

**兰芳记**

**LAN FANG CHRONICLES**

CHOY KA FAI

(A Selection of Works from Archive)

## SYNOPSIS

### LAN FANG CHRONICLES

The Lan Fang Chronicles is a project inspired by the histories and investigations of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Lan Fang Republic (1777–1884) which was founded by the Hakka Chinese in West Borneo. The Republic lasted for 107 years before it disintegrated. Today it is nothing more than a fading legend for its living descendants. The project investigates the concept of “insignificant histories,” and its obscure parallels with the Singapore story.

The Lan Fang Chronicles presents a perspective of the Republic’s existence through an installation of speculative artifacts, archival materials and audio-visual documentaries. Each narrative draws from fact and fiction, memories and forgeries, history and myth—all to reconstruct what is and ultimately, to tell the story of what was, and what could have been of the Lan Fang Republic.

### LAN FANG REPUBLIC

The Lan Fang Republic was the first democratic republic in Southeast Asia, set up by the Hakka Chinese in West Borneo. Founded by Luo FangBo in 1777, the Republic existed for 107 years with ten presidents until it came to an end with the Dutch Occupation in 1884. The Chinese first came to Borneo as gold miners and formed various clans according to the area of their origins.

Originally known as Lan Fang Kongsí (Company), Luo FangBo united all the Hakkas in the area to form the Lan Fang Republic. After the Dutch invasion, the descendants fled across the region to Sumatra, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. While the Hakkas constitute a minority in Singapore, it is the Hakkas who played an important part in the establishment of Singapore as a cosmopolitan city-state today.

## **I AM NOT HAKKA. I AM SINGAPOREAN.**

BY CHOY KA FAI

History happens in moments where possibilities for a future exist.

The Lan Fang Chronicles project was inspired by a casual conversation with an amateur historian, who relates to me stories about early civilizations in Southeast Asia, from the pirates of Malacca, to the sultanates of Demak empire and the democrats of the Lan Fang Republic. I became very curious about the authenticity of the Lan Fang Republic.

The more I investigate, the more I was intrigued.

Why did this 18<sup>th</sup> Chinese colony not leave a bigger imprint on the history of our times? Why did we forget? Or perhaps I should ask, why did we not want to remember?

In Singapore, histories are often commercialized and politically enhanced. We choose what we want to remember and we decide what our future generation wants to remember. What other alternative do we have? And what was the history before Raffles? In 2009, I started this journey of the unknown, embarking on a process of research and excavation. When I travelled to the sites of significance, there was almost nothing to be found. As if, the evidence has evaporated with time, yet traces of precipitation lie suspended in the invisibilities of our collective memories.

The scarcity of its records had made it almost impossible to recollect. As I attempt to recover these fragments of a distant past, stories become histories, histories become myths, myths become memories and memories sometimes, become forgeries.

The project does not set out to depict historical events, but to recollect and reflect on the representation of these narratives. Maybe, through this journey of recovery, we may find a parallel universe to the Singapore story.



## RHAPSODY ON MY TRAVELS TO GOLD MOUNTAIN

### A POEM BY LUO FANGBO FOUNDER OF LAN FANG REPUBLIC

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Based on the original poem “Rhapsody of My Travels to Gold Mountain,” a lecture performance is created to trace the present-day journey made by artist Choy Ka Fai.

It is about his search for the remnants of the Lan Fang Republic as he went on various research trips to sites of historical resonance.

Ever since I heard about the beauty of Gold Mountain,  
My heart has yearned for this place.  
Although it belongs to the regions of  
the Southern Barbarians,  
Its confines are yet within the lands of the Southern Seas.

The year when the cycle attained ren chen, (壬辰)  
It was in the tenth month,  
I boarded a ship and departed at the harbour of Hu men, (虎门)  
The direction of those traveling South turned due East.

Hand in hand,  
assembled together,  
Friends and relatives,  
we were a hundred in number.

All in the same ship,  
we assisted each other,  
As the entire visible world vanished from sight.

