fly

I think that I'm going to die

When you hold me close,

When you hold me near.

(They go into the inner room.)

The next morning: the coolies sit around. KONG gloats:

KONG:

So much for the Boss,

He's taken a loss!

Would you believe it, I made some tin,

Cos everyone bet on the Boss to win!

The Boss enters: limping and bandaged – catches Kong laughing and is infuriated.

BOSS

What you laughing at?

KONG

Not me Boss. No laughing here ..

BOSS

You think that you've got nothing to fear?

You think I'm weak and ready to quit –

I'll show you you little shit –

(He glares around)

I'll show you that I still have clout –

From today, it's the Big Lock-Out!

(He harangues the stunned coolies)

From today, all the work stops.

No rickshaws ply for office or shops.

I've got a legitimate grievance and grudge

Against the laws of the white man's judge-

Rules that trouble me every day –

I have to comply and pay and pay!

(Coolies growl in response to his rabble rousing. Watch out for audience laughter.)

All you coolies are victims too!

I'm telling, this strike is good for you.

Why sweat for the rich who drink your blood?

Make them walk in the dust and mud!

(The coolies start to chant a heavy beat: the Boss continues to rant over their chorus.)

COOLIES

Stop – work! Stop – work! Stop – work! Stop --- work!

BOSS

Not a rickshaw of mine will move today.

The strike doesn't end until I say.

And then we'll see when the chips are down

Who holds the power in this town!

The coolies cheer – and riot. Among them, Kong, brandishing the pole that carries his soup pots. Graphics show --- they riot through town.

:

Interim scene before the curtain: To be written :Baba Ong narrates how the town is paralysed.

In Mime: James again seeks Lim's advice. Lim nods gravely and agrees to help him.

An English Police Officer appeals to Lim:

OFFICER

Dr Lim you are known through Singapore
For your tireless labours for rich and poor.
In the Legislature and in the community,
You outstandingly hold up your civic duty.
Utmost public respect, has on you been bestowed –
So please talk to those coolies, get them back on the road!

You can convince them to return to their labour!

Dr Lim, please do the whole town this favour.

Lim nods agreement and goes out with the Officer: indicating to James, to come with him.

Scene: Macao Street. The coolies sit around disconsolately. Hong Chai stands on the porch of Marakusa's house. In front of Blue Willow are offerings and tall candles for the Hungry Ghost Festival, which is also in the 7th Month -- including paper effigy of rickshaw coolie. Mama supervises, Ah Lin sits with some other girls helping to fold the 'ingots.')

KONG

This is getting beyond a joke.

No one is working, everyone's broke

It was fun for a while tearing up the town,

But hunger's beginning to get me down.

Now they're making offerings to Hungry Ghosts –

I'm the one who needs help most!

(May Lee burns paper money in a brazier.)

MAY LEE

These I burn for the Hungry ghosts,

The restless spirits of fortune lost.

Men among us who passed away.

And no one remembers their name today!

*(Coolies sing **The Wheel must turn** – same tune as Run Run Run but darker, loaded with sorrow instead of rage)*

COOLIE 1

Who want to die like der ricksha puller

Nobody care for der bloody fool ah

after you die den nobody cry

Just one more coolie gone!

COOLIE 2

Whole life long got to run run run
Then again gotta be reborn
Run run run till the dying date
Then born again for another fate
No more rest for the ricksha feller
Still must run and run for ever
Wheel still turning and fire burning
Still gotta run run run

CHORUS

Run gotta run for – ever
Time we can rest will be never
Where got peace for der ricksha coolie
Still gotta run and run

1st COOLIE Will I be born as a rat or a snake –

Goddess of mercy give me a break

2ND COOLIE I not worried about rebirth –

I got my hell on earth!

MAY LEE (slow)

Our life burns up in a short bright flame

And turns to ash that is cold and gray

(Screen image : effigy of a ricksha coolie burning to ashes)

Rain falls down on the dust and ash

And it all is washed away.

CHORUS: Run gotta run for – ever

Time we can rest will be never

All eternity, ricksha coolie

Still gotta run run run –

The Wheel keeps turning and the fire keeps burning

Still gotta run run run!

A rumbling sound is heard.

1st COOLIE What's that noise?

2nd COOLIE Sounds like some vehicle coming –

3rd COOLIE How can?

4th COOLIE Cannot be!

With a rumble and a toot of horn, enters a gleaming classic open touring car! Lim stands majestically in the front: the Officer drives, James is passenger, and a squad of police constables escorts them on foot.

Everyone stares. Marakusa appears outside her house with Hong Chai.

The Boss enters, as Lim begins to address the coolies.

LIM

Listen to me – you hardworking and honest men!

Why this riot and unrest?

Tell me your problems and I'll try to help you.

BOSS

Get out! I'm in charge here. Nobody moves unless I say.

LIM (to the coolies)

Does he speak for all of you? Does he tell you what to do?

BOSS

Yes!

LIM (to the coolies)

What good is this stop work bringing to you? Are you getting more money, or better working conditions?

(The coolies look at each other, shaking their heads.)

LIM

I help to make laws for Singapore.

I will try to make life better for you.

BOSS

No! Don't listen to him. He can't help you.

I control the rickshaws. I control the streets!

LIM (to the coolies)

Do you want better lives for yourselves?

Are you ruled by fear?

Are you free men?

COOLIES

Yah yah – we are free --

LIM

Why don't you peacefully return to work?

COOLIES shout, and turn towards the Boss as they demand the rickshas.

Back to work – give us the rickshas – more money – back to work!

(Moral authority has decisively passed from the Boss to Lim.)

BOSS

No way!

OFFICER: (to his constables)

Arrest that man !(As the constables start to surround the Boss, James hops down from the car and calls:JAMES

Ah Lin!

She scuttles from the brothel towards the car, clutching her bag. Boss grabs her – and uses her as a human shield, his pistol to her ear. Everyone stands transfixed.

BOSS

Don't touch me – or I'll kill her!

LIM

Release that girl!

BOSS (brandishing his pistol at Lim)

Get out of here!

KONG (who is next to the Boss)

Don't do it Boss – don't do it!

BOSS (takes aim at Lim)

Get off my street!

MARAKUSA (in anguish)

Ah Lin!

Hong Chai leaps down with his weapon, shouting

HONG CHAI

For Marakusa!

BOSS

You again!

HONG CHAI

For my lady's friend,

For my lady's wish,

For Marakusa!

BOSS

Enough!!

KONG: No – Boss!

BOSS shoots – Hong Chai Falls. Kong's pole sweeps through the air – he strikes the Boss down. The policemen drag him away under arrest. Kong sidles up to the Police officer and holds out his hand for a reward – which is handed to him.)

Marakusa comes to the fallen Hong Chai.)

MARAKUSA

He had taken his reward,

He had no more to gain.

The true samurai casts his life away,

Careless of pain –

O noble soul!

HONG CHAI

Marakusa!

MARAKUSA

O true samurai!

HONG CHAI

Marakusa!

Reprise "Hold me near." Marakusa and Hong Chai

MARAKUSA

Make yourself easy. We can take it slow.

We have time together. Time for love to grow.

We will find the way to make every minute shine

When you hold me in your arms and you put your lips on mine.

HONG CHAI

Tell me is it real, tell me is it true,

This is really me, This is really you.

Still I can't believe it,

Both of us are here,

All I ever wanted, having you so near.

BOTH

Love so sweet – love so deep –

Am I dreaming, am I asleep –

MARAKUSA

Don't you worry, Don't you fret.
Nothing here that you'll ever regret.
All you need is to close your eyes,
And I'll lift you into the skies ..

HONG CHAI

Don't know whether it's night or day,
All the world is fading away
Nothing matters except your love,
When you hold me near,
When you hold me near

BOTH

I feel that I'm going to fly
I think that I'm going to die
When you hold me close,
When you hold me near.

(Hong Chai dies. Marakusa leans over his body, as the stage becomes filled with red light.)

MARAKUSA

(reprise Fujiyama)

Fujiyama, far from cherry blossom --
see a true warrior.
Samurai's daughter,
salute a noble soul.

Honour – is undying courage

Death -- wipes out disgrace

I turn towards the rising sun.

Fujiyama, my spirit will return.

(Her maid hands a knife, and she kills herself as the big red sun rises.)

LIM

What did they live for? What did they die for?

What had they found to surrender their life for?

Why did they throw away all that they had

For a fancy that can't be seen – were they mad?

Maybe they knew life is more worth living

When you have something to believe in

If you have found a vision to strive for,

Something to live for, something to die for –

Life becomes more than the world you've known

When you find something greater than you alone –

Something that asks all the best you can give –

Something for which you can die – or live!

.

(Stage tidied up. Lim takes May Ling's hand – enthrones her in the motor car.)

Come my poor sister, let me bring you to a place of ease.
Rest there, and when your time is done, you'll go in peace.
And all the tears you've shed are not in vain.
I will remember, in the time of rain.

VOICES OFF: Look out! It's going to rain!

For all of us are passing, like leaves that fall in storm –
When rain comes like blessing, new life will be born.

CHORUS

Hear the rain, hear the rain,
how it comes, it comes –

LIM

Our spirits will linger, on the streets where we have been
the footsteps we leave, in the future shall be seen.
In the songs of the city Our joy and sorrow remain.
You will hear our voices, In the sound of the falling rain.

(All enter for full finale, Ah Lin wearing the Western dress.)

FULL CHORUS

Hear the rain Hear the rain

Bringing life bringing hope

Hear the rain!

How it comes how it drums

On the trees On the seas

On the grass On the street

On the dust At our feet

Hear the rain!

Hear it rushing hear it gushing

Hear it roar hear it pour

Hear it flow hear it grow

Hear the rain!

END -----

Victorian Days

Stella Kon

Short Version 4

June 2006

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OUTLINE 90 words

Singapore 1900: young doctor Albert Lim loves the singing girl Ying. His Uncle asks him to take a political position, to oppose the Colonialist Government. Albert refuses, he wants to marry Ying and have a normal life. But Ying is found to have a fatal disease. She enters the Buddhist nunnery to end her days in peace. Albert, heartbroken, vows to become the voice of the people. He takes a seat on the Council: it is a first step towards democracy for Singapore.

Inspired by the memory of Dr Lim Boon Keng.

Albert	Leslie Tay
Ying	Michelle Teo
Baba Ong	Andy Phang
Dr Mugliston	Michael Lee
J J Jones,	Richard Lord
Baba Oh	Emil Cheong
Baba Soh	Chan Khar Liang
Baba Goh	Juziswan

Head Nun	Tanya Tan
Nun/ensemble	Daphne Ong
Nun/ensemble	Jamie Koh
Nun	Amanda Tee

Scene 1: Crown Colony Anthem

Lights Up: BABA ONG ON STAGE (*jovial and urbane, tropical suit, carnation in buttonhole; he addresses the audience.*)

BABA ONG Welcome to my town of Singapore, in the year 1895. I am Baba Ong, Straits Chinese born in this country, *peranakan Singapura*, a loyal subject of her Majesty Queen Victoria. Today we greet an eminent visitor, just arrived from the corridors of power in London.

JONES: (*introduces himself to Baba Ong*) J. J. Jones, Member of the British Parliament, Assistant Junior Under Secretary of State for the Colonial Office. I have come to inspect the situation in Singapore.

(*ensemble enters: 3 Babas, Dr Mugliston, and an ensemble of white British Colonialists and Babas.*)

CROWN COLONY ANTHEM

BRITS:

A town so grand, a town so fine, a town so clean and green,

A splendid colony of Her Majesty the Queen

A town so rich, a town so rare, you could not ask for more,

Britain's Orient base, the port of Singapore.

BABAS:

The Baba bold, the Nonya fair, we came from China's shore,
And soon we settled down in this sunny Singapore.
We ceased to roam, we made our home beside the Southern Seas,
As subjects of the Crown, the loyal Queen's Chinese.

B: ALL

Great little town of Singapore, jewel of Britain's fame
Ornament of the Empire, a credit to our name
Market for all from near and far, fortunes are to be made,
Th' Clapham Junction of the East, Emporium of Trade.

A: BRITS

With lip so stiff and back so straight we labour and we strive,
and then we beat the heat with a "stengah" after five

BABAS

We teach our sons to play the game, we learned it from the West –
But when we eat, we know for sure, the Nonya's food is best!

ALL

For Empire proud we'll take our chance,
where profit calls we will advance
We'll live our lives in glorious style --
and build up more and more!
God save the Queen, God save this land,
and Prosper Ever Singapore!

(exit ensemble)

JONES We have learned that ships carrying soldiers of the British army, have been ordered to avoid stopping at the port of Singapore. Dutch and Imperial Japanese ships, are also avoiding the port. Our Government is concerned at the potential loss of revenue to Britain!

BABA ONG Everyone knows – that the reason the soldiers and sailors are not coming – is because their commanders are afraid of disease in the port!

MUGLISTON Mr Jones! I'm Dr Mugliston, a private medical practitioner. The current epidemic of disease, is all due to a grave mistake that the Colonial Office made 8 years ago. They abolished the system of compulsory medical examinations, for the women of the brothels. I advised against abolishing it! Now there's a serious problem, affecting thousands of white men!

JONES *(politely)* The Secretary of State will continue to use his best judgement, for the administration of the Colony. *(exit Jones and Mugliston.)*

GOH We Straits Chinese also petitioned for the system to be kept. But they ignored us.

OH Perhaps the compulsory examinations were too expensive for the Colonial government!

SOH Our two representatives in the local Government tried to protest. But the British members of the Legislative Council pay little respect to Mr Tan and Mr Lam.

ONG (*sighing*) Gentlemen – let’s adjourn to our Club in Kereta Ayer. (*They move aside.*)

Scene 2: The Club; Ying’s Home

ALBERT *enters*:

**I’m so glad to be back,
in the town where I was born,
No longer to wander in distant land,
To linger alone and forlorn –**

(*Albert greets Baba Ong and Babas.*)

ALBERT Uncle Ong!

ONG Gentlemen, my nephew Albert. Doctor Albert Lim -- Just back from his medical studies!

ALBERT (*shaking hands and charming them with his good manners and sincerity*) Baba Oh, Baba Soh, Baba Goh! Good day gentlemen!

BABAS OH SOH AND GOH (*in close harmony*) Good day ☐☐ good day ☐☐ good day!

BABA ONG We were just talking about our people’s situation. We need a strong representative on the Legislative Council!

Babashop Quartet by Four Babas

Men from Whitehall try to rule us

Half the time they're really clueless—

Only make our life get tougher—

Never care for how we suffer –

CHORUS Co-lo- nialists – Co- lo-nial!

We send our memorials for the Governor's ear:

He pretends to listen, but he don't really hear.

We have men on Council, minority of two,

Lonely Opposition, not much they can do.

CHORUS Only a to ---ken -- Opposition ---

We made our grave appeal, to protect the public health –

But the British Government won't spend the wealth.

Won't the Colonialists -- give us what we need,

Or do we only - -- pay for Empire's greed!

CHORUS We just pay and pay! (You pay I pay he pays

She pays They pay Who pays It pays) we just pay and pay

ONG My boy, you can use your education – to do much good, for our people.

ALBERT *(shaking his head and laughing)* I want to build up my medical career.

ONG You should help to speak up for our people.

ALBERT I'm really not interested. I have my own life to live!

ONG We need someone to represent us ---

(YING, the singing girl, enters and plays introductory notes on her pei pa.)

ALBERT *(who has been paying no attention)* Who's that?

YING *(singing)* **Good gentlemen – I won't keep you long,
Be so kind, listen to my song!**

ALBERT Who's she?

ONG That's Ying –they call her the Songbird of Kreta Ayer.

(YING sings: I WOULD FLY)

If – I could be flying, Like – a bird that is free,
I'd seek a place of sweet refuge, I'd search for a sanctuary.
Like a bird so I would fly, I would fly –
Like a bird that is seeking a place of repose,
Just to be, to be free.
If – I could be flying, Like – a bird that is free,
Like a bird that is seeking a place of repose,
Just to be, to be free.
I would seek in the sky for my freedom,
To be free I would search in the sky.
Like a bird, I would fly.

Ying ends her song and gracefully exits.

ALBERT I want to meet that girl!

(BABAS sing)

ONG She is beautiful indeed!

OH You think you would like to meet!

GOH No man here has ever touched her.

SOH No hope you can ever budge her.

ALL: **She is pure!**

ONG But go and call on her! For a fine young fellow like you -- She might make an exception!

(The four Babas exit. ALBERT goes to visit YING)

BABA ONG: *(serves as Narrator to audience)* Albert told me later, that he called on Ying's home, in Kreta Ayer Road. She had a small clean room, amidst the brothels and the opium dens. *(Mimed action)* She told Albert to leave – but he pleaded to let him stay, only to talk to her. She told him her history.

YING I was married once, when I was very young. My husband was a kind old man, a carpenter, who was good to me. But seven years ago he died, and I was left alone. So I became a singer in the night.

ALBERT *(ardently)* Your voice is beautiful. Ying! I want you to come with me.

YING Do not think of me like that.

ALBERT I want to take you away from this life.

YING *(sternly)* Don't have such a thought. How often I have been invited, to become some rich man's toy, for the sake of wealth and luxury! Or to become a concubine or second wife -- a second-class respectability. It's not for me. *(Head Nun and other Nuns enter.)* Mother!

HEAD NUN Child ---

YING (*explains to Albert*) The sisters took me in, when I was an orphaned child. I grew up in their quiet nunnery. I still visit them sometimes.

HEAD NUN You're always welcome.

YING (*hands Nuns her donation*) I try to help their charity, to the poor women of the streets.

HEAD NUN By these acts of mercy, you follow the Middle Way.

Scene 3: Acts of Mercy

NUNS Acts of mercy, Acts of love, fill the earth with harmony

**HEAD NUN May you find the way to inner peace,
 may your store of virtue still increase

 May you reach the place where all is bright,
 In the land of pure and shining light.**

**YING (*counterpoint*) May I find the way to inner peace,
 May my store of virtue still increase

 May I reach the place where all is bright,
 In the place of pure and shining light.**

NUNS: **loving kindness to all things ...**

ALBERT: You are so good and pure! I want to talk to you -- I want to know you better –

YING Please leave – please don't come and trouble me. (*Albert leaves. Ying weeps.*)
Mother – Mother – I wish I could marry him!

HEAD NUN It would not be wise, my child.

YING I know. We are too unequal. It would only lead to shame and sorrow. But his heart is
good – I wish it could be!

HEAD NUN I will pray.

YING **I – love him! Could I only live at his side,
I'd be happy! I would gladly be his bride!**

HEAD NUN **May you find the Way to quiet peace ---**

HEAD NUN **May you find the way to peace,
in the land serene and bright,
May you leave behind all earthly pain,
When you reach a refuge of pure light.**

NUNS **Acts of mercy, Acts of love – help to purify the world...**

Scene 4: Deadly Days

Lights up on Baba Ong and Oh Soh and Goh talking to Dr Mugliston)

MUGLISTON The repeal of the CDO – was a great mistake!

BABA OH *(the youngest, is puzzled.)* What is the CDO?

MUGLISTON The Contagious Diseases Ordinance, the law for medical hygiene. I used to do those compulsory examinations -- a terrible job – inspecting an unending line of foul Chinese female “parts,” one hundred in an hour! But the CDO did help prevent disease from spreading.

OH What happened –

MUGLISTON Eight years ago, some moral reformers in London insisted that the law be repealed. They said that instead of encouraging vice, we should just tell people to refrain from dangerous behaviour! *(All shake their heads.)* Since then the plague has spread.

BABA ONG People are dying

MUGLISTON Many women in the brothels have the disease. But the symptoms do not show for many years. They continue working, and infecting their customers. Many soldiers and sailors get sick -- It's endangering the strength of the British Empire!

BABA OH So many of our coolies and rickshaw pullers are sick.

BABA SOH And even respectable people, Babas and shopkeepers, are afraid that any time they visit a prostitute they could pick up the sickness!

BABA GOH And they carry it home to the wives!

DEADLY DAYS

Dr Mugliston and 4 Babas

MUGLISTON

Without the CDO's protection,
we see a rise in the rate of infection

BABA ONG

Sickness is swelling among the poor,
And soon it will hammer on the rich man's door

BABA GOH

Respectable wives are falling unwell,
Didn't know husband was out with some gel.

BABA SOH

The army ships don't call anymore,
They've heard it's so dirty in Singapore

Chorus

MUGLISTON

Didn't they listen when I said how I feel

BABA ONG

Didn't they listen to our appeal

ALL

It's the facts of life they don't understand

They think that sex can just be banned!

Oh the scent of love is a bitter breath

And the lips that smile bring the kiss of death

And the games go on and the music plays

But the toll is rising through the deadly days!

MUGLISTON

Here's a woman, rotten and sick,

Still out working and turning a trick

BABA ONG

Here's a coolie with pain in his leg

Hanged himself by his hair from a peg.

MUGLISTON

The bug lies low in the body for years

Then later in life the trouble appears.

BABA SOH

A woman gone mad from a brain infected

BABA OH

A man who staggers with nerves affected

MUGLISTON

Didn't they listen when I told them why,

BABA ONG

Didn't they listen to our people's cry

BABAS OH AND GOH

Told them they mustn't repeal that law,

BABAS ONG AND SOH

Now they've got what they were asking for!

ALL

Oh the scent of love is a bitter breath

And the lips that smile bring the kiss of death

And the games go on and the music plays

But the toll is rising through the deadly days!

The toll is rising through the deadly days!

Scene 5: "I want to get married."

(Albert enters) ALBERT Uncle, I must talk to you!

ONG Certainly ... Dr Mugliston – my nephew Albert – he's a doctor like you!

MUGLISTON *(shaking hands condescendingly)* A Chinese physician? From Shanghai perhaps?

ALBERT From the University of Edinburgh, actually.

MUGLISTON Edinburgh ... Well, good day to you, gentlemen. *(exit.)*

ALBERT Uncle, there is this matter I want to discuss with you . . .

UNCLE *(to Babas)* Excuse us please gentlemen ... *(Babas exit)*

ALBERT Uncle – Uncle, I want to get married!

BABA ONG Married, this is rather sudden. Who is the girl!

ALBERT Ying: the songbird of Kereta Ayer.