At that moment I said to myself:  
When I boarded the ship at Hu men (虎门), and departed,  
I was sure that I would end up visiting  
the Sea Dragon's palace!

Soon faraway horizons and the vast skies above,  
opened my senses to the boundlessness of the universe.  
Underneath us no more earth to sustain us:  
It seemed that only a road through the clouds  
could help us to attain our destiny.

Like a leaf fluttering in the wind,  
flying ten thousand miles  
Good to make it in one stretch,  
making fine use of this sustained/favorable wind.

And then when we entered a small creek, the boatswain  
said: "We've reached Gold Mountain!"  
All I saw was a river full of red water,  
[skirted by] a long stretch of embankments.  
Trees packed closely together in deep forests,  
Tiny the waves over islets in shallow waters.

It seemed to be the immortals' cave Peach Spring,  
an immortal's cave  
Then I thought it must be a dwelling among willows,  
a house in the hills.

The [river's] banks are vaguely visible;  
the bluish sheen of a multitude of mountain peaks  
melting into the azure [of the sky],

A solitary peak rises in its lonely glory,  
the aspect of the mountains around it  
is equally splendid on all sides.  
A few trees in the setting sun,  
A rill of autumn water.

When the moon has just begun to rise,

On all sides the cries of monkeys sound.  
Nowhere is heard the flute of the cow-herd or the song of  
the wood-gatherer,  
Where can one find a lofty man or a recluse?  
Where the mountains come to an end and the river as well,  
the murmuring stream moves my heart.

\* \* \*

I am a man of only few talents,  
The fierceness of my willpower carries me far.  
My work is hard, as I live by my tongue,  
to toil at the ink-slab, that is the field I till.

I am ashamed of not having the capital to engage in trade,  
Regret not to be a renowned scholar or a lofty master.  
Employed as a teacher in this foreign land,

the years and months go by without any meaning,  
I hurry along the road—when the time to return arrives.  
I shall bundle up [my possessions] forthwith.

Forced to become a trader,  
I am unafraid to wander ten thousand miles  
But as the family is poor, my parents old,  
I always am sad that this guest country  
is at three thousand miles away from them.

Thus over these encircling waters and white clouds,  
I keep my hope alive from morning till night,  
That one day the fortune of my family will be made  
so that we can enjoy a carefree life in peace  
and abundance.  
Alas! in this barbarian dwelling under torrential rains,  
my body wastes away under heavy toils.

Did I not wish then to emulate [the Earl of] Dingyuan?  
What pleasure can I find in comparison with a high  
court official!

me going to this far place, changing my country,  
I who originally wanted to become as rich as Sir Tao zhu!  
(陶朱公)

Now, having climbed to this high place to compose  
this rhapsody,  
it truly has become the expression of the emotions  
of a poet.

Hence I have made the following song:  
Here I stand high, on the loftiest top of ten  
thousand mountains,  
Black clouds and rain encircle me on all sides,  
Among this great scenery of mountains and waters,  
I cannot but weep at all these wasted years!



## THE DE GROOT COLLECTION

BY  
NG YI-SHENG

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The De Groot Collection is a collection of 20 speculative artifacts inspired by the western records of Lan Fang Republic. These objects propose the foundation for a future archive of relics and artifacts; they act as the physical manifestation of narratives, re-enactments, myths, forgeries and memories. The collection is named after Dutch Sinologist J.J.M De Groot who published the earliest known and most comprehensive western document on the Lan Fang Republic (Het Kongsiwezen van Borneo) in 1885.

I.

Let's start at the beginning.

It was 1777.

An age of discovery, an age of revolution.

In America, Washington was fighting for freedom.

Oxygen was named in France.

Captain Cook became the first white man on Christmas Island.

In Borneo, workers gathered to build a mighty kongsì hall.

They cut marble from the mountains to construct a fortress gate

The scholar Luo FangBo stood by and began his nation's calendar:

this marked Year One of the Lan Fang Republic.

In 1778,

Year Two of the Lan Fang Republic,

he went forth among his wild, barbarian neighbours.

He forged peace between the races

and accepted precious gifts of polished skulls,

while his Dayak wife interpreted his language.

In 1779,  
Year Three of the Lan Fang Republic,  
he led an expedition through the jungle.  
In the wild, he found his fortune.  
Soon, his men worked grand machines,  
crushing earth and churning rivers into gold.

In 1780,  
a year of triumph.  
He seized his brush and inkstone for a song of celebration.  
He praised the kongsi's progress  
and mocked his idiot doubters.  
"Swallows and sparrows," he proclaimed,  
"how can they understand the minds of geese and swans?"

His lips, he said, were halberts,  
his tongue a sharpened sword,  
his scholar's voice still trembled like the thunder.

## II.

1782. Bangkok was built.  
Russia invaded Chechnya.  
It was Year Six of the Lan Fang Republic,  
a year of famine.

1783. The Montgolfier brothers  
flew up in a hot air balloon.  
It was Year Seven of the Lan Fang Republic.  
The famine did not end.

In the paddy fields, rice refused to grow.  
The sugarcanes bloomed with blight.  
Even the harvest of the fishermen  
seemed light and full of bones.  
The children wept with hunger.  
The women gnawed their lips.  
The men smoked clouds of opium  
to forget.

1784. Luo FangBo's wife  
dug into her jewelry,  
her rings of orchids  
spun from molten gold.

She commanded Huang Anba of Zhenping district  
to exchange their worth for food.  
She watched him leave.  
But he did not return.

Luo FangBo was furious.  
Thereafter, all Lan Fang  
would trust only men of Jiayingzhou  
to rule the kongsi council.  
All that year, they gathered roots  
and lived on dreams of smoke.  
Then the famine lifted.  
The Dayak wife bore Luo FangBo a son.

### III.

Year Thirteen of the Lan Fang Republic.  
Revolutionaries storm the Bastille.  
A schoolhouse opens,  
staffed with scholars, shipped in from the mainland.  
Young boys absorb the classics and the ethics  
of Confucius.  
They bear their teachers gifts of hunted boar meat.

Year Fifteen of the Lan Fang Republic.  
Mozart writes The Magic Flute.  
All wayward youths are apprehended, punished by  
the book.  
Those who vandalise the walls with words are flogged  
with wooden sticks.  
Those who brawl are fined red silk and candles.

Year Seventeen of the Lan Fang Republic.  
The Reign of Terror.  
Luo FangBo stands before the Mandor River,  
plagued with crocodiles.  
He wades the waters,  
and how the people clap their hands in joy  
as he harnesses the beasts  
with sturdy reins of rope and leather.

How they laugh to watch these monsters, now as tame as  
common mules.

How they beat their drums, to exile them in the swamplands.

Year Nineteen.

Qianlong abdicates.

The smallpox vaccine is invented.

Kamehameha unites the Hawaiian islands.

Luo FangBo is dead.

His wife kneels at his tomb.

It is 1795.

All Lan Fang weeps.

They choose another leader.

#### **IV.**

Four years of bloodshed follow.

The Sultan of Mampawa wages war.

Look how he wields his keris, but Lan Fang blocks its thrust.

They choose another leader.

Four more years of blood.

The Dayak tribes revolt.

Lan Fang answers them with mounted cannons.

A shaky peace descends.

Trade resumes.

Mines keep on digging.

But still, the kongsi calls the boys together  
so they may march.

In the fields, they bear their sickles, swords and spears  
and maces.

The young men become strong men.

The strong men become old.

#### **V.**

1811.

Year Thirty-five.

They choose another leader.

And yet the ground is shifting from their feet.

A Dutch flotilla charges in  
with guns and ships and taxes.

They stamp a treaty and they seal their fates.

Venezuela rises.

Napoleon battles England.

They pay their annual tribute  
with their golden, tarnished coins.

They call out to Luo FangBo,  
whose soul is wandering in Nirvana.

They declare him god.

They paint him on a puppet for their altar.

They whisper in his temple.

But Luo FangBo is dead.

Elsewhere,

Raffles settles Singapore.

Jane Austen writes her novels about love.