BABA ONG A singing girl!

ALBERT She is so good ...She cares for the sick and helps the poor women of the street.

BABA ONG You must be quite infatuated with her.

ALBERT I love her!

BABA ONG What a gentleman usually does with such a woman – he takes her as a second wife or concubine.

ALBERT Ying will be my wife! I will marry her with a proper ceremony – with the traditional rituals – with hundreds of guests and days of feasting!

BABA ONG I will not support this, I won't pay for this!

ALBERT Then I will marry her in a small private ceremony. But people will ask questions.

BABA ONG Of course they'll question!

ALBERT If there's a big wedding, and I show openly that I am proud of her, there will be NO questions. But if it seems to be small and hidden, people will say, "Were they really married? Was there something wrong? Are their children really part of the family?"

BABA ONG (*wants to tear his hair.*) You can't do this!

ALBERT I am going to marry her. (*respectfully*) Uncle – will you support my marriage?

BABA ONG You're impossible!

ALBERT (*recognising he's won*) Thank you, Uncle! (*Baba Ong exit*)

Scene 6: "Precious One"

Albert returns to Ying's home.

ALBERT Ying -- I've told my Uncle that we are going to be married!

YING I told you no ...

ALBERT As my one and only legal wife, Ying. With the full ceremony, in front of everybody.

YING (*overjoyed*) I can't believe it – it can't be true –

ALBERT (*anxiously*) But do you want to marry me? Are you willing to spend your life with me?

YING Yes, Albert – I want to be your wife! I'll love you and care for you.

(Duet, Ying and Albert, "Precious One")

ALBERT **Of all that dwells beneath the sun,
You are the dearest one to me
You are my joy, for all my days,
I will love you through eternity.**

YING **A dream I hardly dared to dream,
and you will help to make it all come true.
A joy I never hoped for,
to wear your ring and live a life of love with you.**

YING **My precious one, I'll pledge my life to you,
Take care of you with all my heart and soul,
I never want to see you come to harm at all
Precious one, for ever I will care for you
From every stormy wind I'll keep you safe
No darkness ever bring dismay
Treasure that will never perish
Ever will I love and cherish you –
My precious one.**

**For you I'd give up all I have
More dear to me than all my words can tell
I pray that you'll be happy**

**So I will always know that you are safe and well
My precious one, I'll pledge my life to you,
Take care of you with all my heart and soul,
I never want to see you come to harm at all
Precious one, for ever I will care for you
From every stormy wind I'll keep you safe
No darkness ever bring dismay
Treasure that will never perish
Ever will I love and cherish you –
My blood I'd shed my life I'd give you
My precious One.**

**ALBERT Precious one, I'll care for you in every way I can
I'll pledge my life to you, I'll guard, protect,
with all my heart and soul,
I never want to see you come to harm.
My precious one,
from every stormy wind I'll keep you safe
No fear may harm you or alarm
My treasure that will never perish
Ever will I love and cherish you
My precious one ..
Would be a sacrifice well spent**

**More than all my words can tell
I pray that you'll be happy all your life
So I will always know that you are safe and well
Precious one, I'll care for you in every way I can
I'll pledge my life to you, I'll guard, protect,
with all my heart and soul,
I never want to see you come to harm.
My precious one, from every stormy wind I'll keep you safe
No fear may harm you or alarm
My treasure that will never perish
Ever will I love and cherish you
My blood I'd shed my life I'd give you,
My precious one.**

Scene 7: "Please take the Seat"

4 babas and Albert at the Club

OH Baba Ong! Let's nominate your nephew to take Mr Tan's place on the Council!

ALBERT What place?

ONG The Straits Legislative Council in Singapore. One of our Chinese representatives is about to retire. The Chinese community can nominate you to the position.

ALBERT But I don't want to go into politics.

Baba Quartet 2

QUARTET:

You could do the job so well

Education sure will tell

Smarter than these English men

They can't scorn you and condemn ...

ALBERT (*spoken*) No No ... It would take up a lot of my time.

QUARTET

You can fill that Council seat

Just be there each time they meet

Represent our people's need,

Serve our best int'rest indeed!

ALBERT

No matter how many times you ask,

I do not want to do this task.

How do I tell you so you'll believe?

I have got my own life to live!

(spoken) I know how difficult it would be, sitting among those Englishmen on the Council, always
the only figure to oppose them –

I want to have my time to be free,

I want to live, I want to breathe,

I want to live my life for me!

In fact – in fact – my Uncle dear

Has something to tell you, you ought to hear ...

ALBERT *(spoken, politely)* Uncle?

BABA ONG *(reluctantly)* Er -- gentlemen, -- I would like to invite you to my nephew's wedding-- in
the near future!

Scene 8: "Love you At a Distance"

Albert and Ying at her home: a brief reprise of Precious One)

YING **My precious one, I'll pledge my life to you,
Take care of you with all my heart and soul,
I never want to see you come to harm at all**

ALBERT **Precious one, I'll care for you in every way I can**

**I'll pledge my life to you, I'll guard, protect,
with all my heart and soul,
I never want to see you come to harm.**

ALBERT We'll be so happy when we're married. I'll set up my medical practice.

YING You'll help the poor people in the street.

ALBERT *(Shrugging)* There's so much poverty and misery, what can one man do? My uncle wants me to become a Councillor – to represent the people.

YING You should do it!

ALBERT I don't want to take on the whole British Empire!

YING One person can make a difference –

ALBERT No no. I'll just practice medicine – and I'll earn a lot of money -- for you and for our children!

YING: My dear "doctor," I have a small complaint I would like you to look at ...I've had it for some time.

(Ying modestly shows an area on the back of her neck and shoulder. Albert examines it and recoils in horror)

ALBERT No ...

YING What's the matter?

ALBERT It can't be ...

YING Why have you turned white?

ALBERT I don't trust myself. We have to get a second opinion. Come with me ---

(He drags her by the hand, they visit Dr Mugliston. Mugliston examines her and shakes his head gravely.)

MUGLISTON. *(to Albert)* You are correct, it is just as you feared.

YING What's the matter?

ALBERT Ying – have you ever had rashes on your skin?

YING Long ago, when I was still married to my old husband.

ALBERT Did you have any fever?

YING A little. I thought nothing of it. *(Albert drops his head in despair.)*

MUGLISTON I am sorry to tell you that you may have a serious -- disease.

YING A serious disease! *(She understands that this is the euphemism for syphilis.)*

ALBERT *(hoping in vain)* Can she be treated? Can she be helped?

MUGLISTON You know that when this sickness is extremely advanced, there is no cure for it.
 There is nothing we can do.

YING But I have not been with any man, since my husband died – seven years ago.

MUGLISTON It lies concealed for years.

YING Will I – how long will I live?

MUGLISTON You might live for many months, for years even!

YING I will slowly get worse – I will lose my looks, my health, my mind!

MUGLISTON Careful nursing may make it easier for you. *(exit)*

ALBERT Ying – I can't bear this – *(he goes to embrace her)*

YING Don't touch me! (*he recoils*) Albert – you must never touch me again.

ALBERT (*horrified, realizing the situation*) Never touch you again ...!

YING We must part from each other.

ALBERT No!

YING I will not bring you into danger.

ALBERT But I love you!

YING It must be .. We cannot marry. Albert -- It's best that we should never meet again.

ALBERT Never --!

YING Don't you see how hard this is for me? ---- I will still love you.

(Duet: I'LL LOVE YOU AT A DISTANCE)

**YING I'll love you at a distance far away,
 I'll see your face but I can't touch your hand,
 I'll hear your voice I loved before,**

But that is all you understand!

ALBERT **To love you at a distance far away –
To see you yet not take your hand in mine –
To hear your song but not approach –
This is a fate I cannot resign!**

ALBERT **My heart breaks in sorrow
how can grief like this be true
My heart breaks in pain to part,
I cannot bear to part from you!**

YING **My heart breaks in sorrow
how can such grief be true
My heart breaks in pain!
I can't bear to part from you!**

(Albert tries to embrace Ying)

ALBERT **Ying – *(she repulses him.)***

YING **I never want to see you come to harm
No more left to say
I'll love you at a distance far away**

ALBERT **For ever I will love and cherish**

Are there no more words for me to say

I'll love you at a distance far away.

YING Leave me now Albert.

ALBERT Ying!

YING Good bye □□ (*exit*)

ALBERT How can I go on without you! What am I going to do!

Scene 9: "A Song in the Silence"

(Albert walks away while the music repeats the 'Love at a Distance' theme signifying his heart is breaking. He finds his Uncle sitting at home.)

ONG Albert – where were you, you've been out all night --

ALBERT Ying is sick. She cannot marry me ... Does that please you, Uncle?

ONG Dear boy – I 'm very sorry to see you so unhappy.

ALBERT Ying is so good, so pure – yet she has this terrible disease. It is the fault of the Colonial Government!

ONG They allowed the disease to spread everywhere!

ALBERT She's dying because of their neglect!

ONG Our people are suffering because nobody looks after their welfare.

ALBERT Yes. (*Heartbreak turns to anger.*) Because that white man's Legislative Council doesn't care what happens to us! (*Ong sits up and looks at him hopefully. But Albert falls back into despondency*) But there's no use talking. Even if I went into the Council ... I would be just one person facing all those Englishmen, the councilors and MPs, the ones who have the real power. It's useless to think about it. ... What can one voice achieve?

(*Ong and Albert sit in despairing silence. A **bird sings.***)

ONG Dawn is coming ...

ALBERT Yes ... (**bird song**)

ONG One bird singing ...

(*Music lead in: Albert begins to move out of despair.*)

A SONG IN THE SILENCE

Tonight my heart is sad
I wonder if the sun will rise
the air is still
and dark the skies.
It seems that nothing dares to move,
Afraid to try, afraid to try
It seems the silence will go on
Till hope must die,
Till hope will die.

Till I hear a sound –

I hear one note and it lifts my heart,
one bird singing to welcome the dawn,
one ray of sunlight breaks through the cloud,
the light keeps growing and the day is born.

Sometimes it seems that nothing can be done,
no use to try, no use to try.
It seems one effort all alone
will fail and die, is doomed to die.

And then I hear --

**A bird that sings though the world is dark,
One voice lifted to challenge the night,
One spark glowing that grows to a fire
And hope comes back and the world is light ...**

I will be the spark, I will be the song ---

**Let me be the song in the silence
Let me be the flame in the night
The dream that hold a shining hope
That brings us to the light –**

I will be the flame, I will be the song!

ALBERT Uncle – I will serve on the Legislative Council. I will take up the seat.

BABA ONG *(is overjoyed, shakes Albert's hand.)* I'll tell my friends. We must muster opinion on your behalf.

(exit Baba Ong and Albert.)

Scene 10: Opposing Albert

Mr Jones and Dr Mugliston enter.)

MUGLISTON Mr Jones, we cannot control who the local Chinese may choose to nominate.

JONES I do not believe that these Asiatic people are qualified to help in government.

MUGLISTON This young Dr Lim was educated in Britain.

JONES Sir, my dog was trained in England but that doesn't make him an Englishman. No Asiatic can have the high moral feeling and sensitivity of a White Man.

MUGLISTON You're right, sir.

JONES Dr Mugliston – do use whatever influence you have with the local Asiatics – so that they do not nominate this Chinese boy to the Legislative Council.

Scene 11: Nomination Process

*Ensemble of babas and other Singapore people enters. Note that women and coolies are not included in nomination process. **Music: preview of "Freedom Dawning."** Mugliston is seen going from one to another, talking persuasively to them.*

Albert, with Baba Ong backing him, mounts a rostrum to address the crowd.

Gentlemen, allow me to speak, in spite of my youth, on behalf of the Baba people.

We, the Straits-born Chinese,

We, who have been educated by Englishmen, almost forgetting our racial past,

We, the Nonyas and Babas of Singapore –

All that we need, is to wake! Shake off inertia and complacency!

Grasp the new opportunities, of the 20th Century!

(Applause.)

We the Babas hail with deepest respect, the gracious reign of her Majesty the Queen;

Under whose government we enjoy peace and prosperity,

To which we most dutifully pay our taxes.

Yet I must point out – that we have little say in local affairs.

We should have more influence!

No taxation, without representation!

No government, without consultation!

(Applause.)

Let us make ourselves heard!

Let us speak with one united voice!

Let our people be empowered, in Singapore!

BABA ONG *(First verse more spoken than sung)*

Today a new story is beginning

Of a rising, against a tyranny.

Each of you will have a part to play,

When you raise your voices to be free!

When you choose your man,

when you sign your name,

when you stand to be counted,

You are making – history!

(Singing)

Look, a new day is dawning,

Watch for the sun to rise,

We can see the future coming,

before our eyes.

We will see our freedom nearing,

A light upon this land,

When we sing one song together,

when we rise and take our stand,

When our people find their voices,

When our hearts are no longer dumb,

On a day when a nation rejoices,

One day ☐☐ to come!

(There is applause and excitement. The Babas huddle, nod their heads, and nominate Albert. Baba Ong raises Albert's right hand like a boxing champion, to the chagrin of Jones and Mugliston. Eventually the excitement fades.)

Scene 12: Temple scene

ONG Well done my boy – (*he corrects himself*) Well done, Albert! Tomorrow you will take your seat on the Legislative Council!

ALBERT Yes ... I sent a message to Ying. I told her I will devote my life to serving the people.
She sent a message back, asking me to come to the temple this morning. Uncle, will you come with me?

BABA ONG What, is there some ceremony at the temple ?

ALBERT: Ying Is going to join the nuns in the nunnery.

(Ong goes with Albert. Ying comes to meet them: in Buddhist nun's robes, escorted by ensemble of nuns and monks.)

(Reprise of "Acts of Mercy")

MONKS: Om Mani Padme Hum. Om Mani Padme Hum.

**NUNS Acts of mercy, acts of love,
Fill the earth with harmony**

**YING May you find the way to inner peace,
may your store of virtue still increase
May you reach the place where all is bright,
In the land of pure and shining light.**

HEAD NUN May you find the way to inner peace,

may your store of virtue still increase
May you reach the place where all is bright,
In the land of pure and shining light.

ALBERT Let me be the song in the silence
Let me be the flame in the night
The dream that hold a shining hope
That brings us to the light –
I will be the bird, I will be the light

BABA ONG You are the song, you are the flame –
Bring us to the light

MONKS: Om Mani Padme Hum. Om Mani Padme Hum.

NUNS Acts of mercy, acts of love,
Fill the earth with harmony

(They lead Ying away, leaving Albert and Baba Ong on stage.)

Scene 13

(Babas Oh Goh and Soh come to meet Albert and Baba Ong.)

BABA GOH Dr Lim, we thank you for taking up the seat.

ALBERT Thank you for your confidence ...

BABA SOH I have a daughter you might like to meet ... (*Baba Ong makes shushing gestures*)

ALBERT I'll do my best to represent the people of Singapore.

BABA GOH You can keep on serving as long as you're here –

BABA SOH We will nominate you, year after year!

ALBERT I know it will be a long struggle. I have promised that I will help all the people of Singapore, of all its races and religions.

BABA ONG Yes!

ALBERT I will deal with the Englishmen. I will speak up to the Colonialist Government.

BABAS Good! Good man!

ALBERT And one day, the British Empire will no longer rule us. One day we will be free! (*He sings the first line*)

“Freedom Dawning”, (*Albert and entire ensemble sing :*)

ALBERT

Look, a new day is dawning,

Watch for the sun to rise,

ALL (*join in slowly*)

We can see the future coming,

before our eyes.

When the seeds we've sown come to harvest

And trees we planted grow tall

We'll hail the promise given

Of peace and hope for all!

Chorus

We will see our freedom dawning,

A light upon this land,

When we sing one song together,

when we rise and take our stand,

When our people find their voices,

When our hearts are no longer dumb,

On a day when a nation rejoices,

One day ☐☐ to come!

Stand up proudly together ☐☐

Finding that we are strong,

When, all our hearts united,

We sing one song!

We will see our freedom dawning,

A future to change this land,

When we sing one song together,

when we rise and take our stand,

When our people find their voices,

When our hearts are no longer dumb,

One day when a nation rejoices,

When a nation rejoices,

The day ☐☐ will come!

It will come, It will come!

≡≡≡≡ END ≡≡≡≡

RICKSHAW BOY

LOVE AND DEATH IN SINGAPORE, 1900

14 May 2007

IN CONFIDENCE

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Scene One

Macao Street – just before dawn. In the dim light, Coolies are preparing to start work They sing a few lines at low volume, low speed: an ominous grumbling chorus of discontent.

COOLIES

Who want to live like der ricksha puller

work all day like a bloody fool ah

run like der rat dat is stuck in trap

an still got to run run run

Run run run for der wheels don't stop
run run run till der day you drop
how can live in dis kind of way
to run an run all day
why we are born to be ricksha coolie
still gotta run and run.

Sc 1b The light grows brighter It is early morning. Lim Boon Keng enters, addresses audience.. (song Lim's question)

LBK

Singapore, stronghold of Britain's might --
This coolie city, out of Queen Victoria's sight.
Singapore, trading emporium,
where everything can be bought ..
Built on the bones of the migrant workers –
who come here to labour – for what?

Soup seller Kong enters.)

KONG Hot hot soup! Best of bull! Bull's penis soup! Best of bull!

LIM Who are you friend? What is your story ?

KONG I used to pull a ricksha too, until one day I bust a gut (indicates hernia)

I used to screw till my thing turned black,

Now I sell my soup to help others rut!

LIM Look at this man, crippled and torn,

By the work where he was employed

Look at this man, diseased and unclean –

Look at this man, whom life has destroyed!

May Lin at the door of Blue Willow House solicits Lim.

MAY LIN Come – sir – try our hospitality.

We'll give you more than a cup of tea.

LIM Woman, why live like this --don't you know the danger –

When you give yourself to every passing stranger.

MAY LIN Don't kid yourself, I don't give free!

What other life is there for me!

(LIM is distressed, burning with indignation.)

LIM Look at this woman, old and unwell

Cursed in this body that men have enjoyed.

Look at this woman, without any hope --

Look at this woman whom life has destroyed!

(He talks to the deranged coolie)

LIM And you, poor soul?

(The deranged one howls and growls at him)

KONG Don't waste your time, the fool is strange –

In fact he's totally deranged!

LIM

This isn't the way that things should be,

This isn't a world that I want to see!

This is as wrong as a world without air,

Heaven above, this is unfair!

If it's right that men labour and break their back,

The sun should die and the sky turn black!

If it's right for women to be used and sold,

Then water is dry and the fire is cold!

And there isn't a hope that your life is worth,

If there is no justice here on earth!

It is unfair!

Why did these people travel the world

To find misery here instead of some gold

Why do they suffer and slave every day

To get what we give them – some pitiful pay!

Do they struggle for nothing except to survive?

Is there more to living than staying alive?

(exit Lim.

Scene 1c – blazing noon on Macao Street. Rickshaw coolies enter and sing: high energy, with lots of pain and anger.

RUN RUN RUN Coolies

Who want to live like der ricksha puller

work all day like a bloody fool ah

run like der rat dat is stuck in trap

an still got to run run run

Run run run for der wheels don't stop

run run run till der day you drop

how can live in dis kind of way

to run an run all day

Run run run, der back can break

run run run, der leg can't take

sun still burn but der wheels must turn

you just must run an run.

Run gotta run like a mad (mad) dog
why we are born wi der bad luck
why we are born to be ricksha coolie
still gotta run and run

(Various voices solo)

How can a poor man save his money --
spend too much on der girlie honey --
opium vice – an throw der dice --

(All) Dat's how der money run!

MOK, the old coolie Now I old and I work too long
what will I do when I no more strong
soon one day dis heart can bust
den my ricksha stop at last

(Various voices, solo)

Pull der car for der whole dam day --
work like hell for der dam poor pay --
six sen one mile damn cheap buy, yi,

(All) six sen damn cheap buy!

Run run run for der wheels don't stop

Run run run till der day you drop

(solo) life no hope for the ricksha coolie,

run till der day you die, yi.

(All) run till der day you die!

Run gotta run like a mad (mad) dog

why we are born wi der bad luck

why we are born to be ricksha coolie

still gotta run and run.

Scene 1d

Later that morning. Another view of Macao Street. We see exterior of the brothel Blue Willow House, Mama enters with Ah Lin.

MAMA

Now, my girl, you call me Mama!

AH LIN (*Obeying*)Mama!

MAMA

Do not be afraid girl, I will look after you,

I will be beside you, all the day long.

In this place you haven't a friend,

You don't know the streets or the foreign tongue.

I will take care of you, daughter dear!

You owe me lots for your transport here.

You'll work for free till you pay the debt –

It might be a few years yet!

AH LIN

I will work hard!

Mama leads her to the door of Blue Willow House.)

MAMA

Now this is my place– Blue Willow House.

This is where you will work – for better or worse!

AH LIN

What kind of place have you brought me to?

What kind of work do you want me to do?

MAMA: You'll work as one of my girls.

AH LIN: I won't do it! I won't be a whore!

MAMA: Get inside!

(She seizes a heavy stick and strikes Ah Lin viciously. Ah Lin is knocked to the ground, screams and writhes under the blows.)

MAMA: Get inside.

(Ah Lin stumbles ahead of Mama, into the brothel.

Scene 2 a

Macao Street: Night falls.. Street characters: a drunk, with bottle. A deranged coolie – when approached by May Li, he jerks his head and shouts: Devil! Devil! Some coolies swagger down the street,.. Kong hawks his soup to them. Kong’s business is good, and he keeps money in a heavy purse.

KONG

Come all and sample this time-honoured potion,

Penis of bull in a powerful brew!

Spices and herbs in traditional portion,

Taste it and test it for what it will do!

Mama and some girls emerge from brothel The girls include the “Hiow” (sexy) prostitute, the “Classy” prostitute, and the “flirtatious” one. Mama sings: (This song is same melody as Bulls balls brew)

MAMA

Come in and visit these beautiful maidens

Waiting with warmest of welcomes for you!

Enter this palace of plentiful pleasure,

Try what these amiable ladies can do!

So divine and so delicious
They will gratify your wishes
They will tease you and they'll please you
They'll caress you and impress you
They'll excite you and delight you
In our Happy – House of Joy!
(coolies enter the brothel. .)

MAMA Here we have in Singapore
a hundred thousand single men
I import the quality goods
to meet their natural yen.
Hundred thousand men without women,
Believe me there's a demand.
It's a solid consumer base.

KONG

Look at the customers stand --
in line!

MAMA

It's fine --
I need to travel the region
to source for new recruits

I pay for insurance protection
and help with labour disputes.

My prices are extremely basic,
with due market regard:

Of course they still want it cheaper:

KONG

Every coolie has a hard ---
luck tale!

MAMA

No sale!

In this line of work

Good profits can be made

I'm a businesswoman

in the Flesh Trade!

Scene 2a

Macao Street.

Two coolies come along: young Hock, and the older Leong (Leong is a likeable, genial man; he wears a jaunty Western-style straw hat which becomes his symbol.)

LEONG Now I tell you Hock my boy, how I got my success today!

HOCK Older brother Leong – I will listen what you say!

LEONG Listen to me, the things I know --

I left China ten years ago –

I worked like hell I spent my sweat,

I saved up all the cash I'd get,

No drinking, dice or women –

HOCK – None?

LEONG – Well a man's got to have *some* fun –

At last I could buy a rickshaw of my own!

So I don't have to pay rental charges for a bloody loan!

And so I could save up more and more –

And soon I will be going home from Singapore!

HOCK When are you going?

LEONG Soon! All my savings, already sent back,

Safe with my old father and mother. Now they will never lack ...

Just a bit more work to put money in my pocket,

then I'm boarding the steamship packet ..

Duet, Leong and Hock: "Going back as a wealthy man" Leong says soon he will return to China with money in his pocket. He will buy a little farm with a willow tree by the river, and look after his parents, find a wife and raise a family, this is success, this is what he has struggled to achieve.

Scene 3

Inside the brothel: Mama prepares Ah Lin to start work.

MAMA In the flesh trade, old stock depreciates.

Only new goods, the clients appreciate!

You May Lee go sweep the floor,

'cos men don't ask for you any more

You Ah Lin go comb your hair,

Tonight my dear, you start work here.

MAY LEE Welcome little girl to the world of three minute love!

Of men who use you to serve their need,

Take your body for all their greed –

AH LIN Will they be kind? Will they be good to me?

MAY LEE They won't ask you how you feel,

They won't care if your smile is real.

You are only a piece of meat

To relieve their rage and heat.

AH LIN Will there be someone – who will care for me?

MAY LEE These are men who only care

To get the pleasure their money buys

They only thrust – to spend their lust –

And never look into your eyes!

MAMA First lesson every girl should know,

when working in this line

Never forget that time is money,

don't let the men waste time.

Maybe he's lonely and wants to talk but

talking doesn't pay,

so shake his stick and bring him off quick

and send him on his way.

Tell 'em they're great and say they're strong

But don't let them take all night

Quick turnover is what you want,

So just learn to expedite.

MAY LEE Welcome little girl to the world of three minute love ---

Of men who use you to serve their need

take your body for all their greed

AH LIN Somewhere there's somebody who will really care,

I do believe it's true – e

Somehow I will meet him, make a life to share,

Such a love can be, I do believe.

(in counterpoint) Some day he'll find me and take me far away

Somewhere we will be together,

love to lift the darkness,

love to fill each day,

I believe that love will last for ever --

Some day we will find each other and we'll know it's true

Some day we will be together --

Love to light a lifetime,

love to see us through,

I believe that love will last for ever.

MAY LEE (in counterpoint) Welcome little girl to this life of pain

You will never find your innocence again

Youth and hope and beauty, you will lose them all,

In the world of three minute love!

Men will never care For the way you feel

They will never see if your smile is real

All they want is just to use you for their lust

They take you for their need and never know your name

in the world of three minute love

MAMA First thing every girl should know, when working in this line,

Never forget that time is money, don't let the men be wasting time.

Quickly attend them no delaying,

this is a business, no time to dally, no beforehand playing.
Maybe he's lonely wanting chatter, Talk doesn't pay you, actions matter
Send him off fast in spite of pleading, Quick turnover is what we're needing
Tell him he's great and praise his vigour, say that you never saw someone bigger,
Don't play around and don't be funny, service him quick and take his money,
This is the way that profit is made, In the flesh trade!

Scene 4

Macao Street

Lim Boon Keng is walking around talking to people. Old coolie Mok approaches him, in gesture indicates he has pain in heart ...Lim takes his pulse.

LIM

The rickshaw work – is too much for you –
Try to find some other work to do.

(May Li, with Ah Lin trailing her, approaches Lim, indicating she has fever and perhaps lymph node swellings. Lim examines May Li's eyes and mouth. This incident establishes a connection between Lim and Ah Lin.)) You really should come in my clinic you know –

For you, I'll set the fees quite low.

(He writes in a notebook: and speaks to the audience)

Those who govern us – ask me to make report,

As though the dismal facts must still be sought –
I know the suffering in the street, the death and the disease –
I know what action should be made, to bring the people ease.
When will they act? Will anything be done?
Will greed and ignorance – be overcome?

Will the world ever change? Will things ever improve?
For these poor and oppressed – will things ever move?

(Street people sing)

1. RAIN SONG (PART 1)

So hot, so weary the day, Our hope is small
But listen to thunder rolling -- A promise – that rain will fall.

LIM

Don't ever give up hoping, don't despair –
wait for the falling torrents to refresh the air

CHORUS Hear the rain hear the rain

how it comes –

it comes –

VOICES

Leaves are drooping, grass – turns brown—

listen for the thunder, wait till rain comes down.

Rain to wash the desert, soak the barren sand

Swell the streams and rivers, flood across the land.

CHORUS

Hear the rain Hear the rain

How it comes how it drums

On the trees On the seas

On the grass On the street

On the dust At our feet

Hear the rain!

Hear it rushing hear it gushing

Hear it roar hear it pour

Hear it grow hear it flow

Hear the rain!

LIM

Rain to renew the weary,, Relief for the weary who call

In the time of the changing seasons, believe the rain will fall.

REPEAT CHORUS:

Hear the rain Hear the rain

How it comes how it drums

On the trees On the seas

On the grass On the street

On the dust At our feet

Hear the rain!

Hear it rushing hear it gushing

Hear it roar hear it pour

Hear it grow hear it flow

Hear the rain!

(All exit)

Scene 5

Evening in Macao Street. The area in front of Blue Willow House is like a public arena – Mama has set out some chairs there; Kong hawks his soup.

KONG

Hot hot soup here!

Best of bull here!

Come all and sample this time-honoured potion,

Penis of bull in a powerful brew!

Spices and herbs in traditional portion,

Taste it and test it for what it will do!

There's cinnamon and cardamom

And sesame to help along

And aniseed to do the deed

In the bulls' balls brew!

MAMA (*Extolling her girls*)

So divine and so delicious

They will gratify your wishes

They will tease you and they'll please you

They'll caress you and impress you

They'll excite you and delight you

In our Happy – House of Joy!

Coolies gather: including the drunk and the deranged one. Hock and Leong are there. Leong carries a big stick which is part of his rickshaw equipment. The girls work the crowd. The hiau one solicits Hock, who is a bit scared. The flirtatious one tackles the deranged coolie, who sullenly growls at her "Devil!"

The boss of the secret Society, the Tua Tow, comes along; a benevolent old patriarch, with his followers: notably, his bodyguard, a Strongman carrying some weapon – sword or halberd. As Tua Tow seats himself: Strongman does a brief martial arts demo before taking up his post as a guard behind Tua Tow. (Note: Strongman does not have much personality ... not arrogant or swaggering, just an employee... becos he is not a main player in the story.)

MAMA

Tua Tow! Honored to see you! What can I provide for you – a girl, a pipe?

TUA TOW: Tea my dear. What entertainment tonight?

MAMA New goods to be put up for sale -- *(she beckons Ah Lin forward. Tua Tow inspects her and nods kindly. Nearby, Hock is totally struck.)*

HOCK Who is this girl? What's her name?

LEONG Hey boy ..

HOCK Who is this girl, who is she --

LEONG Are you dreaming?

HOCK Something in her -- touches me – *(He gazes at Ah Lin.)*

A COOLIE Tua Tow! Tua Tow! *(three coolies drag in a fourth one – who was caught stealing)* This is a thief! He stole from his room mates! We caught him in the act!

THIEF *(blubbing)* Mercy Tua tow mercy mercy ...

COOLIE The punishment for theft – to cut off his hand! *(Thief yells and howls)*

TUA TOW Without two hands he cannot work. I say – allow him something left. *(He instructs his bodyguard)* Cut off – two fingers from his hand, that's his punishment for theft.

(The thief cries Thank You in gratitude. The three guys drag him away – followed by Strongman, who is obviously going to execute the punishment.)

(Coolies carouse. Girls seek business. May Li approaches some coolies, but they scorn her, and she feels humiliated.

Strongman comes back, cleaning the edge of his weapon. The drunk guy bumps into him.)

DRUNK Hey! Who you think you are? You so big ah? *(He staggers around and grabs Leong's stick. He takes the stick and goes to challenge Strongman. There is a bit of a duel, stick vs weapon, in which the weapon obviously has a major advantage.)*

LEONG Hey brother! *(He intervenes to calm the drunk down, take the stick away from him, get him seated. This episode shows that Leong is a popular guy and a community leader.)*

A rich merchant arrives, an honoured patron of the brothel. Mama rushes out to greet him, seats him with a drink..)

MAMA Towkay Tan! Look what I have,

A special item I've kept for you.

(summons Ah Lin; Hock reacts)

This is Ah Lin -- She is fresh, she is young.

She is completely new.

TOWKAY TAN

She's a virgin huh?

MAMA

I Guarantee your delight.

What will you pay for her first night?

(TAN examines Ah Lin. She is terrified. Hock is frantic, grabs at Leong as though to ask him to do something)

HOCK They are putting her up for sale!

LEONG She should get a hefty price --

HOCK She'll be in that old man's hands --

LEONG I agree he ain't so nice --

Hey little brother! What's your plan?

You'd like to be her very first man!

HOCK I want to be with her, I want to protect her --

LEONG I can see your heart is set on her --

HOCK I would give anything the woman is thinking of!

I want Ah Lin -- to be my love!!!

(Leong nods and talks to Ah Hock confidentially. Meanwhile Towkay Tan has finished examining Ah Lin)

TAN I am satisfied, I'll make you my offer ..

MAMA I know you will name a price that's right –

TAN (*a dirty old man*) Fifty dollars for the girl's virginity,

For her first exquisite night –

HOCK One hundred! (*All stare at him*) I will give a hundred dollars –

I will pay what it takes to win --

One hundred dollars for Ah Lin!

(*MAMA looks questioningly at TAN, who puffs out his lips and shakes his head*)

TAN No girl is worth that much!

MAMA Do you have the money? It's cash up front, young man ..

HOCK I will get it – I know I can –

MAMA (*privately*) Look at him. I have to scoff.

(*brusquely, to Ah Hock*) Back by midnight or the deal is off.

(*She takes Ah Lin away. Ah Lin asks timidly*)

AH LIN: Who is that young man – I'd like to know –

MAMA Just a coolie called Ah Hock – I doubt if he’s got the dough!

(Mama takes Ah Lin into the brothel; the other girls and their clients have also gone in. Two or three coolies squat in a corner throwing dice, Tua Tow watches their game. Leong approaches Kong, leading Hock.)

KONG Hot hot soup here! Best of bull!

LEONG Old man – a favour we ask you to do!

KONG I don’t do favours for louts like you!

LEONG Business then. One hundred dollar’s loan;

I’ll put up the rickshaw that I own.

KONG Not worth it!.

HOCK I promise you that I will pay!

Somehow I will find a way!

LEONG I’ll guarantee the loan be paid.

You know my name. You know my trade.

(KONG nods thoughtfully, accepting this.)

KONG One month, two dollars is interest rate. *(LEONG nods).*

We get the Boss to validate.

(Kong hobbles to Tua Tow and explains the deal to him, while Hock, overjoyed, thanks Leong)

HOCK You'll get me the money – it's all coming right –

I will hold Ah Lin tonight!

(The Tua Tow acts like a magistrate, to witness the deal, and Strongman will be the enforcer if necessary. Kong explains the conditions, holding a bag of money.)

KONG One hundred dollars loaned by me

To coolie Hock. Leong stands guarantee.

(Tua Tow nods. Leong and Kong shake on the deal.)

KONG Two dollars interest, on the thirtieth day. *(they shake again.)*

And one thing more. *(Turns suddenly to Hock)* What if you don't pay?

HOCK I'll pay! I promise!

KONG And your promise is worth a lot ...

HOCK I'll pledge everything I've got!

KONG Yes you've promised, we all have heard,

Scene 6b

In the deserted parlour of Blue Willow House – May Li cleans up the place and sings her despair.

THROWN AWAY

Look at me I used to be
the highest paid of any grade
of working girls in Singapore
a courtesan for any man
who'd pay my fee to lie with me
you should have seen them line up at my door!
But all too fast the years have passed
and now my room's an empty tomb
for no one wants to take an aging whore!

Here's how it is when you're growing old
with no cash to save and no love to hold
no one cares that I once was young
nobody bothers what I've become
like flowers that fade as their freshness is lost
at the end of the day they are thrown in the dust
look at the way that my life has been

what was it for, what does it mean

Ah -- I was bought -- and sold for pay--
used up -- and worn out -- and thrown away!

Now I wait and curse my fate,
no one will share my long despair
or hear my cry
pain is all that lies ahead
and men's abuse -- until I'm dead!

Ah -- I was bought -- and sold for pay--
used up -- and worn out -- and thrown away!

Scene 6c

Back in the "Bridal Suite," Hock and Ah Lin are very happy, And pledge eternal love in some blissful future.

Scene 7

Macao Street early, the next evening. The prostitutes come out of Blue Willow House laughing and happy, to set up a small altar outside. Chairs are placed to make a small audience area.

Seven Stars

GIRLS SING

Cowherd once defied the Gods, all for the love of the Weaving Maid:

They were parted by river between, painful penalty that they paid.

Still their love is so deep and true, even though they are far apart:

Constant lovers eternally, faithful forever within the heart.

Seven stars once shone so fair,

Only six now twinkle there!

Seven sisters who used to play,

Weep for the one who went away!

Seven stars in sky of blue,

Help all lovers to be true!

Seven sisters clean and pure,

Help to make all love endure!

AH LIN You celebrate this festival too!

MAY LEE Every year this story's played --

AH LIN I used to celebrate at home --

MAY LEE The Cowherd and the spinning maid!

GIRLS SING

Merciful Heaven saw their plight, parted each side of the Milky Way:
Once in a year they may unite, to meet each other for just one day.
Birds fly up, the white and black, coming to help that couple's loss--
Wing to wingtip set in the sky, making a bridge for the lovers to cross.

MAY LEE (*teasing*) This is the prayer just meant for you!

AH LIN (*Blushing*) Girls pray for their lover to be true! (*She prays at the altar while girls sing*)
(*Tua tow and other guests seat themselves, watch girls singing and dancing.*)

GIRLS SING

Seven stars once shone so fair,
Only six now twinkle there!
Seven sisters who used to play,
Weep for the one who went away!
Seven stars in sky of blue,
Help all lovers to be true!
Seven sisters clean and pure,
Help to make all love endure!

Seven stars that shine above,
One of them left her home for love!
Seven sisters in the sky,
one was lost and we can't say why!

Seven stars that shine so bright,
kindly look on us tonight!
Seven sisters pure and fair,
Listen to the maiden's prayer!

(eating and drinking go on. Leong and Hock enter.)

HOCK *(euphoric)* I will work doubly hard – I'll break my back –
Very soon, I will pay the money back –

LEONG You can have my rickshaw when I go home --- pay me at a later date.

HOCK I will buy Ah Lin free! I'll save her from her fate!

(They sing chorus of ““Going back as a wealthy man” ” extolling what they will do with their money, Leong hopes to buy a farm with a willow tree by the river. They sit down to watch the entertainment.

KONG Hot soup here! Hot hot soup!

The deranged coolie staggers in—howling in reasonless rage, looks pathetic. Leong, being kind, pays for soup for him. He squats down next to Tua Tow's chair -- muttering and mumbling to himself.

BULLS' BALLS BREW

Kong

Hot hot soup here!

Best of bull here!

Come all and sample this time-honoured potion,

Penis of bull in a powerful brew!

Spices and herbs in traditional portion,

Taste it and test it for what it will do!

*There's cinnamon and cardamom

And sesame to help along

And aniseed to do the deed

In the bulls' balls brew!

To vitalize and energize,

To magnify and amplify,

To lengthen and to strengthen

Drink bull's balls brew!

(Let) this tonic aid you fornicate,

For paleness of your maleness

Or for limpness of your business

For sex to be such ecstasy

For vigour like Niagara

For lassitude of attitude

It's BIG BLACK BULL'S BALLS BREW.

*(repeat from *)*

Kong goes round to sell soup; Tua Tow has some, also Strongman the bodyguard, laying down his weapon to do so. Kong pesters the deranged coolie. The Deranged one suddenly erupts in rage. He howls and flings his soup bowl across the stage. He grabs Leong's stick and whacks Strongman, who was taken by surprise -- Strongman drops unconscious to the ground. Everyone is shocked. The Deranged one drops the stick and grabs the weapon and glares at the crowd (who for some reason, are not able to flee into the nearby houses. Maybe the arena was roped in and he is blocking the only exit.) What we are seeing is the classic mass-killer scenario – as the deranged one sees the crowd as devils, and brandishes his weapon.

DERANGED ONE Devils! Devils! Kill! Kill!

(Girls scream, attracting the mad one's glare; Leong warns them)

LEONG Keep still! Don't move!

The madman starts to stalk up on Tua Tow, about to kill him. Tua Tow in fear staggers towards Ah Lin, blunders into her, she screams. The madman starts to hunt her instead. She runs across the stage to Hock who wants to protect her. Now the madman is advancing on her and Hock, while Hock bravely and vainly holds up a small piece of wood.)

LEONG Hey! Hey!

He leaps forward with his big stick and duels the madman. Now it's stick against weapon, an unequal contest which we have seen before. Eventually Leong kills the Madman – but is fatally wounded. People remove Madman's body ... and assist Strongman who regains consciousness; Tua Tow sits on his chair, much shaken, etc etc.,

HOCK Brother! Don't die!

LEONG

Listen to me, the things I know –

Listen to me before I go –

My parents are well provided for—

All that I have in Singapore,

Little brother, I leave to you.

HOCK Don't die!

LEONG No more things to do –

Brother, always remember me --

Send my ashes home— leave me beneath the willow tree.

(dies. Hock stoops mournfully over the body. Kong comes and lays a hand on his shoulder.)

KONG

Remember the deal – the bargain was sealed –

Pay on demand, or your life must yield!

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Scene 8

Macao Street: Leong's wake. His straw hat is displayed. There are white lanterns, a coffin, banners, paper effigies for burning including effigy of coolie with rickshaw. (please note that realistic portrayal of a funeral may be regarded as very inauspicious; better suggest rather than show details; photo images may be better.) There is the drone of Taoist chanting. Everybody is there including Hock, Ah Lin, Tua Tow, Kong, May Lee

The coolies sing: **The Wheel must turn** (same tune as Run Run Run but darker, loaded with sorrow instead of rage)

COOLIES

Who want to die like der ricksha puller

Nobody care for der bloody fool ah

after you die den nobody cry

Just one more coolie gone!

Whole life long got to run run run

Then again gotta be reborn

Run run run till the dying date

Then born again for another fate

No more rest for the ricksha puller

Still must run and run for ever

Wheel still turning and fire burning

Still gotta run run run

Run gotta run for – ever
Time we can rest will be never
Where got peace for der ricksha coolie
Still gotta run and run

1ST COOLIE

Will I be born as a rat or a snake –
Goddess of mercy give me a break

2ND COOLIE

I not worried about rebirth –
I've had my hell on earth!

MAY LING (*slow*)

(She is slowly dropping paper money into the brazier)

Our life burns up in a short bright flame
And turns to ash that is cold and gray
(Screen image : effigy of a ricksha coolie burning to ashes)
Rain falls down on the dust and ash
And it all is washed away.

ALL

Run gotta run for – ever
Time we can rest will be never

All eternity, ricksha coolie

Still gotta run run run –

The Wheel keeps turning and the fire keeps burning

Still gotta run run run!

(KONG confronts Hock: Tua Tow is nearby. After the shock he had, Tua Tow is frailer, less decisive than before)

KONG Are you going to pay the debt? Have you got the money yet?

HOCK I'll get it soon! Leong left to me all that he owned –

KONG That beat up rickshaw's not worth a bone!

HOCK Don't see what it is, see what it can do!

I'll use it to earn the money for you!

Look how I'll run, look how I'll pull –

Soon the debt will be paid in full!

(Hock has become a man and Tua Tow is quite impressed with him, but KONG is intransigent)

KONG This was agreed, this was the deal,

Pay on demand, or your life must yield!

Give me the cash by tomorrow night –

Or you have to die! This is my right!

(Exchange of glances shows that Tua Tow reluctantly agrees with this, and it is Strongman who will if necessary be the executioner.)

TUA TOW This is your right if you insist. But can you give the boy a chance?

KONG Don't ask me to change my stance ...

Tua tow rises and hobbles out, everybody follows him except Kong, Ah Lin, May Lee..

KONG is left alone and sings a song: "I hate him because"

*Because he comes from China to take the jobs of local people – because he is strong and I am weak –
because he is young and I am old!*

May Lee and Ah Lin have been overhearing this song.

AH LIN *(frantic)* My man, my lover, will have to die --

MAY LEE Pity, he seems like a nice young guy –

AH LIN Is there no justice to be seen –

MAY LEE The old man will not intervene –

But perhaps --

AH LIN What?

MAY LEE There's that doctor, he's kind and wise,

You could ask him for advice.

AH LIN Would he help me?

MAY LEE I think he would –

AH LIN he doesn't know me –

MAY LEE His heart's so good –

a friend to everyone – a brother to all men –

He will help you – Dr Lim Boon Keng!

AH LIN (*frightened*) But where to find him, where to go,

how to reach him, I don't know!

MAY LEE You must go to his home –

AH LIN I've never been beyond this street,

I'm so afraid of the people I'll meet --

So many new faces, so many strangers,

In this city full of dangers ..

MAY LEE Try to be brave --

AH LIN I am so frightened, this is so hard --

MAY LEE Go quickly while she is not on guard --

AH LIN So that Hock won't have to die --

To find some hope for my love and I --

I have to try -- I will try!

(very scared, she scuttles across the street and finds a rickshaw. She whispers to the coolie in a tiny voice -- he knows LBK's address.)

COOLIE Ah -- Dr Lim Boon Keng! House or office? House! *(off he goes with Ah Lin.)*

Scene 9

(The Reception hall of Lim Boon Keng's home. Lights and music come from the next room, where a dinner party seems to be in progress: Waltz music, and voices sing off-stage:)

VOICES

Nonya and baba, nonya and Baba,

Bababa bababa bababa bababa

Bababa Baba and Nonya ...

(A servant conducts the terrified Ah Lin into the hall, seats her on a chair at the side, and goes to call the Master. From the other room, sounds of laughing and “yam- seng!” Lim Boon Keng enters the hall, glancing back towards the dining room that he just left)

Look at these gentlemen polished and proud,

Passing their days in comfort and ease

Look at these ladies, lovely and fine,

Doing each day only just as they please.

What does it mean at the end of the day,

That Nonyas and Babas were smiling away –

Is your goal for each day to be happy and blithe?

Is there more to living, than enjoying your life?

(He sees Ah Lin who bows deeply to him)

LIM *(concerned)*

What is the matter with your health?

You said – it’s a matter of life or death!

AH LIN – Not me – it is my friend –

help him or his life will end!

In Macau Street – please will you come –

I will tell you the tale as we go along --

LIM And yourself?

AH LIN I came from Blue Willow House, I've escaped for just an hour,

She will beat me if she knows, I am in her power..

LIM No! You are free of her, in Singapore --

She has no hold on you, according to the law.

AH LIN Please come, please come and try,

To give a chance for my love and I --

So that he won't have to die!

(Lim and Ah Lin go off.)

Scene 10

Macao Street, near night. Leong's funeral materials all cleared away. Only his straw hat is still hanging on a nail on the wall.

Mama ejects May Lee from the brothel. Mok the old coolie asks May Lee to be his woman. May Lee accepts. May Lee and old Mok have a lighthearted song which says she is the best he can afford, he is **the best she can get**. They exit.

Tua Tow, Hock and Kong enter.

KONG Time is passing: soon it's midnight.

I claim his life, this is my right!

You were the witness, you are the one

Who's got to see that justice is done!

(Tua Tow pleads ineffectually)

TUA TOW I ask you again – you should forgive --

Give him time to pay -- let him live--

KONG I will claim what is mine –

I will have his life – it is nearly time!

(Lim and Ah Lin enter ... by motor car! Everyone comes out to the street to stare. LIM gets down and respectfully greets Tua Tow.)

LIM Sir, I believe there's a difficult case before you.

Although I am young – would you let me express my view?

TUA TOW Dr Lim I have heard of your good sense.

What is the judgement that you would dispense?

KONG He owes me a hundred, if he don't pay

He has to die, there is no other way!

(Tua Tow briefly explains to Lim who nods.)

LIM I understand from what you tell,

If Leong hadn't died then all would be well.

He underwrote the original loan,

It all depended on what he would own.

HOCK That is true.

LIM And what he owned, he left to you.

KONG One beatup rickshaw car, won't get you very far!

LIM How did he die? I need to know more –

(appeals to all, starting with Tua Tow) Can you tell me what you saw?

VOICES He fought the killer.

He was so brave.

TUA TOW He rushed forward – my life was saved.

LIM He had courage!

VOICES He was heading for home.

He had a good life.

He gave himself as a sacrifice.

LIM He was noble –

VOICES He had a heart that cared for others –

He was good –

He was kind –

LIM This is what Leong has left behind!

Courage and strength and a caring heart,

These remain when he had to depart.

This is his legacy left on earth –

Who will say what they are worth?

(All are much impressed. Lim grabs Leong's straw hat and passes it to Tua Tow. He continues in an ironic and challenging way, asking people to do the absurd task of assigning cash value)

Could you try to set a price,

For his noble sacrifice?

What do you think?

Maybe you could try to say.

For his courage that saved your life –

What would you pay?

(Tua Tow thoughtfully puts money in the hat.)

LIM (asks the crowd)

And for his deeds of kindness, sprung from his noble heart –

What would you give for those? Will you make a start?

(Tua Tow gestures and Strongman takes the hat round the crowd. Hock grieves.)

HOCK He was my friend – now he’s lost –

He has gone to the ashes and dust!

(Ah Lin comforts him. Mama goes to pull Ah Lin away from Hock, back to the brothel, giving her a vicious shake.)

MAMA Where have you been, you wicked girl,

Running around and seeing the world?

Think that you can play and shirk –

Now I will make you work!

LIM

Madam, you should know the law,

protecting women in Singapore.

You cannot force a girl like this,

to work for you against her wish.

MAMA All my girls are volunteers!

LIM (to Ah Lin) Do you want to work in the brothel?

AH LIN No!

LIM Then by the law, you are free to go.

(Ah Lin is incredulous, then runs back to Hock: Mama fumes impotently.)

MAMA I will go at once to China,
Bring back girls who are younger and finer,
There are many, woman and maid,
Willing to work in the Flesh Trade!

(Strongman brings the hat back – Tua Tow counts the money collected)I

TUA TOW More than a hundred dollars here –
The loan is paid, the debt is clear.
(He hands money to Kong and the balance to Hock)
Take the money. Hear the warning:
No more evil plot be spawning.

(Kong spits—Strongman threatens him – he lurches out.

Hock, looking at Leong's hat, is still very sad.)

HOCK He's gone -- as though he'd never been –
Why did he die, What does it mean?

AH LIN Our children will remember him –

HOCK Yet one day,

We and our children – will pass away!

VOICES: Look out! It's going to rain!

LIM Yes all of us are passing, like leaves that fall in storm –
 When rain comes like blessing, new life will be born.
 Our toils and our struggles are not in vain.
 We will be remembered, in the time of rain.

CHORUS Hear the rain, hear the rain,
 how it comes, it comes –

LIM Our spirits will linger, on the streets where we have been;
 The footsteps we leave, in the future shall be seen.
 In the songs of the city Our joy and sorrow remain.
 You will hear our voices, in the sound of the falling rain.

CHORUS Hear the rain Hear the rain
 Bringing life bringing hope
 Hear the rain!
 How it comes how it drums
 On the trees On the seas
 On the grass On the street
 Hear it fall, hear it beat

On the dust At our feet

Hear it rushing hear it gushing

Hear it roar hear it pour

Hear it flow hear it grow

Hear the rain!

THE END

BABA BOON KENG (THE LEGEND OF DR LIM BOON KENG)

An Outline of the Musical

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Characters:

Lim Boon Keng (BK) age 27

Song Ong Siang (OS) age 26

Margaret BK's first wife, age 24

The Singer – a contemporary singer

Ensemble of Babas and Nonyas.

Chorus of primary school girls from SCGS.

Other characters are played ad hoc by members of the ensemble, including: Grace, BK's 2nd wife, Wong Nai Seong, Kang Yu Wei, Sun Yat Sen, British Governor. Baba Tan Boo Liat (Tan) , Baba Seow Poh Leng (Seow)

Prologue SCGS GIRLS AND TEACHER ASK BoonKeng “who are you, what did you do, your life is a mystery, what is your history. “ Some girls got anecdotes. One girl says he met her grand mother’s grandmother

Young boon Keng just back from UK meets a child who is foot bound and mentally crippled. In reply to the GIRLS He sings of his desire to help the hurt, end their suffering, save their lives.

Scene One

The year is 1896. The ensemble consists of Babas, Nonyas... and two brilliant young friends, Lim Boon Keng age 27 and Song Ong Siang age 26.

The Nonyas are segregated from the men folk; traditional minded, ignorant of everything except cooking and sewing. (In the course of the musical they get emancipated, progressively updating their clothing and behaviour.)

Ensemble sings: *This is where we belong,*” the theme song for the Peranakans – a melody incorporating all their joie de vivre and zest for life; modelled on traditional faves like *Rasa Sayang*, it will soon have the audience singing along.

BK and Ong Siang challenge the Babas to move into the new 20th Century ahead. BK says “I diagnose” that the Babas “ YouBabas – you people who were born here – you think you are more sophisticated than those emigrants now coming from Cina. They are hungry They are go-getters. YOU are in danger of losing out, of falling by the wayside. And losing out to the challenge of China. You have been protected by a kind and

paternalistic govt -- you are complacent. You are sleepy.” This is a piece of strong and fiery prose oratory whose vocab and sentiments exactly mirror current Singapore situation.

(Boon Keng is brash and abrasive, an angry young man. .. he gets away with flagrant disrespect because the Babas respect his learning and position, and shake their heads indulgently over his excesses. Ong Siang is a gentler character; unfailingly loyal to BK, he keeps trying to soften and mitigate BK's harsh criticism.)

Afterwards, BK and Song are with their friends Tan and Seow. Bk repeats that nowhere on earth can be found anyone so ignorant as the Nonyas of the Straits Chinese.

Tan teases him - Alamak Boon Keng, ini macham you won't be able to marry any of our local girls!

BK: Married! I'm too busy to get married!

Tan: You're twenty seven, still single. We'll have to find a wife for you.

Seow: Maybe you'll have to marry orang puteh lah!

Song: Or marry a girl from China!

BK (Laughing as he goes out with his friends) I don't want to marry a China girl!

Sc Two:

Margaret and her father Wong Nai Seong. Margaret is dressed in the most modern western fashion of 1898. Her father is a patriarchal Methodist pastor.

Margaret: I don't want to marry a Baba!

I won't be a Nonya, do you hear?

I want more freedom, father dear!

Wong: Margaret, listen to me -

Margaret: I don't want to marry a Baba!

To spend my days at the back of the house,

Stitching and sewing to make the time pass,

Doing no more than gossip and cook,

And Never ever reading a book!

Wong: Margaret - no one can make you stop reading -

Margaret: I don't want to be somebody's wife!

I want to - have a life!

Wong: Listen to me, girl. Dr Lim Boon Keng is no ordinary Baba. His people have chosen him as their representative, though he is only 27. He is a brilliant scholar --

Marg. Does he speak Chinese? -

Wong - only local dialects -

Margaret: Is he literate?

Wong - only in the language of Shakespeare -

Margaret: (determinedly) I shall have nothing to say to him.

Wong: Perhaps you could teach him Chinese.

Margaret: (laughs) What Baba would ever let his wife teach him anything! They consider women an inferior class of being.

Wong: This Lim Boon Keng is different. Margaret – Nothing has been fixed. Nothing has been decided. I am going to meet him, on my own important business. Just come with me, just come and talk to him.

(Wong, with Margaret trailing behind, goes to meet BK.)

Wong: (Foochow dialect) Dr Lim Boon Keng. I am Pastor Wong Nai Seong, of the Methodist Church in Foochow.

BK: (Foochow dialect) Reverend Wong.

Wong: Dr Lim – I seek your help, to find a refuge for my people.

BK : A refuge?

Wong: I am a follower of the great teacher in China – Kang Yu Wei.

BK. Kang Yu Wei! The tutor to the young Emperor! The teacher of reform!

Wong: You know of Kang Yu Wei -- then you know the Dowager Empress hates him and all his teachings. (Music reference –“ Beware the Dragon Lady.”) I fear she may threaten my poor people of Foochow. I want to find a place where we can flee, if we are persecuted, somewhere we can make a new home.

BK How can I help you?

Wong Help me meet the land owners in Borneo and Sarawak, so that I can try to find suitable land.

BK I will give you letters of introduction. I will help you all I can.

Wong. God Bless you Dr Lim! I have heard that you have a great heart – you are always ready to help others. I will sail for Borneo. While I am gone – my daughter will stay in Singapore. (introduces Marg to BK) This is Margaret.

(Marg curtsies stiffly. Bk is embarrassed. Wong departs leaving them together.

BK says that his life is busy... he has no time for the distractions of wife and family.

Marg I want to do more with my life – than just being somebody’s wife!

BK If I should marry – I would want a wife who would share my work and share my dreams.

BK confides to Margaret the passion of his life is to spread education. Hr believes learning can change the world. . She says, Your name means “Celebrate learning”. (He may not have realised this.) His friend Ong Siang shares this dream too. The dream of revolution! Yes, it’s revolution! not through the gun, like that madman Sun Yat Sen. By teaching the adults, educating the children. We lecture, we write. We raise funds to build schools, colleges. Universities. That’s how we can change the world.

Margaret catches fire and enthusiastically agrees. BK wishes more Nonyas were like her, Margaret says the solution is to have a school for girls.

They agree that “when we are married” they will work together to change the world. bk will be the action man she will be the inspiration. They walk beside the sea at sunset, seeing an eagle soaring over the waves, and pledge their love.

*There’s an eagle, soaring high over the wave –
There’s the evening star, above the sunset fire..
Be an eagle for me, be my bright star shining.
Conquer the distances, light up the darkness,
For ever, for ever,
Blaze against the night ..*

*Darkness gathers upon the hills,
Storm threatens the sea.
Spread your wings and ride on the gale,
Shine brighter as the night comes down.
Be my eagle, be my bright star.
Night and darkness shall not defeat us,
The widest ocean will not dismay.*

*I’ll be beside you, For ever, for ever ...
Be my eagle -- be my bright star.””*

Scene 4 Chorus of Little Nonyas, led by a Matriarch, sings about their lives, in a “patter” song that touches on the details of cooking and sewing – the commonly perceived idea of what makes up “nonya culture.” It also shows how circumscribed and unliberated they are.

The Babas enter; the SCA quartet (Lim, Ong, Seow, Tan) propose the idea of a girls’ school. BK says “My wife will help to teach Chinese.”. Margaret tries to sell the idea to the Nonyas while the young men address the Babas. The school will be very modern, including “exercise for the girls” and sound moral character, and learning of Chinese as well as English. The Nonyas and Babas react with horror.

Little girls’ chorus enters – the first pupils of the school. There is an interesting song “SCGS”, in which the little girls chorus sings treble, the four young men sing tenor and bass, Margaret sings soprano – and the Nonyas and Babas grumble and protest in the background.

Scene Five

Margaret and BK have a young family.

BK sings of the tumultuous times they live in.

“The world is changing – thrones and kingdoms fall.
And blood and terror—rule over all.”

Marg says that her father sends word that his teacher Kang Yu Wei is fleeing from China with the Dowager Empress’ men after him. He will pass through Singapore.

Margh and BK conceal him and help him evade the assassins. Kang says a young family like theirs is the fundamental unit of society; Confucius teaches that love is the foundation of all relationships; Kang: "Love is the rule, love is the way, to guide us through each day." Marg says her father says so too.

Gazing into each other's eyes Marg and BK sing:

"Love between the child and parents,
love between husband and wife –
This gives meaning to our life!"

Sc Six: After 9 years of marriage, She is discovered to have a fatal illness – (could be TB, which never seems to get in the way of great arias from heroines of famous operas). They sing a heart-broken parting song, "Will you remember?" in which BK says he will always remember Marg; Marg, a firm Christian, says she will remember BK from beyond the grave but he as an unbeliever has no comfort in this. She dies, after telling Bk he must marry again.

When the passions we knew have passed away
When no mem'ry remains
This will still be true --
That I loved you.

GIRLS So Sad, so sad! - Dr Lim- Is that why you turned away from Singapore? We heard you wanted to be a China man.

ACT TWO

Ensemble sings "Babas AND Brits , blachan at the Ritz" , a jolly song about how they like being the King's Chinese.

Ong Siang expresses the values of freedom and liberty under British rule

-- BK is a true Baba and when he goes to London and stays at the Ritz he brings his sambal blachan.

BK is travelling a lot; OS tells him the school needs funds, the SCM Magazine is folding.

Sun Yat Sen comes to Singapore and rabble-rouses: **Sons of Han!**

*China! My beloved motherland!
You lie trampled beneath the foreigner's heel.
Our once-great nation is cast down low,
the **sons of Han** hang their heads in shame.*

*Awaken! Children of the yellow emperor!
It is time, it is time
To throw off the shackles of the past,
To re-shape the world to a new beginning!*

BK shakes hands with him. Screen shows image of famous oil painting of this scene. Local people see BK as a revolutionary like Sun; the British think he is a traitor.

Flash on screen: announcement from Brit Governor that the loyalty of those who work for overseas is suspect. OS warns BK . OS sings a touching song- “ **I’m losing a friend** – the boy I used to know, is going away.”

BK’s stance: we are British subjects, we are Chinese too. We can be cosmopolitan, transcending local loyalties .

Ensemble chants “**Boon Keng – traitor.**” -- sounds like Chinese big drum and cymbals – “Boon Keng Boon Keng, he is a traitor, Boon Keng Boon Keng, infiltrator” etc

Scene 2

BK tells OS that he is pushing the dream that the updated teachings of Confucius are a foundation for morality for all Chinese in the modern age. Flashback, Kang Yu Wei visits school and looks on approvingly while Marg teaches the little girls to sing “**Love is the Way.**” The chorus is a simple classroom chant, “Love for Father, love for mother, love for sister, love for brother..” BK, Marg and Kang sing a richer harmony version of “love is the rule, love is the way, to guide us through each day.

Scene 3

1911 - China empire falls: “**Empires fall.**”

Siang and Boon Keng have dinner together and in the drinking toast, show off their linguistic abilities. Boon Keng proposes a ‘carpe- diem’ toast, Hokkien **Mei Si Boh Ku**. Nos habebit humus

In Europe there is a threat of war.

OS wants to start Straits Volunteers and movingly sings about “Fight for the right” i.e. in defending Empire they would fight for liberty, democracy, law, which translate to peaceful life for my mother; freedom to build a life. Ensemble of Peranakans

1914 Ensemble sings that War breaks out— “**Empires fall.**” BK starts speaking and collecting money for war causes; the Peranakans and women (now quite emancipated) sing– **Babas and Brits** and contribute money. “**Empires fall** –” the German empire falls . The Brit governor awards BK an OBE, to Ong Siang’s delight that BK is rehabilitated. But BK reveals that he is leaving the British Empire - going to live in Amoy, as President of Amoy University at Tan Kah Kee’s invitation.

The screen informs us that BK lived and worked in Xiamen as President of Amoy for 16 years.

ACT THREE

Interlude:

A woman of our times – crop-top and kebaya – -- sings the big “Kit Chan” song:: ***Tell me who you were.*** Screen shows contemporary images relating to BK – Boon Keng Road, Boon Keng MRT, oil painting in gallery, marble statue in Amoy, book in NLB.

Singer:

*Time -stands between us—
years -- like a flowing tide –
carry the past away.
What still remains – how can I know you –
tell me of your dreams,
tell me of your passion and your love,
tell me who you were.*

*Like a whisper on the wind,
Like a shadow that fades.
Like pages that fall into dust
We forget your name...*

*Tell me of your fierce heart,
Tell me of the voice calling aloud
Tell me of your fire—*

*Like the wind that always blows,
Like light and shadow on the sand
Like pages children will always remember
We speak your name.*

Sc 1 1930's: the Great Depression

Ensemble sings: The Day the Money Stopped . Tan and Seow lead the Babas in a lively number about the financial crisis: (prices dropped, shares flopped, earnings cropped, income chopped... etc)

BK's letters to Ong Siang briefly establishes that he has been struggling for 16 years in Amoy University – the staff and students despise him and reject his Confucian teachings.

On-screen picture of Tan Kah Kee. Voice over: Kah Kee tells Boon Keng that as his businesses have failed he is no longer able to support Amoy University and is handing it over to the Nationalist Govt. Screen shows pix of Boon Keng at age 65, white bearded etc. But the actor does not have to don a white beard.

BK Sixteen years in Amoy ... sixteen years of struggle.

He sings "Against the Tide." (This is the big torchy song that becomes one of the memorable moments of the show.)

*"I followed my Star, though no one believed me,
I sailed on my own, defying the tide-
Against the current, I kept on persisting,
I kept on resisting, I never gave in!
Through storm and through tempest, when all were against me,
though often defeated, but never dismayed –
I followed my star, my bright inspiration,
I never turned backward, I never gave in."*

Boon Keng 's wife Grace enters. Grace is very lady like. She would never nag, or criticise her husband outright. Having heard the news, She tells Boon Keng that there is no reason why he shouldn't continue to be President of Amoy University under the Nationalists.

BK I will have no more autonomy. I will just be their figurehead.

Grace: (*ignoring this*) They want you to be the President. You will keep your office, and your house on Kulangyu.

BK It has come to this – all my efforts have failed.

Grace: You should ask them to pay you a good salary. All these years you never took a cent from Tan Kah Kee. But now all your money in Singapore has gone. You are too good, you are too trusting -- you let those scoundrels steal your property. . We definitely must stay here. We have nothing left in Singapore.

BK Except our friends –

Grace: Our children are here. Our home is here. We shall stay here Boon Keng. You will still be the President. I will still be the President's wife. (*Exit*)

BK (*whispering to himself*) Margaret – you were my bright star. Margaret!

(*Margaret appears as a spirit – feisty as ever.*)

M: Boon Keng –

BK Margaret?

M: What's this about being a failure?>

BK Margaret –Am I dreaming?

Margaret says that she has seen his valiant struggle – beyond life and death, there is no victory or defeat -- only the courage to soar.

BK says he is old. Margaret says that to her he is the young eagle -- beyond life and death there is no age. She has come to encourage him

BK says passionately that he has longed for her, he tries to embrace her but he cannot touch her.

BK I cannot hold you – my arms are still empty --
Marg: "But I will be beside you, I will stay with you – "

Reprise earlier duet with added poignancy as they can look at each other but cannot touch.
*I'll be beside you, For ever, for ever ...
Be my eagle -- be my bright star."*

Margaret tells him, "Leave China, Boon Keng. Go back to Singapore, where we were young together."

Boon Keng says decisively "Ong Siang, I am coming home!"

Act Three Scene 2

Scene: SCGS Speech Day, 1937 - with ensemble of Babas, nonyas, teachers, little girls choir, and Ong Siang now quite old and frail. The Headmistress says they are gathered to celebrate that their beloved founded Song Ong Siang has been made a Knight of the British Empire for all his services to the Empire over the years. Screen shows the Award Ceremony, Ong Siang in full regalia, with the Governor. The little girls sing Babas and Brits/ **“Blachan at the Baltimore”** as a grandiose Anthem, somewhat incongruous with their childish voices. Boon Keng appears on the scene.

BK Hello old boy! So it's Sir Ong Siang Song is it?

OS My dear fellow! (They grip hands, pound shoulders.) Are you back for good this time?

BK Back for good, with family and all. So the school is flourishing I see.

The Headmistress takes BK and OS to inspect the little girls and their work. The Babas and Nonyas gossip.

Babas and Nonyas: Who's that? That old man? It's Lim Boon Keng. Dr Lim Boon Keng. Thought he was in China. Thought he was dead. Heard he hasn't got a cent. Heard he's got no house of his own. Someone is giving him charity. What can he do for the school? What can he do?

The parents go off with the little girls while BK and OS have a drink together.

BK To Sir Ong Siang!

OS To you! (*They drink. OS gets sentimental*) Boon Keng. You should have a knighthood too. You did so much for the Empire. It's a shame that they have forgotten you.

BK I've got my OBE ..

OS You deserve much more.

BK No matter. Drink up!

OS Skoal!

BK Meh si boh ku!

OS (shocked) What's that?

BK. We are getting old Ong Siang. these things do not matter so much.

He sings his drinking song “Meh si bo ku!”— self-mocking, ironic, defying fate. Ong Siang, at first hesitating, is convinced and joins in to a hearty chorus.

BK steps aside and sits down. Ong Siang slowly walks off. The lights dim – distant sounds of war are heard. The screen informs us, that Sir Ong Siang Song died in September 1941. Music “Losing a Friend.”

War sounds get louder --February 1942.

Ensemble sings the repeating motif, “The world is changing, empires fall”. The British anthem is overcome by music of chaos and destruction. The screen shows British flag replaced by the Japanese.

Act Three Scene 3

The Japanese occupation is symbolised by the little girls of SCGS forming a choir to sing a Japanese song, "Sakura". The courteous Japanese commandment (Shinosuki) asks the frail old Boon Keng him to once more be a leader of his people, form the Overseas Chinese Friendship Committee – show friendship by contributing \$50 K. if not, Shinosuki says that his family would suffer, the people of Singapore would suffer. Doesn't he want to save them? His wife Grace is dragged out and made to kneel under threat of death.

BK struggles with his conscience. He dialogues with unseen spirits. He says he does not fear death. To do this would betray all he had worked for. It would be easy to be a dead hero, a martyr. It will be far harder to play this unwanted role; to be a figurehead – what for? The spirits of Marg and Ong Siang appear and sing about "Love is the rule, love is the law, love for the fellow man". Boon Keng realises that at the cost of his reputation, he could perhaps lighten the load of his people – mitigate their burden. BK bows to Shinosuki and takes up the unwanted task. "For th love of my people"

We see Boon Keng working among the people to collect money -- and with the Japanese to protect the people.. The screen shows the famous photo of BK handing over a cheque for \$50K to the Japanese. The ensemble sings, "Boon Keng, traitor, Boon Keng collaborator." The old man holds his head high and goes about his task -- listening to the voices of his ghostly mentors, whose pure spiritual voices drown out the earthly criticism.

Return to "Sakura." The war proceeds, the ensemble repeats the motif, "The world is changing, empires fall". "Sakura" fades out. The screen shows the Japanese flag replaced by the British flag. The war has ended, the ensemble of Babas now see that the myth of white supremacy is ended, the "The World is changing, "

1949, Nationalists in China are replaced by Communists: "Empires fall."

Final scene: old Boon Keng totters into an assembly of Babas. Underscore of "Mei Si Boh Ku" suggests he is still feisty – still looking to serve his fellow man – as he proposes the formation of a new society, the China Society, for English educated Babas to learn more about the great new Chinese PPC now opening up. (the importance of this is that the China Society still flourishes at the present day and hopefully is a sponsor of the show.)

In BK's dreams he sees the young women of the future --Girls and teachers from our days (jeans, Ipods) – totally emancipated – reaching out to him.

Time -stands between us-- years -- like a flowing tide -- carry the past away.

What still remains – how can I know you – tell me of your dreams, tell me of your passion and your love, tell me who you were.

BK: Time – stands between us – carries the past away. Though all our hopes are washed away, the dream remains. Tell the story, of my life and passion – when everything we struggled for is gone – , the dream still lives, the dream lives on!

Some young Babas pick up the torch from him – Lim Yew Hock, Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Chok Tong. BK gives them his blessing as They talk about self-government and independence.

Finale by whole cast: **This is where we belong, reprise**

END

Some possible titles:

BOON KENG OF SINGAPORE

BABA BOON KENG

BLACHAN AT THE RITZ

LOVE IS THE WAY

LOVE IS MY HOMELAND

EAGLE OVER THE WAVES

ABOVE THE EVENING STAR

NEVER SAY DIE (from Mei See Boh Ku song, 'as long as we live, we will never say die')

LIM BOON KENG
Warrior of the Mind



Libretto by Stella Kon

Version 4

LIM BOON KENG Warrior of the Mind

MAIN CHARACTERS:

BOON KENG – from age 26 – 81

MARGARET – Boon Keng’s first wife. Age 24 – 34

GRACE – Boon Keng’s 2nd wife, age 24 – 74

YU LOO (age 22 – 65) Boon Keng’s sister

SONG ONG SIANG – (age 25 - 62) BOON KENG’s best friend, leader of the Straits Chinese Reformists

MARGO, Boon Keng’s grand daughter, Chinese-American, age 35 – from the year 1950.

Smaller parts

WONG NAI SIONG – (age 45?) Father of Margaret, pastor of Foochow Methodist Church, a leader of **Chinese Revolutionaries** in the Nanyang

KIM HOE - Yu Loo’s husband 28

BRITISH GOVERNOR – generic figure over 6 decades

YAMAMOTO (JAPANESE MILITARY OFFICER)

SHINOZAKI (JAPANESE MILITARY OFFICER)

BRITISH GENERAL

LU XUN, Chinese intellectual in Nationalist China

Various groups and factions

Young English-educated **Straits Chinese Reformists** who support Boon Keng in Singapore

Conservative Straits Chinese who oppose him in Singapore

Nanyang Students in Amoy – supporters of Boon Keng

Chinese intellectuals and staff at Amoy University – oppose Boon Keng

Coolies; merchants of various races; Japanese soldiers.

Girls of Singapore Chinese Girls school, 8 – 12 years old

*The musical also features a graphic presentation with a screen showing interactive animations and captions. On the desktop is a timer showing the year, and separate windows featuring separate topics: **WRITINGS; BABAS AND NONYAS; CIVIC GROUPS; BANKING; CHINA.** See Notes for the data.*

5) **ACT ONE**

a) **Scene 1: PROLOGUE Margo sings**

Margo addresses the audience directly. She illustrates her speech with interactive graphics, calling up pix as appropriate.

MARGO I didn't know my grandfather -- .Dr Lim Boon Keng. I live in America, in Illinois, where my Father Robert Lim is a Professor of Physiology. He spoke of his father often -- (*points to graphics*) Lim Boon Keng was a statesman, a great public figure . He was the Grand Old Man of Singapore – the Sage of Singapore.

But my father, Robert, didn't really know his father well. He knew little of his private life – only that he was born poor, he began his public career very young, and his first wife was my grandmother, Margaret.

Margo sings.

Graphics show images of Boon Keng and of old Singapore – going back in time to 1895.

i)

Song #1a. TELL ME WHO YOU ARE

Margo

**V1. Tell me who you are, how I wish I'd known your face,
wish I'd known that wisdom in your eyes,
and your smile, and your kind embrace.**

**V2. Tell me all your deeds, how you won such great esteem,
share the secrets of your hidden heart, of your hope, of your goal,
your dream!**

**CH Careless time dims the years, the old pages fade away,
and who now will recall all your life and your fame?
Like a sound on the wind, come echoes from the city you knew,
Voices from those aged streets still call on your name.**

BR Out of the silence, they're crying, calling, singing,
here by the river, they know you do not die!

CH Tell me who you are, how you laboured and you strove,
tell me of your ardent heart on fire, of your pain, of your joy, your
love!

Tell me who you are!

b)

c) Scene 2: Controversy of LBK Nominat
1895

In front of the Singapore Town Hall (now the Asian Civilisation Museum), In gathering dusk – slowly lit by torches and gaslights -- a crowd of people has gathered. BOON KENG himself is not in sight.

Graphics label people in the crowd:

The British Governor and some Westerners – members of Legislative Council

The Young Straits Chinese -- with short hair and modern Western clothes – led by SONG ONG SIANG and TAN BOO LIAT

Conservative Straits Chinese – with long queue and Chinese clothes.

Chinese Revolutionary Supporter (dressed like Sun Yat Sun)

Onlookers include well-to-do merchants of other races eg a Parsee, Arab, Chettiar.

Song #2a DR LIM BOON KENG

Ensemble

GOVERNOR:

Firebrand, he's a trouble maker,
I have heard that's so, Doctor Lim Boon Keng!

CONSERVATIVE BABA

Upstart, young tradition - breaker,
over turns our ways, Doctor Lim Boon Keng!

SONG ONG SIANG

Splendid mind, scholarship in Edinburgh, educated to a high degree!

TAN BOO LIAT

Best to carry our cause, in the Legislature,
name him to the Council Lim Boon Keng!

CONSERVATIVE BABA

No! he never will do,

there to represent the Strait Chinese!

ALL

He's/Not our Legislative Council man!

(INSTRUMENTAL interlude follows over which the next dialogue section is spoken)

GOVERNOR: You local worthies are here to propose your choice, for the candidate, whom I shall nominate to the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements. Some have proposed the name of Dr Lim Boon Keng. But Dr Llim is a firebrand, a trouble maker! Furthermore he is very young!

CONSERVATIVE BABA: (indignantly) He's only twenty-six! He's a nobody!

SECOND CONSERVATIVE BABA How can people respect him?

CONSERVATIVE BABA: He's an orphan! He has no money!

SECOND CONSERVATIVE BABA He's on the make for his own interests!

SONG ONG SIANG: Dr Lim is already known as a public speaker – he has won universal acclaim!

GOVERNOR: I am concerned about Dr Lim's loyalty to the British Empire. He supports those Chinese who rebel against the Chinese Emperor!

(graphic indicates a Chinese man standing aside from the Singapore crowd, who looks rather like Sun Yat Sen .)

SONG ONG SIANG: (hotly) My friend Boon Keng is not a Revolutionary!

SONG #2: DR LIM BOON KENG Continued

**GOVERNOR: Boon Keng! could he be a traitor,
is he really true, to the British crown!**

**CHINESE REVOLUTIONARY SUPPORTER Boon Keng! that collaborator!
White man's running dog! Lets his people down!**

SONG ONG SIANG Sir, I have letters here from Europeans and Chinese.. from merchants, clan leaders, and the Straits Times newspaper. One and all, they urge you to appoint Lim Boon Keng to the Legislative Council!

CHORUS 2 (sung) Raise to Council – Lim Boon Keng!

GOVERNOR *(spoken)* I see that public opinion is on his side. I agree. *(applause)* Where is Dr Lim?

SONG ONG SIANG He is at his sister's home, nearby -- waiting for the news.

GOVERNOR *(to messenger)* Take this message to Dr Lim Boon Keng. Inform him, that it is my pleasure to appoint him as an Unofficial Member of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements.

(a messenger takes a written note from the Governor and runs off.

SCENE 3. YU LOO

MARGO He kept being re-elected to that post again and again. Altogether he served on the Legislative Council for a total of fifteen years!

GRAPHIC Cartoon of Boon Keng's family.

Boon Keng had four younger sisters. Their grandparents looked after them, after their parents died --. his grandmother made nonya cakes and Boon Keng helped to sell them. Eventually Boon Keng got a scholarship to go to Edinburgh for six years, and the sisters got married off young, (exit Margo)

We see Boon Keng at the home of his married sister YU LOO, beside the Singapore river. She is a young nonya age 22, bubbly, with childlike ignorance and innocence.

YU LOO (*squeezes Boon Keng's hand adoringly. She chatters away in Baba Malay, which is the only language she speaks, and translation appears on the screen.*) Twa Koh mesti lah jadi orang besar, orang besar betul betul! Twa koh pandai sangat pandai.

Boon Keng (In Malay) Yu Loo --- Pelahan pelahan lah

YU LOO (*Her chatter segues into English translation.. not Singlish*) Semua orang tahu. My big brother! My big brother! You will be such an important man. Because you are so clever my big brother... Kim Hoe says you are so clever.. Twa Koh sangatt sangat pandai lah!

BOON KENG Don't count chickens.. Maybe they will not nominate me.

YU LOO I know they will choose you! Kim Hoe says they will surely choose you!

BOON KENG Yu Loo – after our parents died our grandparents tried to look after us. I regret – I am sorry, that I couldn't help you and our sisters go to school ..

YU LOO (*laughing merrily*) Hee hee hee beras sudah masak, never mind that lah! I married my Kim Hoe! my Kim Hoe is so good to me!

BOON KENG– It was like a miracle, that from my humble beginnings I went to Edinburgh, that cold stone city, to receive the modern world's most advanced scientific education! I have been so fortunate. I feel I owe a debt, to those who still live in darkness! I am called to a battle against ignorance and superstition, all that holds our people back from joining the universal progress of mankind!

YU LOO (*laughs in bewilderment*) Tua Koh, Yu Loo so stupid lah, I don't know what you are saying! You are so clever. You tell me so that I can understand!

BOON KENG . (reflects a moment) I must fight – to protect our people – from ignorance! You remember I used to tell you stories about the knights of old – how a knight would take a vow, to ride out on the wild frontiers – to succour all those in need of help.

(he sings his song – with the idealism and vigour of his age of 26.)

Song # 3: WARRIOR OF THE MIND

BOON KENG

**v1. I'll be a warrior so strong and bold,
Forth I will ride, I will save all the world,
Fight for the right! High is my aim,
In my heart, in my heart a flame!**

**C1. Far I'll ride, help the poor and weak,
all my life I'll give, nobly I will seek,
with my sword from the east, and my rifle from the west,
I'll never rest, as I ride on my quest!**

**v2. Souls lost in ignorance, I'll search to find,
bring them from dark to the light of the mind,
Bring to the light! I'll labour on,
I will fight, until life is done!**

**C2. Far I'll ride, help the poor and weak,
all my life I'll give, nobly I will seek,
with my horse from the east, and my saddle from the west,
I'll never rest, as I ride on my quest!**

**C3. Far I'll ride, help the poor and weak,
all my life I'll give, nobly I will seek,
with my sword from the east, and my rifle from the west,
I'll never rest, as I ride on my quest!**

**I'll fight for right!
I'll ride!**

YU LOO Twa koh – you will be a fighter, a warrior --

BOON KENG It won't be easy. Sister -- if you hear people saying bad things about me --

YU LOO How can they talk badly about you!

BOON KENG Do not believe them. –

YU LOO I'll never believe them! I know you are my good Twa Koh.

(YU LOO's husband Kim Hoe enters, Yu Loo runs to him)

YU LOO Kim Hoe – Apa Khabar?

WARRIOR OF THE MIND 2016

KIM HOE Boon Keng -- The message has come!

BOON KENG (Takes the message) I must go to the town hall... (Exit with Kim hoe and YU LOO.)

SCENE 4: CELEBRATION

BOON KENG's friends and supporters are gathered at the Mansion of Song Ong Siang's father. As he enters they cheer him with a drum-like chant --)

BABA SUPPORTERS: Boon --- Keng! Boon – Keng! Boon --- Keng!

BOON KENG Thank you thank you! I am greatly honoured. . I humbly accept the nomination to the Legislative Council.

SONG ONG SIANG A drink! a toast to our new Legislative Councillor!

(Drinks start to go round. Boon Keng raises his glass to the crowd.)

BOON KENG I am grateful to the British Colonial Government for having provided the opportunities, which allowed me to ascend to such a lofty position. I cannot express my deep gratitude, to my old teacher Mr Hullett, who first lit the flame of learning in my breast. To all who have helped me, in Singapore and elsewhere, I say -- Thank you very much.

(The people laugh as he playfully runs through a range of dialects., while drinks are served

BOON KENG Terima kaseh. Kum siah. Xieh Xieh. Arigato Gozaimas. Ungalukku Nanri. Danke schon. (drinks, toasts the company) Merci Beaucoup!

CONSERVATIVE CHINESE MAN (shocked by the inauspicious words) hah? Meh si boh ku? You say we all going to die soon?

SONG ONG SIANG This is French for Thank You – Merci Beaucoup --

CONSERVATIVE (scandalized) Meh Si Bo Ku! Death not far away! Choy choy.

BOON KENG'S FRIENDS (laugh and register the bi-lingual pun.) Merci Beaucoup! Thank you very much! Mehsi Boh ku! Very soon we die!

BOON KENG (drinking and toasting) We remember -- Death is never far from us -- and so we must always laugh – and be thankful for our life! Merci Beaucoup!

Dance with a chorus of Nonyas and Babas. Note that unmarried Nonya girls do not appear in public.

Song #4A 'LAUGH AT LIFE'

BOON KENG

**V1. Laugh at life! be light of heart,
for you know there is no use in regretting,
you have to smile, a little while,
and no troubles will be troubling you.
Dance for joy, and raise a song,**

make a happy sound of thanks for our living,
so ev'ry day, in ev'ry way,
we will find a time to say,
merci beaucoup.

Not long, before we die,
so laugh while the sun is shining,
no use repining, you don't have to cry,
you can laugh at life!

V2. Laugh at life, the time is short,
we should never let the grass grow beneath us,
We've got to strive while we're alive,
to achieve so much that we want to do.

Dance and sing when light grows dim,
we'll remember all the best of our story,
we'll smile and say at end of day,
we give thanks for our living,
merci beaucoup.

V3. Laugh at life, be light at heart,
for you know there is no use in regretting,
you have to smile, a little while,
and give thanks before we start to forget!

Meh si boh ku, oh merci beaucoup, for ev'ry thing,
meh si boh ku, oh merci beaucoup,
we dance and sing,
merci beaucoup
merci beaucoup...!

(The Babas disperse).

SCENE 5 REFORMING THE BABAS.

Boon Keng and Song Ong Siang converse.

SONG ONG SIANG So my dear Boon Keng, you can do so much good for us, by serving on the Legislative Council ! Our teachers in Britain taught us that a man can aspire to no higher honour, than to help to govern his country.

BOON KENG Ah yes. I will be a bridge between our rulers and the people they name as Asiatics. It will be such an honour to serve beside the white men on the Legislative Council .. they are courteous enough to call me a very good Chinaman, almost as good as one of themselves! *(both laugh)*

(The pair freeze – Margo appears, giving commentary.)

MARGO Lim Boon Keng served on the LegCo for five terms of three years. (**Graphics in window show relevant data scrolling by fast.**) He spoke upon matters concerning public health and education, where his special expertise was recognised. He continued the social work he'd already been doing (**graphic: Anti Opium Campaign**) and especially, his own people -- the Nonyas and Babas.

Graphic – with cartoons: The Nonyas and Babas are the Chinese communities who have lived in the Nanyang for centuries – also known as the Straits Chinese.

SONG ONG SIANG The Babas need to be enlightened !

BOON KENG They need to be reformed!

SONG ONG SIANG Boon Keng – let us start a magazine for our people. The Straits Chinese Magazine! We will write articles to enlighten the Babas –

BOON KENG – modernise their thinking –

SONG ONG SIANG -- teach them about their heritage –

BOON KENG –bring them into the new age!

(Graphics -- issues of the Straits Chinese Magazine.)

BOON KENG We must teach the Babas about Confucius!

SOS Confucius, the Chinese sage? What on earth for?

BOON KENG Without Chinese education, the Babas have been cut off from their moral heritage.

SOD I'm a Presbyterian myself.

Graphics – LBK wrote 12 articles on Confucius, in English, in the Straits Chinese Magazine.

BOON KENG. There are so many social evils we must fight! Opium smoking – it destroys so many lives -- the British should ban this immoral trade!

SONG ONG SIANG Footbinding — a curse on our womenfolk! Stop this barbaric, outmoded custom!

BOON KENG The queue – a symbol of humiliation and backwardness for the Chinese! Cut off the queues!

SONG ONG SIANG Gambling! An obsession which ruins many families! Give up the gambling farms!

BOON KENG the Oppression of women -- end multiple marriages and the enslavement of girls!

SONG ONG SIANG Open schools for girls!

(Lights down on the pair and they exit.)

ACT TWO

Scene 6 CHINESE POLITICS

MARGO Beyond the prosperous, thriving British Crown Colony of Singapore – winds of change were blowing. In China, people rebelled here and there against the Imperial Government – whom they saw as foreign Manchu oppressors.

(Graphics: Map of China shown in Imperial yellow, hotspots of rebellion coded in blue. Cartoon of emperor, and peasants in revolt in the provinces, revolutions crushed from Peking.)

And throughout the Nanyang, revolutionary thinkers like Sun Yat Sun were working among the Overseas Chinese —to foment revolution and carry it back to China.

(Graphics: cartoon of Sun Yat Sen addressing revolutionary crowds. Map of Chinese diaspora –Hawaii, Japan, Nanyang -- hotspots from which blue arrows go back to China. Incidents of revolt flare up and are crushed from Peking.)

Other Chinese believed in peaceful Reform!

(Cartoons of emperor and Reformers – colour coded in yellow.)

They believed that the Imperial Government must be modernized and reformed – that China must be changed without violence, without bloodshed. Many reformist thinkers were driven out of China and continued teaching outside China.

(Graphic: maps)

The Reform thinkers and the Revolutionaries fought out their conflict in debates and newspapers and speeches throughout the Nanyang and Japan.

GRAPHIC OF Sun Yat Sen

Opposing groups of Reformers and Revolutionaries march onto stage.

Cartoon Graphics show the conflict throughout the Nanyang in meetings, newspapers, street clashes.

Song #6A REVOLUTION OR REFORM Part One

Sung by opposing factions of reformers and revolutionaries

REFORMERS

**Old ways must be reformed,
Old must be changed and renewed!**

REVOLUTIONARIES

**Old ways must be thrown out!
Old must be driven away!**

REFORMERS

**Change and reform! Change and reform!
reformation reformation!
Struggle for reform!**

REVOLUTIONARIES

**People revolt! people revolt!
revolution revolution!
fight and revolt!**

REVOLUTIONARIES

**Sweep away the degenerate past!
Start again on a blank new page!**

REFORMERS

**Change and Reform!
Change and reform! Reformation reformation!**

REFORMERS

**Emperor learn from the modern world,
Ancient wisdom learn from the new!**

REVOLUTIONARIES

**People revolt! people revolt!
Revolution revolution!**

BOTH in counterpoint)

REVOLUTIONARIES

**Sweep away the degenerate past!
Start again on a blank new page!
Reform!**

REFORMERS

**Change and reform!
Change and**

Reformation reformation!

REFORMERS

**Emperor learn from the modern world,
revolt!
Ancient wisdom learn from the new!
revolution!**

REVOLUTIONARIES

**People revolt! people
revolt!
Revolution**

(ensemble exits.)

MARGO One of the Reformists who came to Singapore was the Reverend Wong Nai Siong. A pastor of the Methodist Church in Foochow. A visionary, a dreamer.

(WONG NAI SIONG enters. MARGO exits.)

WONG NAI SIONG (soliloquy) I have a dream. My people in Foochow suffer under the tyranny of the Manchu oppressor. I will lead them forth, to make a new settlement in the wild jungles of the Southern

region. There we of the Foochow Methodist Church shall dwell as brothers, all sharing one race, one language, one lord, one faith! There with no differences to divide us, we shall dwell in perfect love, and perfect harmony. I have a dream.

BOON KENG (enters) That is a good dream.

WNS Dr Lim! I have come here to see you --

BOON KENG Welcome to Singapore. I hope you'll see that here, people do live in harmony and brotherhood, in spite of differences of race and language and religion! Anyway as for your new settlement --I am acquainted with Rajah Brooke -- the English ruler of Sarawak. I think Raja Brooke might welcome a colony of good, hardworking, Christian people in his country. Let me write to him on your behalf.

Graphic with Map: In 1901, Wong Nai Siong led a group of migrants from Fukien to found a new settlement at Sibuan in Sarawak. Sibuan city still flourishes today.

WONG I would be most grateful! Sir, I have sought you out as a leader of the Straits Chinese. I have seen your articles in the Tien Nan Shin Pao newspaper, to support the Reform Movement. I myself, as a man of God, am certainly in favour of peaceful reform for China!

BOON KENG I oppose Dr Sun Yat Sun's call for Revolution! I believe that China can be peacefully reformed. I believe that when men of good will come together, reason will ultimately prevail.

WNS If the Emperor does not consent to reform, one day a bloody revolution will come! Our Reform Movement has prepared yet another petition to the Emperor, imploring him to legislate the changes we desire. We are collecting signatures to this petition, among all the overseas Chinese.. Will you help us Dr Lim?

BOON KENG Yes indeed! We will collect hundreds and thousands of signatures! and surely the Imperial Court around the Emperor will realise, that they must heed the will of the people.

WONG NAI SIONG I hope you are right.

BOON KENG (*taking the document*) I will work with you! But I have to tell you -- I have a difficulty here, because I do not read and write Chinese very well. I have been trying to teach myself, ever since I returned from Edinburgh. It is hard to find a teacher who is fully fluent in both Chinese and English.

WNS Ah .. I have a suggestion. Perhaps you might like to meet Margaret Wong -- my daughter.

BOON KENG Your daughter??

WSN Margaret was educated in America -- and I myself taught her the Chinese Classics. She already assists me in many things. She happens to be in Singapore now, with me on this visit.

BOON KENG She is here in Singapore?

WSN Shall I introduce her to you?

BOON KENG I could meet her after hours at my medical clinic - in Telok Ayer.

WSN. I am sure she can be of great help to your work. I will bring her there.

Scene 7 Margaret

Singapore – exterior – beside the sea. Wong Nai Siong and daughter Margaret enter. Margaret is dressed in contemporary Western clothes, not too expensive as befits a pastor's daughter, and has a slight American East Coast accent.

MARGARET Father – I don't want to meet this – this Baba!! They are provincial and backward!

WONG NAI SIONG Margaret dear-- I have given you the best modern education in English and Chinese – but now it is going to be difficult to find a husband for you! Not many men want to marry an educated woman!

MARGARET I don't want to marry a Baba! They believe women are inferior creatures –

WONG NAI SIONG I told Dr Lim that you were visiting Singapore. He is eager to meet you -- you can just talk to him for a while ... Wait here for a moment ...

(Margaret waits by the quay, looking beautiful. Boon Keng enters, his eyes drawn to her.)

WONG NAI SIONG Dr Lim! Have you seen the latest Chinese newspaper?

BOON KENG (*distractedly*) The Chinese newspaper, yes ...

WONG NAI SIONG It's full of praises for Sun Yat sen's talks in Java and Penang – calling for bloody revolution in China!

BOON KENG (*bringing his attention back to Wong*) Sun Yat sen is a devil, a fierce fiend, to advocate the dreadful destruction and suffering that revolution would bring!

WONG NAI SIONG Perhaps you and I should start a rival newspaper in Singapore! To spread the wisdom of peaceful reform for China,

BOON KENG (*enthused*) A Chinese newspaper?

WONG NAI SIONG And my daughter can help us .. Margaret -- she reads Chinese.. (*beckons Margaret to join them*) Dr Lim, please meet my daughter Margaret.

MARGARET (*shakes hands American style, formal and not very friendly*) Dr Lim.

BOON KENG I -- I'm very pleased to meet you. ...I understand you've been in the United States?

MARGARET I have been at school in Baltimore.

BOON KENG Will you be visiting Singapore for long? Do you like what you have seen so far?

YU LOO (*with a painstakingly learned English phrase:*) "My sister! "

SONG ONG SIANG Margaret – my dear new sister!

All others exit, Boon Keng and Margaret are left alone to begin life together . They sing:

SONG 8a: HOLD ME WITHIN YOUR HEART (SHORTER rendition)

BOON KENG and MARGARET

Be near to me, hold me within your heart,
never let me go!
This love we share, love never shall depart,
As long as we remain.

CH. Hold me close, I'm here, oh my love,
I'll be with you till time is done –
you will know I still love you, whatever may come,
as long as you keep me still close in your heart!

BOON KENG
And I swear -I'll always be true

BOTH
I'll stay with you, I'll hold you near, close in my heart!

They proceed with life together.

Graphics: Mandarin classes held at BOON KENG's house. CIVIC GROUPS: BOON KENG founded Philomathic Society 1898, Straits Chinese British Association 1900

BOON KENG Kim Yan – ada baik? *He gives her the band off his cigar which she puts on her finger.* (**Graphic translation: How are you Kim Yan?**)

YU LU (prompting the shy child) Kim Yan! Pangil AhPek, Ah Kim,. (**Greet your Uncle and Auntie.**)

KIM YAN Ah Pek. Ah Kim.

MARGARET Kim Yan ...

BOON KENG Kim Yan mau pergi sekolah, belajar- belajar? (*She shakes her head.*) Kenapa ta'mau? Kor-kor ada pergi Raffles Institution, bukan? (**Kim Yan, do you want to go to school? Why not? Your big brother goes to Raffles Institution doesn't he?**)

KIM YAN Kor kor kata – Raffles Institution itu “BO-RING!”

BOON KENG (He looks up at swallows flying overhead) Kim Yan, lu tahu, nama lu Yan, ia-lah Burong laying-layang. Kim Yan ia la – laying laying mas. (**Do you know that your name Yan - means Swallow? Kim Yan means Golden Swallow.**)

Graphics in different languages:

Kim Yan jing yen layang mas golden swallow
--

KIM YAN delighted) Ma! Kim Yan – laying-layang – swallow! Ya bukan? Ya? Ya? (**Mother –Kim Yan means swallow! Is that right Mother?**)

YU LOO Mak ta-tahu sayang –Mak tiada belajar sekolah. (“**Ma doesn't know dear. Ma did not go to school.**”)

KIM HOE Ah Pek chakap betul. Kim Yan – laying layang mas. (**Big Uncle is right. Kim Yan is Golden Swallow.**)

BOON KENG Ah Yan – sudah makan? Makan Apa? (**Have you eaten? What did you eat?**) (*looking up at swallows*) What does a little swallow eat, Kim Yan?

KIM YAN .. maybe seeds?

BOON KENG do they find seeds up in the sky? Have you noticed that in March, the swallows all fly away from our country? Where do they go?

KIM YAN (*she shakes her head*) Kim Yan Ta'Tahu.

BOON KENG In school you could learn that kind of thing. (*indicates Margaret*) Your Ah Kim here would teach you.

(Margaret starts to sing. All the little girls draw close)

SONG#10: SWALLOW SONG

MARGARET AND CHORUS OF LITTLE GIRLS

SWALLOW SONG [kids] C140 1-33 bbx 2016-0221

Music by Dezz MOEY C2016

Words by Stella KON C2016

**1. What does the swallow now swallow for supper?
how does she eat, while spreading her wings?
Wonder why, feeds in the sky,
Wish I'd know more of these things.**

**V2 Where is the hollow where swallow will lie low,
where does she hide, through summers and springs?
Want to know, where does she go,
Wish I'd know more of these things.**

**BR I want to know about the world, I'd have so much pleasure,
knowing lots of funny stuff will be like having treasure!**

**3. Why does the butterfly flutter or fly by?
Where is the bow that the rainbow will bring?
Why it's so, I'd like to know,
want to know more of these things.**

**Why it's so, please let me know,
Want to know more of these things**

BOON KENG My own name Boon Keng – means, Celebrate Literary learning!

WARRIOR OF THE MIND 2016

Graphic : “Boon Keng = Wen Jing =CELEBRATE LEARNING” in cascading different calligraphies, languages, spellings, fonts and colours

BOON KENG (spoken) How wonderful is learning! I will always praise it!

It is more to be valued than gold and diamonds.

Learning illuminates the world,

It brings light into darkness,

It makes the desert green.

If I gather wisdom my whole life long,

I would not come to an end of it.

If I give wisdom to others,

I will still have no less.

How marvellous is wisdom!

It is a treasure I will seek all my life.

MARGARET and girls repeat vs 1 2 and chorus.

End of scene.

MARGO That was the school. Singapore Chinese Girls School. *(Indicates graphic)*

Graphics: school through the ages..

I guess they had to struggle for years, he and Song Ong Siang, fundraising and persuading people, before the school was really standing firm.

Windows scroll with lists of BOON KENG’s activities, founding of societies, newspapers, etc.

MARGO At the same time he was getting more and more concerned with China politics.

1900

(Home of BOON KENG and Margaret, Boon Keng enters hurriedly)

BOON KENG

My dear I need your help. I have a visitor who needs a lodging for a few days – in great privacy.

MARGARET

Who is your guest?

BOON KENG

I can’t tell you his name. His presence must be kept a secret.

WARRIOR OF THE MIND 2016

MARGARET

But why can't you tell me?

BOON KENG

This man is wanted – by the Empress of China!

*(A mysterious, robed Chinese enters and Boon Keng hurries to look after him. **Screen display flashes captioned picture: "Chinese Reformer, Kang Yu Wei."** Pics of Beijing. The music makes reference to "Beware the Dragon Lady!" from Forbidden City.)*

BOON KENG

We have to help him escape. You must be very discreet.

(Furtively they help Kang Yu Wei to leave the stage.

"China" Window pulses with ominous light and smouldering fire.

BOON KENG with others founded Singapore Tong Meng Hui (Reformation League)

BOON KENG China is heading for disaster! The Dowager Emperor and the ministers around her prevent all attempts to reform China. The world must be told of this dire situation. I am one of the few men who have close contacts in the Imperial court, and can also communicate fluently to the world outside! *(He starts writing a book)* To be prudent, I'm writing this book under a pseudonym. It's possible that if they knew me for the author they'd come looking for me, the assassins of the Dowager Empress, even here in Singapore

"Publications" window shows his book, "The China Crisis from within"; shows it encapsulates the ominous scene in China, and shows its international readership.

Scene 9 Rubber Boom

MARGO Meanwhile my grandfather was keeping busy .. building a civic society in Singapore with his own two hands.

Music: Busy-body theme from "Dr Lim Boon Keng". Margaret has two baby amahs.

Graphics:

International correspondence with Gandhi, Tagore, etc.

With SOS, founded Singapore Volunteer Corps.

Member Singapore Municipal Council.

With others, founded Newspaper: Tien Nan Shin Pao.

Founded Tempines Para and Coconut Plantations Ltd.

Newspaper Jit Shin Pao (with Wong Nai Siong)

Visited Java and founded five Mandarin Language schools

Boon Keng talks to various businessmen.

Graphic: Sembawang Rubber Plantations Co. Cartoons of cars, rubber tappers etc .

SONG #11A: RUBBER BOOM BOOM BOOM –

**MERCHANT COMMUNITY
We thank the kind colonialists
And her Majesty Victorious
For giving us chances glorious`
To get rich! Rich ! rich!**

**Every American has a car
4 fine wheels go round and round
Every wheel needs a big new tire
To keep them rolling, keep them rolling,
money comes rolling in!**

**Acres of land in FMS
Plant the trees and watch them grow
Cut and tap that beautiful sap,
Watch that white gold flow!**

**Rubber rubber rubber rubber
boom boom boom!**

They all grow rich. Margaret has rich clothes – and three baby amahs.

a. Scene 10 SCGS Flourishing

Present are a bevy of little girls, the pupils of SCGS, and their parents. Boon Keng, Margaret and Song Ong Siang are there as GOH. . With Margaret are three baby amahs and her 5 year old son Robert.

YU LOO (brings her daughter to greet BOON KENG and Margaret): “Tua Koo– Twa Kim.. Robert...

SCHOOL PUPILS (running to greet Margaret) Mrs Lim! Mrs Lim! (Head teacher calls them to order and lines them up.)

SONG ONG SIANG (*addresses the gathering in his mild-mannered way*) We are overjoyed today -- to celebrate the 3RD anniversary of the Singapore Chinese Girl’s school!

BOON KENG (*oratorically*) Let us celebrate the rise of the Singapore Chinese Girls’ School, as a beacon of education, to light a flame of learning in Singapore!

MARGARET (*smiles at his grandiosity and addresses the girls*) My dear girls, each one of you is like a little light, that will shine, shine bright!

(*Schoolgirls sing. The little girls do a "light dance." with candles*)

Song #12 LIGHT A LITTLE CANDLE

GIRLS' CHORUS

**Light a little candle, light a little flame,
Don't be scared of darkness, shining all the same
keep the candle burning, etc...**

(lyrics to be written)

Margaret presents prizes to the top girls. After the dance all exit. Except Boon Keng, with Margaret leaning on his arm as though her health is weak. BK anxiously supports her.

BOON KENG Margaret!

Scene 11 Margaret'S Death

(*Margaret is terminally ill.*)

BOON KENG Margaret – don't go. Do not leave me –

Song #8b HOLD ME IN YOUR HEART – Full version

MARGARET WITH BOON KENG

**Remember me, hold me within your heart,
never let me go!
This love we share, love never shall depart,
although we say goodbye.**

**Hold me close, I'm here, oh my love,
I'll be with you till time is done –
you will know I still love you, where ever I am,
as long as you keep me still close in your heart!**

**Remember me, feel my hand still in yours,
don't regret our love!**

**Hold me close, I'm here, Oh my love,
I'll be with you till time is done
you will know I still love you, where ever I've gone
As long as you hold me still close in your heart!**

**OUTRO I believe I'll see you once more,
forever through the years, our love will endure..
I'll stay with you, I'll stay with you,**

in your heart.. your heart!

(Margaret's children are brought to her. She bids them farewell)

MARG My boys – My little Robert – (to Boon Keng) Look after them!

BOON KENG Don't leave me –

MARGARET I will be with you as long as you remember me –

**MARGARET I'll stay with you, I'll stay with you,
in your heart!**

Margaret dies.

2. ACT THREE

Scene 12 BOON KENG AND 1908

MARGO Boon Keng had a medical partner at the Sincere Dispensary, Dr S C Yin from Amoy.. They worked together -- in a great social cause.

Graphic: Cartoon of Dr Yin who says, "I am Dr SC Yin! I am deeply interested in your work against opium addiction!"

CLUBS AND SOCIETIES WINDOW – LBK and SCY found the Anti-Opium Society, and an Opium Treatment Centre.

Cartoon of Dr Yin says: "I have a son who is going to be a writer." Cartoon shows that Yin's son is writer Leslie Charteris, author of the Saint books. Yin says, "I also have a sister, Grace. Boon Keng, would you like to meet my sister?"

Cartoon shows Boon Keng meets Grace and they get married.

MARGO So Boon Keng married Grace Yin, and brought her back to Singapore. I suppose he needed a wife to take care of his four young sons.

GRACE and BOON KENG enter.

BOON KENG. My dear Grace, I shall be going to China soon, I will be away for several months. I hope you will not mind.

GRACE Boon Ke-e-eng! You're leaving me alone? All by myself in this foreign country?

BOON KENG Be courageous my dear. I am doing is important work in China, to try to bring Reform to the Imperial Court – it's the best hope to prevent a bloody revolution.

GRACE (with a genteel sniff in a handkerchief) You are leaving me all alone.

BOON KENG You won't be alone dear. You have my sisters to keep you company ... and you can keep busy looking after Robert and Walter and Francis and John, and soon you will have our own child too!

GRACE I can't do it. I can't do it. Boon Keng – if you must go away so much –

BOON KENG (firmly) Yes. I have gained the trust of some advisers to the Emperor, men of good will. I shall work with them, to help bring the Imperial Government into the modern age! They have also appointed me to represent China at international events and conferences. I shall be travelling a great deal!

GRACE Then you won't be here to educate your sons. I think Robert should be sent to school. In Scotland, in Edinburgh. Just like you were.

BOON KENG (stunned) But I was sixteen when I went to Edinburgh! Robert is only eight –

GRACE I have heard you say that early education is the most important.

BOON KENG To go to Edinburgh – so young – alone!

GRACE You have friends there to foster him. And Francis can go too, to keep him company. Boon Keng! You want to do the best for all your children, don't you? (he nods) Really, I cannot look after

four boys here, and care for our own new family that is coming along. Robert and Francis should go and get that good education in Britain. It is best for everyone – if you must travel so much.

(BOON KENG sadly accepts the deal – and turns his back on his domestic affairs. As Grace recedes, he picks up a travelling bag, and briefcase.

Scene 13 BOON KENG's loyalty questioned

(Graphic: Map of BOON KENG's travel to Peking. CHINA WINDOW: Cartoon: Boon Keng dressed in Chinese mandarin robes talks to officials conspiratorially; bows before Emperor in Imperial audience.)

In Singapore, BOON KENG's critics question his loyalty.

SONG ONG SIANG Really Boon Keng – why are you so deeply concerned with the affairs of China?

BOON KENG: I am a loyal subject of the British empire – but I am also a true son of Han, I care deeply for the homeland of my ancestors!

SONG 2b Dr lim boon keng - reprise

BRITISH GOVERNOR

Boon keng, he's a traitor, to the British crown!

BOON KENG I uphold the rule of the ancient Chinese Empire!

REVOLUTIONARIES

Boon keng, he betrays the people, let the people down!

BOON KENG However I believe the Government of China must be reformed, must submit to the voice of the people!

CHINESE LOYALISTS

This is treason to the Emperor! Traitor traitor

BABAS (with Song Ong Siang)

Boon Keng, left behind the Babas..

left behind the Babas, Lim Boon keng!

All Exit except Song ong siang.

song # 13a: LOSING A FRIEND (FIRST RENDITION)

SONG ONG SIANG

Vs 1:

If I had to lose you, I would be sad and upset,
dismayed, my friend.
It would hurt to see you, leaving behind all we've made,
all come to an end!

CH:
I'm losing you, You've changed your mind,
feels like I'm left behind.
I don't want (to) say goodbye, I hope you try,
do not forget me!

(More Lyrics To Be Completed)

Scene 14 China in Turn **1911**

Map of China shows revolutionary battles flaring up all over.

CHINA: Sun Yat sun leads the Chinese Revolution.

Map of Europe shows that BOON KENG – wearing cartoon insignia of Imperial China plus stethoscope -- -- represents Imperial China at International conferences in events in Paris, Rome, Dresden.

Song #5b CHINESE REVOLUTION part 2

SUN YAT SUN AND CHORUS OF CHINESE REVOLUTIONARIES

SUN

The sun is rising,
The world is turning,
The fires are waking, the land is burning!
The people hearken, they find the hour
Now they shall waken, and show their power!

CHORUS

Arise, arise!
Come march beneath the red and angry skies!
Obey – our mother country's call –
Today- We fight to win or fall –
Our blood shall run -- till victory's won –
Arise. Arise!

The people waken!
Their rage is blazing,
They stand in anger, their banners raising,
Throw down the tyrant, release the flood,
We build a new age, reborn in blood!

CHINA WINDOW: The revolutionary forces incrementally spread over China, The map turns blue, the Imperial flag falls and is replaced by the blue Nationalist flag.

Cartoon: Map of Europe, Boon Keng, in Dresden -- Looks very surprised by events.

MARGO Lim Boon Keng seems to have accepted the Chinese Revolution as an accomplished thing. He reconciled with Sun Yat Sun and for a while, he was Sun's official physician.

CHINA WINDOW : Cartoon: Sun Yat Sun and Lim Boon Keng shake hands.

Cartoon: Boon Keng listens to Sun's chest with stethoscope.

After 1912 the Chinese Republic was taken over by generals and warlords. Lim Boon Keng returned to Singapore. There seemed no role in China for a philosopher, an intellectual, a man of peace. He resumed his business activities, his social work, his position on the Legislative Council. (MARGO exits)

Map tracks BOON KENG's return to Singapore.

a. Scene 15 Singapore Business

Scene: Boon Keng's Singapore home, typical of wealthy Straits Chinese, with Western and Chinese artifacts and rose-wood mother of pearl furniture. His study has lots of books, Chinese scrolls, a big roll-top desk overflowing with papers, typewriter. He is rich, eminent and respected. Visitors come and go, conferring, taking advice, doing business.

Graphics: LBK with others, established Chinese Commercial Bank Ltd.

LBK with others, established newspaper Malaya Tribune.

Became President of Singapore branch of the (Nationalist China) Kuomintang

Member of Chinese Advisory Board 1913-1922

GRACE hostesses at his house, then sings solo.

Song #14: GRACE LIM

GRACE

**It's not easy being who I am, being Missus Doctor Lim Boon Keng!
But I try, all I can!
There are duties that I have to do, As a leader of society,
As the wife of such a famous man!**

C1.

**All the poor suff'ring and deprived, afraid,
so much need, for my aid!**

V2.

**Ev' ry year I go down to the school, hand out prizes to the little girls,
give them good advice and moral talks!
I'm the founder of a worthy group, Chinese Ladies' Association.**

We improve our mind, and do good works!

Graphic : founding of Chinese Ladies Association

Grace proudly points to the on-screen graphic

C2.

**All the poor, leading lives of grief and grime,
so much call, for my time!**

C3.

**Singapore I must serve without an end,
As the wife of Boon Keng!**

For I'm Missus Doctor Lim Boon Keng!

Graphic: Cartoon of "Businessman and philanthropist Tan Kah Kee. " Show MRT station of that name.

Map showing Amoy province, Amoy island and city now known as Xiamen, Kulangyu island, Chip Bee town and school.

BOON KENG (*talks to on-screen cartoon*) My dear Kah Kee – you have decided to give your great wealth to the cause of education – to help spread the flame of learning among the people of China and the Nanyang, and in the new Republic of China. You have founded the Chip Bee school, in Amoy. I salute the generous spirit of Tan Kah Kee!

As you have asked my advice, I respectfully suggest that you should establish a University, a major school of higher learning, one that will combine the science of the West, with the ancient moral values of the east. This is what the Republic of China sorely needs. It cannot survive, if it is based on science and technology alone, without moral foundations!

The University should provide a great liberal education that will produce gentlemen and ladies of cultivation and learning—imbued with the values which have been instilled in our Chinese civilization over two thousand years – the moral teachings of Confucius. Yes my dear Sir. I heartily encourage you to endow Amoy University. It will be a great deed that will make the name of Tan Kah Kee resound through the ages!

Scene 16 The great War

1914

In Europe The first world war has broken out. The music sounds ominous and deep, but far away – not impacting us emotionally.

Graphic: Europe growing dark and smoky. PUBLICATIONS: Article by BOON KENG :“ On The coming Great Conflict.”

The British Governor stands under the Union Flag . Singapore Merchants pay little attention.

SONG #15a: GUNS OF WAR

GOVERNOR

**The guns of war are roaring
The night is full of flame
The nations clash in conflict
The earth is racked with pain
The peoples cry in tumult
A darkness fills the skies
The storm is growing wilder
The angry waters rise**

MERCHANTS What is this to us?

Europe is far away

Let the white men kill each other,

Little that we should care.

GOVERNOR

**The Empires of the earth struggle together
The young men fall like grass in the field
The sky is washed with blood...**

MERCHANTS – why should we care? Why do we care?

(BOON KENG and OSS enter)

BOON KENG The war in Europe – is swallowing up the world! We must go to the defence of the British Empire.

ONG SIANG *(joyfully slaps Boon Keng on the shoulder. he feels reconciled with Boon Keng .)* We the loyal Queen’s Chinese!

BOON KENG (addresses merchants.) My friends I urge you to pledge your support to Britain – which has helped us, educated us, given us this colony where we can flourish in peace. ..

MERCHANTS why should we care? Why do we care?

BOON ENG I know the face of Britain’s enemy. I visited Germany before the war, they saw me as an innocent Chinaman, they talked freely about their plans of aggression and conquest! I say to you that the

British Empire is fighting now to defend civilisation against an empire of darkness: All men of good will must come to her aid!

SONG # 16a : HEAR MY APPEAL

BOON KENG

Hear my appeal, the Empire is at war,
now we owe her the aid her loyal subjects must bestow!

C1. You will advance, her call you will heed,
you'll rise to help her hour of need!

V2. Strong is the foe, his evil aim is sure,
to destroy Britain's peace, we have enjoyed for years secure!

C2. You will not fail, your hearts are so true,
you'll give the best she asks of you!

C3. You will not fail, your hearts are so true,
you'll give the best she asks of you!

Your best – you'll give – your best!

Boon Keng takes the lead with Song Ong Siang and helpers, energetically collecting funds from the whole community, including the other races.)

Graphic: shows PR material – “contribute to the War Effort!” with hand-drawn thermometer which shows how much money was collected. \$ 40,00 for British Red Cross.

PUBLICATIONS: Screen display shows articles written by Boon Keng

“On the current conflict in the Far East.”

“The Unity of the British Empire – Why Straits Chinese should interest themselves in the War.”

“The Great War from the Confucian Point of View.”

Graphic: An appeal for Prince of Wales Relief Fund, with a thermometer whose top end is labelled “purchase of one Sopwith Camel.” The fund thermometer surges over this benchmark. Cartoon shows 2 Sopwith Camels flying from Singapore to England – with Boon Keng piloting the first, with aviator’s helmet, goggles and scarf and a big grin.

The War ends.

Scene 17 Singapore Post War

At Singapore Town Hall crowds gather as The Governor awards Boon Keng and SOS the OBE.)

GOVERNOR Today we celebrate the victory of Britain and the allied forces in the Great War. This was the war to end all war. Never again will civilised nations send their young men to slaughter! We look forward to a twentieth century of peace!

Today, Britain recognises the loyalty of the subjects of this Crown Colony. Dr Lim Boon Keng! You have been the leader of your people, their spokesman, their advocate! His Majesty wishes me to confer upon you the Order of the British Empire.Mr Song Ong Siang!

(All applaud as Governor pins award on Boon Keng and SOS; awards to others continue in the background while SOS talks to Boon Keng.)

SOS Congratulations my dear boy.

BOON KENG congratulations old chap.

SOS (to Grace) Congratulations to you Mrs Lim.

GRACE (simpering) Such an honour for Boon Keng. Of course he deeply deserves it! He has worked all his life for this honor –

SONG ONG SIANG And you have proved yourself to the British, as one of the loyal King's Chinese!

BOON KENG *(to SOS, laughs)* Do you remember that time -- when our whole contingent went together to London for King Edward's coronation? And we stayed at the Ritz, and we were almost thrown out of the hotel, for cooking sambal blachan in our rooms!!

SOS The smell went out into the corridor. "What is that dreadful smell?" said the English people. "Is there something rotten in your rooms?"

BOON KENG. Whenever I travel – I bring a jar of my sister's sambal blachan.. We Nonyas and Babas – we can't do without it!

SONG # 17: SAMBAL BLACHAN

BOON KENG, SOS AND STRAITS CHINESE INCLUDING YU LOO

**R1 Sambal blachan, eh sambal blachan, spice of our life,
Baba loves it, nonya likes it, man and wife, ah,**

**Baba's pleasure, Nonya's treasure, all will agree,
we adore our sambal blachan, sedap skali!**

**CH1: Taste buds awaken when we add this stuff,
Just like a friend who helps us all to laugh!**

**R2. Nonya's favour, adds the savour, best it can be,
Life is not complete without this home-grown fla-vour!**

**BR: Oo -- wah, haven't got can die,
Crave it like Opium, nothing else can satisfy!**

**R4: Sambal blachan, eh sambal blachan, spice of our life,
Baba loves it, nonya likes it, man and wife, ah!**

**R5: Sambal blachan, ah sambal blachan, wakes appetite,
Nonya's table has to have it, day and night, ah!**

R6 Baba takes it, Nonya makes it, suka makan,

Like to eat it, you are true Peranakan! ah!

C2 Mark of the Nonyas and the Babas too,
That's how we know who is so true and blue!

R7 Baba's pleasure, Nonya's treasure, all will agree,
we adore our sambal blachan, sedap skali!

How we love it, how we love it, sambal blachan ah!
Sedap! (ah!)

1919. *Music: Rubber Boom Boom Boom.*

Graphics show in cartoon form:

Three groups of Chinese merchants/bankers, with Boon Keng a key member of each group. The first group is Chinese Commercial Bank. The second group is the larger Ho Hong Bank. The third is the even larger Overseas Chinese Bank. We see Boon Keng helping to persuade the first two to merge together – then to merge with the third, forming the Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation which is a mighty presence in Singapore today.

BOON KENG *(at home with grace, looks up at Graphics of banks and toasts them with a drink. Thank you!*

Thank you! merci beaucoup!

1921 **Graphic: a telegram, bell rings in notification.**

BOON KENG looks up at the screen.

Image of Tan Kah Kee

TAN KAH KEE: *(voice over)* My dear Friend, inspired by your advice and enthusiasm, I have founded a new University in Amoy, for students of China and the whole Nanyang region. This University will teach both the new science of the West and the moral wisdom of Confucius. I have had difficulty in finding the right man to head the institution. I now invite you to become the President of Amoy University, to spread the light of learning to our people!

GRACE: The President! President of Amoy University, Dr Lim Boon Keng! What a great thing that would be!

BOON KENG Yes, it would be a very great undertaking.. To build a whole new University from nothing – GRACE Of course you can do it. You founded the girls' school—

BOON KENG That took years of struggle, with Ong Siang's help. And I was much younger then.

GRACE We would have to live in Amoy, wouldn't we! I was born in Kulangyu island just across the water, My mother lives there still – Kulangyu, Drum Rock island, such a place of elegance and refinement. my mother lives there still. We must go!

BOON KENG Are you sure Grace? It would mean my giving up my business interests here in Singapore -- the banks, the plantations and companies --

GRACE You can find some capable person to look after them and send you the money regularly. And you would have the President's salary as well!

BOON KENG . I won't impose on TKK's great generosity. I would not take any salary as President – if I accept the position.

GRACE Nonsense. Of course you must take the salary. We will live in Kulangyu – the children will go to Chip Bee school –

BOON KENG Grace, I have not made up my mind. Certainly I would like to do this thing. But I must consider carefully.

GRACE When can you let me know?? I will have to start packing!!

BOON KENG I will tell you when I have decided.

(BOON KENG's tone is unusually firm and Grace is somewhat abashed)

GRACE I must get warm winter clothes for the children --- *(Exit)*

(Boon Keng thoughtfully gets himself a drink and sinks into his rattan reclining chair – a pose of depression, which we see more often as time goes by. He drinks and gets sentimental)

BOON KENG Margaret --- if only you were here. This is just the kind of thing we wanted to do isn't it? To ride boldly forth to carry the light of learning into a new frontier... If you were with me, I would not hesitate for a moment. -- But I am getting tired—and the years are not my friend.

It is a stupid thing – but one reason that I hesitate to leave Singapore, is that your grave is here. I am a man of science. I know that after death nothing survives, and the body is only dust. But your grave is all I have left of you ... Margaret! I wish you had not left me. I wish I could see you again.

Song # 18B WON'T SEE YOU again

BOON KENG

**How could you have left me?
I still cannot believe it,
no I could not, could not,
never never ever think that you would leave.**

**CH: All the light I needed shone for me in your smile,
Through all that while your voice was music, was joy.
If I could turn time back to how we had it before,
I'd wish I could hold you, could be with you once more.**

**Vs 2. My heart is so empty, I don't know how to go on.
Can it be that you are really never never somehow coming back to me.**

**CH 3: Then all the light I needed shone for me in your smile,
through all that while your voice was music, was joy.**

**O if I could turn time back to how we had it before,
I'd wish I could hold you, could be with you once more.**

**Vs 4: How could you have left me, I still cannot believe it,
I will really really never ever ever I will never see you again!**

My love! Won't see you again!

Margaret appears.

MARGARET Boon Keng..

BOON KENG Margaret? Is that you? You are still so young – you're the girl I married –

MARGARET And you are still – Boon Keng. (*briskly, tenderly chiding*) And you are the man who let our son be sent away to Edinburgh, so young, so very young!

BOON KENG I am sorry for that –

MARGARET I have watched over him. Robert has a brilliant mind, just like you! He is going to be a doctor!

BOON KENG Margaret – this position in Amoy – should I take it? It would be a long hard struggle, and I don't know whether I do have the strength for it. If you were with me I would have no question – you have always been my courage and my strength.

MARG Boon Keng – I will always be with you. Just believe it. Just hold me close to your heart.

(sings)

Song 8b hold me in your heart

MARGARET

**Remember me, hold me within your heart,
never let me go!**

**The love we share won't waver or depart,
although we say goodbye.**

**CH. Hold me close, I'm here, oh my love,
I'll be with you till time is done –
you will know I still love you, where ever I've gone,
as long as you hold me still close in your heart!**

**V 3. Remember me, feel my hand still in yours,
don't regret our love!**

(spoken) Don't ever doubt it. I will always be close to you.

**C2 Hold me close, I'm here, Oh my love,
I'll be with you till time is done
you will know I still love you, where ever I've gone**

As long as you hold me still close in your heart!

**OUTRO I believe I'll see you once more,
forever through the years, our love will endure..
I'll stay with you, I'll stay with you,
in your heart.. your heart!**

Boon keng can't see her any more.. with new determination he gathers his family and children and luggage. Grace is raring to go, hustling children and baggage to the ship.

Boon Keng's friends gather to say farewell, shaking hands etc.)

BANKER Don't worry Dr Lim. Singapore is prospering, world trade is flourishing -- . Your investments here will be absolutely safe.

SONG ONG SIANG So you are really going to make your life in China. You've sold your house, you've really burned all the bridges behind you .

BOON KENG You know I am fulfilling my life-long dream..

SONG ONG SIANG You'll be running a big new University, not just a girls's school...

BOON KENG Look after the school, old boy.

(Boon Keng and family leave. Song Ong Siang looks after them and sings)

Song 14b : LOSING A FRIEND – Reprise

SONG ONG SIANG

**If I had to lose you, I would be sad and upset,
dismayed, my friend.
It would hurt to see you, leaving behind all we've made,
all come to an end!**

CH:

**I'm losing you, You've changed your mind,
feels like I'm left behind.
I don't want (to) say goodbye, I hope you try,
do not forget me!**

3. ACT FOUR

a. Scene 18 AMOY UNIVERSITY

Graphics: the barren shore of a river, topped by the Nationalist flag. While Boon Keng speaks, the buildings of Amoy University slowly appear on the shore as they are built by Boon Keng's efforts. Each one has a Confucian name on its front.

Boon Keng enters on stage left, accompanied by Grace and her 2 children. Students and professors, male and female, from China, Java, Taiwan, Manila, etc.

Graphic: Cartoon tags the factions of staff and students as "Modernisers" and "Confucianists". A yellow stick-on note on the Modernisers adds that "the May 4th Cultural Movement in 1914 rejected the values of China's past."

BOON KENG (*makes an opening speech ...*) Amoy University, financed by the great philanthropist Tan Kah Kee, will be the first in the world to wed western science with Chinese wisdom -- the wisdom of Confucius!

MODERNISER STUDENT: Confucius is not fit for our modern nation!

BOON KENG Confucianism is part of Chinese civilization! (*his supporters cheer*)

MODERNISER PROFESSOR: We should follow the Western Scientific approach. Why should we follow Confucius – the relic of an outworn feudal age!

BOON KENG Confucianism is imbued into the spirit of the Chinese people! It is the ethical code which should govern our new country!

STUDENTS AND STAFF OF AMOY UNIVERSITY

We are building a new nation,

A new people is being born.

Let us throw off the burden of the past,

Discard the ancient and outworn.

CHORUS

Arise, arise! Cast off the old,

Starting afresh, we build tomorrow.

Awake you people from your slumber,

Our future is near!

MODERNISTS (spoken) Down with Confucius!

BOON KENG (spoken) The new nation – must learn how to behave.

The new people – must have wisdom in their hearts.

MODERNISERS

arise, arise! cast off the old,
starting afresh , we build tomorrow.

BOON KENG (over the chanting)

Confucius holds the wisdom of the Chinese people.

Confucius should be our moral light.

CONFUCIANISTS (chant from Confucian classics) XXXX XXXX

MODERNISTS Down with Confucius!

BOON KENG As long as I am President of this University – I shall untiringly strive – to make it the ideal of modern Chinese education!

A band of Chinese Intellectuals enter from the right , led by Lu Xun.

Graphic identifies “Lu Xun – highly influential modernist writer and critic”

BOON KENG Welcome to the University! (*to the staff and students*) We are privileged to have with us the renowned writer and critic, Lu Xun – who has come to grace our Literature department! (To Lu Xun) Sir, welcome! You will help us study the great and wise traditions of Chinese literature, the wisdom of Confucius and the sages!

LU XUN Who is this old man among us, this Westerner in a Chinese dress?

Who cannot stop talking about Confucius, every time he opens his mouth?

Why does he try to thrust upon us --

old dogmas, outworn traditions?

BOON KENG The new China must be built on moral foundations – not merely materialist teaching?

LU XUN This is the age of Marx and Darwin! Confucius is an outdated relic.

BOON KENG Will Marx and Darwin feed your spirit? Will they teach you the right way to live?

LU XUN

This man born in foreign lands – he thinks he knows what China needs –

He has no understanding of the spirit of China!

His words are not worth listening to!

He is unfit to lead our students...

WARRIOR OF THE MIND 2016

MODERNISTS Confucius is dead! Sweep away the past! (They march to the left)

CONFUCIANISTS Learn the new science! Respect the old wisdom!”

The CONFUCIANISTS S march to the right. The 2 groups encounter face to face. Both sides cannot advance and won't give way, as they cry their slogans.

MODERNISTS Confucius is dead! Confucius is dead! Confucius is dead!

CONFUCIANISTS Respect the past! Respect the past! Respect the past!

LU XUN This is impossible conflict! This is beyond compromise! Mr President: I resign!

(He stomps towards exit right) I am going to other fields ...where I will tell of the reactionary policies of Amoy University and its President. Dr Lim Boon Keng -- You will have no co-operation or high regard from the intellectuals of China. *(Exit.)*

GRAPHIC: BOON KENG's home in Amoy on KulangYu island.

GRACE: recites, with Chinese-opera gestures:

Kulang yu – pleasant little island!

On the shore, the waves strike the drum-sounding rock.

Ferry boats ply across the narrow water.

Isle of elegant refinement!

On its steep streets resound the tinkle of a thousand pianos.

Our home is named Aurora for the dawning of a new age,

It stands on Pe-Ko-San, the Scholar's Pen-Rest Hill--

Fitting residence for President Dr Lim Boon Keng!

b. Scene 19 Encountering Sorrows

Boon Keng's Presidential study—same overflowing desk, more Chinese artifacts. He is hosting 2 Chinese-American professors, both in Western dress. An attendant serves them from a big dish of triangular rice dumplings. Drinks are served. BOON KENG makes a toast:

BOON KENG My esteemed colleagues – merci beaucoup!

PROF 1 (American accent, returning toast) Thank you Mr President!

BOON KENG I have an interesting project to put before you. Here at Amoy University we seek to make ourselves a bridge between Eastern and Western learning! *(all nod agreeingly)* As a model of this ideal,

let us undertake the translation of one of the great works of Chinese poetry! We will translate it into the English language, for scholars throughout the world.

PROF 2 Poetry? I'm a scientist --

Prof 1 I don't read Chinese well --What work do you have in mind?

BOON KENG The great work called the Li Sao, by the poet Qu Yuan. The title translates as "An elegy on Encountering Sorrows."

PROF 2 Li Sao? I am afraid I know very little of our ancient literature.

BOON KENG (smiling) I think you will know this reference. We are now in the fifth lunar month, when we eat rice dumplings – and watch the racing Dragon Boats, cleaving the waters of our harbour, with the thrust of oars and the beat of drums. (*They all nod.*) This is in memory of the great poet Qu Yuan, a patriot and martyr of ancient times! Unjustly accused of disloyalty, as a final gesture of protest, he drowned himself in the river. The people threw rice dumplings into the water for his spirit. Many boats went out to search for his body – and in commemoration, now we see the dragon boats. (*distant sound of drums – continuing through the scene.*)

PROF 2 (*pleased to find something to relate to*) Rice dumplings and dragon boats!

BOON KENG The Li Sao is packed with references to astronomy and medicinal plants – a treasury of ancient science! Which is where I hope you can help me. (*They nod.*) The poem is full of complex allusions and metaphors. The names of plants, flowers, animals, hills, all have a hidden meaning. (*He shuffles papers, reads from printed Chinese text*) Here the poet says: I adorn myself with ai⁴ and chih³ and lan². These are various sweet-smelling plants –

PROFESSOR 2 (*Interjecting*) -- Artemesia, angelica, and the autumn orchid .

BOON KENG (*making notes*) Thank you! Metaphorically, he's referring to his own high morals and loyalty. When he says On the riverbank I collect su⁴ and man^{~3}

PROFESSOR 1. (*Interjecting*) These are evergreen plants –

BOON KENG Yes, they are evergreen, unchanging – thus he refers to his own constancy and integrity.

I translate: (he declaims, to the beat of the Dragon boat drums)

At dawn I drink magnolia's dew,

At dusk I sup on fragrant blooms!

I make my coat of water lilies,

Of lotus petals, my dress!

PROFESSORS Ahh!

BOON KENG The poet loyally served the king of Ch'u, but the King was seduced by corrupt ministers, who slandered Qu Yuan as a traitor. The poet writes of the king as a faithless woman --

(*declaims*) The beautiful lady pledged me her troth!

But she gave ear to false accusers.
They slandered me and named me traitor –
She forsook me and turned to other lovers!

The Li Sao is a political diatribe – veiled in literary symbols. It is the outpouring of a noble mind, encountering disappointment and betrayal. Qi Yuan searched in vain for the ideal ruler. Finally he drowned himself, in protest against being accused of disloyalty.

(declaims)

I'll seek through the world for the perfect woman!
With flying dragons and elephants of jade,
Four bright phoenixes shall draw my car!
I'll search to the ends of the earth!

How can my heart be forced to recant?
Though I'm rejected and betrayed,
I will die nine deaths before I give up!
I will sacrifice myself for a martyr's cause!

PROFESSOR1 Amazing sir.

PROFESSOR2 This is so deep, this is profound!

BOON KENG With your help, my dear colleagues, I will make an English translation that will be fully annotated with literary references and the Latin names of plants. It will be a milestone in opening up the wealth of ancient Chinese knowledge to Western eyes!

PROF 1 A capital idea, Dr Lim!

Prof 2 I'm on!

GRAPHIC- PUBLICATIONS- The Book of the Li Sao translation.

c. Scene 20 THE GREAT DEPRESSION

1932

Graphic: cartoons show Great Depression, collapse of world economy

song # 11 B RUBBER BOOM BOOM BOOM- reprise

ENSEMBLE

**Rubber rubber rubber rubber bust bust bust!
Money money money money turned to dust!**

Graphic: TAN KAH KEE speaks

WARRIOR OF THE MIND 2016

TAN KAH KEE My dear President, You must be aware that an economic Depression is afflicting the whole world. My business has suffered. I am regretful to tell you that I am longer able to support Amoy University as before. You yourself have never accepted a salary for your work, but there are really not enough funds for the staff. I hope you can assist, to find funding for the University.

BOON KENG (*writes letters at his desk*) I shall have to visit our friends in the Nanyang – those supporters who send their sons and daughters to study here!

GRACE Malaya! Java! Singapore! You should not have to keep on travelling! Tan Kah Kee promised he would provide the money! And you should start taking your salary as President! Your money from Singapore is getting less and less, I think you put the wrong people in charge of your business affairs. Tan Kah Kee should look after you!

(BOON KENG ignores Grace and sets out with a few followers assisting his now-feeble steps. "Busy-body" motif repeats, more agitated and anxious, as Boon Keng travels by steamer and train and carriage to Java and the Nanyang, meeting people, speaking and raising funds. He meets crowds in Java and begins to address them. At first his voice is weak. But his indomitable spirit revives and soon he is singing with inspiring vigour and donations pour in.)

SONG #15b HEAR MY APPEAL - Reprise,

BOON KENG

**Hear my appeal, our Amoy school so dear,
now requires all the aid her loyal students can bestow!**

**C1. You will support, her call you will heed,
you'll rise to help her hour of need!**

**V2. High is our aim, the school that we have raised,
Bravely burns like a flame, of learning in the night,**

**C2. You will not fail, your hearts are so true,
you'll give your best to keep it bright.**

**C3. You will not fail, your hearts are so true,
you'll give the best she asks of you!**

Your best – you'll give – your best!

Boon Keng visits Singapore. He meets Song Ong Siang in Ong Siang's home which displays his big history book and tokens of his knighthood. Both men are getting old and frail, but greet each other as friends since boyhood.

SONG ONG SIANG President Doctor Lim!!

BOON KENG Sir Ong Siang! So they've made you a knight eh? Where's your horse and your shining armour?

SONG ONG SIANG Oh I've left them at the Tower of London you know, it is just too much bother to keep on polishing that armour --

BOON KENG You are a shining example of the loyal King's Chinese. They've given you the honour, For your history writing, and the Singapore Volunteer Corps ---- Sir Song Ong Siang. Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire!.. Congratulations old chap.

SONG ONG SIANG They'd have done the same for you, if only you'd stayed in Singapore.

BOON KENG Ah well – I had to do battle in another sphere.

SONG ONG SIANG Why are you in Singapore now -- another fund-raising expedition?

BOON KENG Yes, on the way to Taiwan. Lots of our students come from Taipeh --,very keen scholars they are!

SONG ONG SIANG But you yourself – do you have time to be a scholar, an academic?

You seem to be on the road all the time, raising funds, pleading for money. What became of your dream, to build a unique school, integrating Confucian studies with Western learning?

BOON KENG It will happen one day. One day the Chinese people will rediscover the wisdom of their ancestors.

SONG ONG SIANG Give it up old man. I speak frankly to you, as your oldest friend. They will never understand your dream. It's time for you to retire gracefully, and come home, come back to Singapore. Stop struggling in vain.

BOON KENG Don't you know old boy –The warrior doesn't stop fighting, even when his cause seems lost. He does not abandon the struggle.

Bk is back in Amoy. Distant gunfire. The Japanese have invaded China. Boon Keng at his desk writes an article

Graphic PUBLICATIONS "On the current Japanese invasion of China."

GRACE: Boon Keng! You should not write articles against the Japanese. They will be angry with you.

BOON KENG Now is the time when all men of good will must speak up, must protest their crimes..

GRACE China isn't safe. We should go back to Singapore.

BOON KENG, I won't flee, while there is work here for me to do.

Graphic of Tan Kah Kee

TAN KAH KEE (*voice over*) My dear President, as I am no longer able to support the University, I have decided to transfer it to the Government of China, with much regret.

BOON KENG (*addresses Tan Kah Kee*) Dear Chancellor, I am sorry that Amoy University is to pass to the hands of the Chinese Government. With greatest respect, I now offer you my resignation, and hope to return home to Singapore.

BOON KENG gathers his family around him and they return to Singapore. Grace complains but he ignores her.

GRACE Boon Keng! You shouldn't have sold our house in Singapore. We haven't any money! Where are we going to live? What are we going to eat?

scene 21 RETURN TO SINGAPORE

Song # 19: CITY BY THE RIVER - ensemble

A song celebrating coming home to peace, tolerance and mutual understanding.

TO BE WRITTEN.

Yu Lin and her family meet them. Boon Keng gives child the paper ring off his cigar to wear on her finger. Song OS is there to greet him, embraces.

SONG ONG SIANG It's good to have you back in Singapore old boy. Don't worry about your accommodation, one of our friends has an old house where you can live...

We see him in his home at Patterson Hill with its attap roof, with his rose-wood furniture .. Scattered papers show that he continues to write article and make speeches. As before, community people do come in and seek his advice, pay respects.

Graphic: PUBLICATIONS Articles against Japanese aggression in China

CIVIC GROUPS Founded Straits Chinese China Relief Fund Committee – "to help China in the war against the Japanese."

Date 1941. BOON KENG sits in a rattan lounge, looking old and frail. NEWSPAPER Headline: **Death of Sir Ong Siang Song.**

SONG #14c LOSING MY FRIEND - short Reprise

BOON KENG

If I say I love you, maybe you'll know how I feel,
my dearest friend,
we were close as brothers, sharing our hopes and our dreams,
one mind and intent!

CH I'm losing you, you've gone away,
feels like I'm left to stay,
I don't want (to) say goodbye, won't say goodbye,
Will not forget you!

ACT FIVE

Scene 21 SECOND WORLD WAR

SONG #15b THE GUNS OF WAR

GOVERNOR AND ENSEMBLE OF PEOPLE

**The guns of war are roaring
The night is full of flame
The nations clash in conflict
The earth is racked with pain
The peoples cry in tumult
A darkness fills the skies
The storm is growing wilder
The angry waters rise`**

Graphic of British surrender; The British flag falls and the Japanese flag rises over the City.

Japanese soldiers march into Singapore – herd the civilians together including BOON KENG and family.

OFFICER: Who is Dr Lim Boon Keng? (Boon Keng and family are dragged forwards – Grace , servants, his sisters).

OFFICER You are the leader of the Singapore Chinese!

BOON KENG So they call me ...

OFFICER: You have written and spoken, to oppose the glorious military conquests of Nippon in China!

BOON KENG I did indeed.

OFFICER: For this you should die! (*Boon Keng smiles.*) But we will spare you. Work with us Dr Lim Boon Keng for peace and prosperity – teach your people to love Nippon!

BOON KENG (*quoting Qi Yuan*) I will die nine deaths before I give up!

GRACE (*wails*) Boon Keng! Give them what they want!

OFFICER: You will be executed –

BOON KENG (*smiles*) Meh si bo ku!

The Japanese seize Grace and make her kneel outside in the sun. Her wails come faintly .. Boon Keng!

His sister Yu Loo (now aged 65) comes to him, very distraught.

YU LOO Twa Koh – Twa Koh – Kim Hoe – Francis --

BOON KENG What's wrong?

YU LOO The soldiers -- they took Francis away. They beat Kim Hoe. They took Francis away in a lorry with other young men. When Kim Hoe tried to help him they beat him, he fell down -- what will happen to Francis?

BOON KENG (*muttering to himself*) Sook Ching ..

YU LOO They beat Kim Hoe – so much blood – I was so frightened...

BOON KENG (*heavily*) This is what I must do – for my people –

(*He approaches the Japanese commander, Shinozaki who is courteous and mild-mannered.*)

SHINOZAKI Dr Lim Boon Keng!

BOON KENG (bows and greets in English – to avoid Japanese honorifics) Colonel Shinozaki. Show mercy to my people sir.

SHINOZAKI Dr Lim, I request you to form a Friendship Committee to work with the Government of Syonan To. The Japanese government wishes friendship and peace to all.

BOON KENG Sir -- Your soldiers have taken away many of our people for execution. Can these men be released?

SHINOZAKI Give me a list of their names.

BOON KENG (*reflects to himself*) Surely peace can prevail -- When men of good will reason together! I will be a bridge between our people and these new rulers --

(*he bows to Shinozaki, accepting the job. The Overseas Chinese Association of Singapore Chinese businessmen forms around Boon Keng*)

Graphic – CIVIC GROUPS - Overseas Chinese Association.

We see strings of petitioners coming to Boon keng with papers. He intercedes with the Japanese soldiers to protect them from being beaten; takes the petitions, makes notes and promises helpful action.

The chorus of little girls from SCGS sings their theme song, "Light a Little Candle" in Japanese. It sounds thin and wistful.

SONG # 12b LIGHT A LITTLE CANDLE, Japanese version

A new Japanese commander marches in. and takes over duties from Shinozaki . Yamashita is the bad guy, arrogant and brutal.

YAMASHITA Dr Lim Boon Keng!

BOON KENG Admiral Yamashita.

YAMASHITA I hear that you are very good at raising funds.. I now ask Overseas Chinese Association to raise a friendly donation, from Straits Chinese to Japanese Emperor. Fifty million dollars.

OCA MEMBER (*stunned*) Fifty million dollars!

YAMASHITA Failure – will mean execution of all Committee members and their families.

(*Association members huddle and gesticulate, panicking.*)

BOON KENG Admiral, we can't do it. Even if all the members sell their homes, we cannot raise fifty million dollars.

YAMASHITA If you are executed, you will not require homes. And all the Chinese community will have to bear the consequences. (*exit*)

Boon Keng with two friends goes out fund-raising from donors. The same blocking as in earlier fund-raising scenes – but the mood is different. Boon Keng speaks to donors almost shame-facedly. He faces a crowd of traders and shopkeepers.

1st CROWD Lim Boon Keng! Why are you helping the Japanese?

2ND CROWD Why are you extorting money from us on their behalf?

3rd CROWD They use it to buy guns to kill our people.

BOON KENG My friends, Help us to raise the money – to save your families from the anger of the Nipponese!

SONG #2C DR LIM BOON KENG

CROWD (*Muttering, in unison*) **Boon Keng, he's a traitor. Boon Keng, collaborator.**

1st CROWD Their soldier are killing and raping our people. Why are you helping them!

BOON KENG If we don't co-operate – there will be more oppression, more brutality.

2ND CROWD They are forcing us to leave our homes, to go to Johore.

3rd CROWD They want us to make new settlements in the jungle.

BOON KENG Those who are strong, who are used to farming, should go. Better to escape from the city!

CROWD (*Muttering, in unison*) **Boon Keng, he's a traitor. Boon Keng, collaborator.**

Lets his people down!

Boon Keng poses with Yamashitata to hand him the cheque for \$50K. As a gesture of protest, he looks unhappy and does not smile. It is the moment of extreme humiliation and degradation for Boon Keng.

Graphic of the cheque handover

Boon Keng sits in his chair at home drinking, growing maudlin

BOON KENG What am I doing. Margaret -- what am I doing. Helping our enemies, our oppressors – It is the best I can do for my people. But I am working with the enemy. I wish I could die ..

Meh si boh ku Not long before I die .. I wish it could be soon. Meh Si boh ku.

Yamashita marches in

YAMASHITA Dr Lim!

Boon Keng acts senile and feeble and calls in a quavering little voice ..

BOON KENG Whiskey! Eh -- Whiskey!

YAMASHITA You must do more for the OCA! (*He shakes BOON KENG, is convinced he is really drunk*) I'll have you executed --

BOON KENG (*lifts a glass – giggling*) Meh Si boh Ku! (*Yamashita is fed up and leaves him alone.*

We hear the roar of planes and the almost subsonic rumble of the atomic bomb.

Graphic: A mushroom cloud rises..

The Japanese flag falls. British flag rises.

d. Scene 23 Tribunal

Boon Keng still sits in his chair, a tired old man. BRITISH GENERAL enters.

BRITISH GENERAL Dr Lim Boon Keng! For your activities during the recent war, you are charged with collaboration with the enemies of her Majesty's government . You will be brought before the Military Tribunal to answer the charges against you. *(British soldiers come to take Boon keng away.)*

GRACE *(screams)* You can't put him on trial! Don't you know who he is? He is Dr Lim Boon Keng, O.B.E !

BOON KENG stands in front of a military tribunal, a moment of humiliation.

ENSEMBLE *(mutters)*

**Boon Keng! could he be a traitor,
is he really true, to the British crown!**

**Boon Keng! that collaborator!
Nippon helper! Lets his people down!**

BOON KENG *(speaks firmly and gently – not concerned to defend or justify himself.)*

Gentlemen – you have raised questions about my loyalties and allegiance – to country, race and people. My race is the ancient race of China, from which my ancestors came. My people are the Babas and Nonyas, among whom I was born. My country is Singapore, a Crown Colony of the British Empire. I have served her in many ways, for many years.

As a doctor, I believe my first allegiance is to all humanity, to all men and women. My one chief goal must be to fight against suffering and ignorance everywhere. I have tried to let this principle guide me, in all my actions in the recent conflict. I am willing to be examined on this principle -- on my loyalty to the welfare of all the people of Singapore.

BRITISH GENERAL Dr Lim it is clear that you have acted from the highest motives. This tribunal is pleased to declare you not guilty of collaboration with the enemy.

(The chorus of criticism continues in background.)

ENSEMBLE *(mutters)*

Lim Boon Keng – traitor, traitor.

Lim Boon Keng – collaborator.

Scene 24: FINAL SCENE - MARGO VISITS BOON KENG

MARGO My father Robert Lim had worked in China before the Sino-Japanese war, as a Professor at the Peking Union Medical College, where his American credentials were much respected even though he didn't speak much Chinese. After the War Robert went back to China and became Surgeon General of the Republic of China, and head of the Chinese Red Cross.

GRAPHIC shows data on **Robert Kho-Seng Lim** (see Wikipedia)

Graphic: 1949. CHINA WINDOW Nationalist flag falls to the Red Star flag. The Blue map of China turns red

He returned to America just last year, when the communist Party took over China,. I was glad to see him again .. kind friends helped him find a University position and rebuild his life. I had more time to talk to my father. And after talking to him I had a desire, to come to Singapore to visit this grandfather whom I had never seen.

MARGO steps into the scene – Boon Keng's home in Singapore.

I've read as much as I could, about my grandfather's life. My father says that the old man is isolated now – almost a recluse. He is eighty-one now. He has withdrawn from all activities;

Few people come to see him – the allegations of wartime collaborations are still a shadow hanging over him. He lives quietly in the old house where a friend lets him stay rent-free.

BOON KENG (calls in a quavering voice..) .. Whiskey! –

Servant brings him whiskey in a glass. MARGO stands watching at a distance .)

MARGO Who is this grandfather of mine?

I see an old man wandering, maundering

Wearing out his days -- -- in a drunken haze ..

BOON KENG (*giggling to himself*) Merci beaucoup!

MARGO Old Man penniless and senseless,

Neglected and dis-respected ...

Is this the man my father used to praise?

MARGO (*speaks to BOON KENG*) Grandfather.

BOON KENG Ehh? Who are you?

MARGO I'm Margo from Illinois.

BOON KENG Margo? --

MARGO I'm Robert's daughter.

BOON KENG Robert's daughter! Margo. You are Margaret's grand-daughter. *(He seems to wake up -- his manner is like his old self – not senile at all)* You are welcome Margo, You are very welcome. Is your father well?

MARGO He is well – he sends you his love.

BOON KENG I am glad he got back safely to America. *(He Suppresses emotion in his old way – beckons servant to serve tea)* Your father did great work in China – As the Surgeon General, He rebuilt the whole system of China's medical education and medical research. It was a great undertaking.

MARGO I am proud of what he's done.

BOON KENG You can be prouder still of this, what I will tell you now: when Robert Lim left China he had no money, unlike other officials who enriched themselves. But he left behind him the Chinese Red Cross, in which every ambulance was fitted with its full complement of spare parts and medical supplies. Robert was almost penniless: he had taken nothing for himself. *(he nods proudly)* Margaret's eldest son.

MARGO But my father he had to flee from China when the Communists took over. Chairman Mao meant to kill anyone attached to the old regime --

BOON KENG Chairman Mao Tse-Tung. He is one of those who wants to eradicate the feudal past -- to wipe the slate clean before rebuilding the new China.

MARGO His followers kill scholars, burn old books, destroy old monuments ..

BOON KENG He means to wipe out every trace of China's ancient civilisation. If he has his way, all China will be overturned and all its ancient culture will be lost. This must not happen!

(Boon Keng is fired up. He speaks with the crusading zeal of a young man ready to conquer a new world)

BOON KENG There is still a way our great heritage may be preserved – if we, the Overseas Chinese, keep up the old traditions – even here in Singapore!

MARGO Singapore seems to be so British – the top people are English educated --

BOON KENG That will change, as the Empire fades away. Let the people of Singapore learn the Mandarin language. Let them study the ancient books, let them understand that the teaching of Confucius can be a guide for the modern world!

MARGO They would have to change their whole education system..

BOON KENG Ah my grand- daughter, I have spent a life-time struggling with education systems. This task I must leave to other hands. For today, let me do what still remains within me.

(Frail and indomitable, he gathers papers from his desk, ready to send out letters.)

I will call some friends together, the English educated Straits Chinese. I will urge them to study Chinese literature and culture, through talks – and lectures – and exhibitions. We will form a new group – the China Society.

Graphic: CIVIC GROUPS China Society 1950

People who look like modern Singaporeans gather around – including Yu Loo, Francis, Grace, one in all-white shirt and trousers; chorus of SCGS girls. There is an Inauguration ceremony with handshaking and document signing by committee members, with Boon Keng as President while the SCGS girls dance and sing .

BOON KENG With the inauguration of this Society, let there be men and women in Singapore, who are educated in the English language of the modern world -- who are also deeply versed in the culture and tradition of their fore-fathers!

ALL Yes – yes -- China Society! (etc)

BOON KENG Though darkness should fall over China, here in the Nanyang the flame of learning shall forever burn. *(He lifts a glass and toasts)* The China Society!

ALL The China Society!

BOON KENG (toasts) *Merci beaucoup!*

SONG #4B LAUGH AT LIFE

**V1. Laugh at life! be light of heart,
for you know there is no use in regretting,
you have to smile, a little while,
and no troubles will be troubling you.**

**Dance for joy, and raise a song,
make a happy sound of thanks for our living,
so ev'ry day, in ev'ry way,
we will find a time to say,
merci beaucoup.**

**Not long, before we die,
so laugh while the sun is shining,
no use repining, you don't have to cry,
you can laugh at life!**

**V2. Laugh at life, the time is short,
we should never let the grass grow beneath us,
We've got to strive while we're alive,
to achieve so much that we want to do.**

**Dance and sing when light grows dim,
we'll remember all the best of our story,
we'll smile and say at end of day,**

we give thanks for our living,
merci beaucoup.

Meh si boh ku, oh merci beaucoup, for ev'ry thing,
meh si boh ku, oh merci beaucoup,
we dance and sing,
merci beaucoup
merci beaucoup...!

BOON KENG sits in his chair and becomes very still.

MARGO My grandfather died in obscurity, almost neglected. But in the years since then his people have come to understand all he did for his people – for Singapore – for the world. Dr Lim Boon Keng.

I Margo starts to sing solo, the other people slowly join in and it swells to the final chorus.

Graphics scroll past for the first part of the song.

“Dr Lim Boon Keng died on 1 January 1957, the year that Singapore gained self-government from Britain.”

“His funeral was relatively insignificant and obscure. There were no displays of civic respect, no processions through the streets of Chinatown. He was buried in Bidadari Cemetery. His grave has since been removed.”

“Amoy University, for 50 years after being taken over the government of China, made no recognition of its Founding President”

For the second part of the song the following graphics scroll past:

“In 2004 Mr Lee Kuan Yew spoke of Dr Lim Boon Keng as “a true bi-culturalist, a model for modern Singapore to replicate.”

“Singapore Chinese Girls School continues to flourish within Singapore’s bi-lingual education system.”

“Lim Boon Keng is now recognized as a pioneer in interpreting Confucius in English and for the modern age.”

“In 2005 Amoy University erected a pavilion on campus in honour of Lim Boon Keng.”

“At Qing Ming each year, the President and staff of the University pay their respects to their founding President”

SONG #1B TELL ME WHO YOU ARE

MARGO AND ENSEMBLE

**Tell me who you are, why your story moves my soul,
why it leads me from the life I know, bids me seek for some higher goal!
V2 Tell me how you were, of your passion and your fire,
in the dullness of a world asleep, you awake, you arouse, inspire!**

C1 Careless time dims the years, unkind, fades the past away,

**and who now will recall all the deeds of your day?
C2 Who can say what remains of all you hoped and laboured to build,
past defeat, and past despair, your song lingers still!**

**V3 Tell us who you are, you've a message for us all,
through the silence of the years between, speak aloud, let us hear your call!**

**C3 Like a sound from afar, a soft whisper on the wind,
The new echoes arise, on the streets that you knew!
C4 Touch us now, share your dream, excite in us your vision of love,
We will sing your song as we remember!**

**BR Voice of your people, we're crying, calling, singing,
here by the river, we know you will not die!**

**v5 Tell me who you are, for your spirit is not gone,
in the city that recalls your name, still your dream, still your song lives on!**

Tell me who you are!

END -----