## **VI.**

Year Forty-seven.

1823.

Photography is invented.

Photography is invented!

Beethoven conducts his Ode to Joy.

They choose another leader.

Victoria takes the throne.

Telegraph lines are laid.

They choose another leader.

They choose another leader.

The Opium Wars break out.

The Irish die of famine.

They choose another leader.

They choose another leader.

The Communist Manifesto.

Gunboats in Japan.

Taiping Rebellion.

The Origin of Species.

The US Civil War.

The Suez Canal.

France invades Cambodia.

Man invents barbed wire, traffic lights, the telephone.

They choose another leader.

Wagner writes Das Rheingold.

They choose another leader.

Edison produces light.

They choose another leader.

The continent of Africa

is carved up between Europe like a cake.

### **VIII.**

And it is 1884.

There is nothing left to choose.

Year One Hundred Seven of the Lan Fang Republic.

Night falls upon the land.

An ancient Dayak widow takes the stage.

She wears a mask recalling carnivals and faded operas.

Beneath the moon, she dances.

The language of her song resists interpretation.

She holds a flag now withered from its fortress.

A Dutchman enters.

He stammers out his name: JM De Groot.

He surveys all he sees and starts to write.

Then he disappears. And then the story ends,

leaving only pages of impressions, half-translated.

Leaving only this, a blueprint for a monument unbuilt.

Leaving this, a room of artefacts

still empty.



## I AM THE ARCHIVIST AND THIS IS MY ROOM

BY  
YAK AIK WEE

### I. Deer Hunting

It was about 3am when I first came across this in the stack. And I found myself staring at it. Maybe I was sleepy and my mind wasn't working well, but there was something unusual about this picture.

This picture is entitled Deer Hunting on the Island of Borneo and it is dated 1865.

One thing struck me when I saw this. This looks to me, like a painting that is typical to China. I mean, hunting on horseback—that was something Mongolians had deep in their culture. But the men in this picture are clearly not Chinese. So how did this come about? Did such a scene actually occur in Borneo in that year? Were there deer in Borneo?

Yes, deer are native to Borneo and they're called Sambar. But horses?

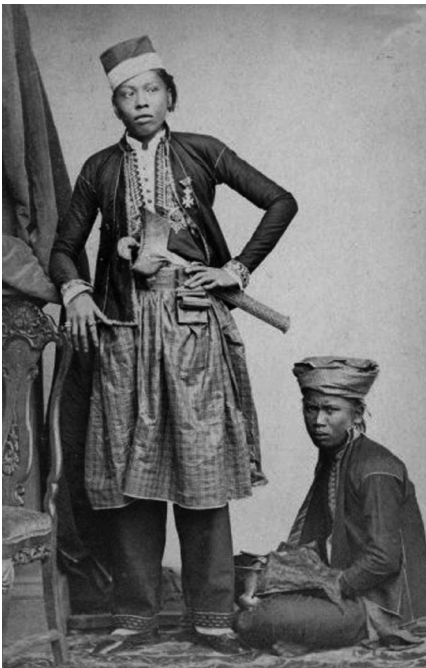
Surely horses are not native to these parts. In my research, I found records of "one horse" in Borneo at that time, and that was given to a Sultan, as a gift. One horse. So why are there so many horses in this picture?

There can be three possibilities.

One. The Sultan bought another horse and bred them. And then he got the Chinese to teach his princes to hunt for deer on horseback.

Two. This picture was wrongly labeled. It should have been India.

Three. That this is a symbol of the commissioner's political ideals. That the Malays rode on the Chinese, represented by the horses, and they hunted Dayaks, represented by the deer.



## **II: Dayaks, Malays, Chinese and others**

There were four main races in Borneo at that time—the Dayaks, the Malays, the Dutch and the Chinese.

So, with these four different races living together, you might ask, how did they get along and were there any conflicts? The answer to that, is as you can expect in any multi-racial environment. Diplomatic relationships, yes, but conflict still exists.

### **The Malays**

The ruling Malays, unfortunately, were not very well-regarded by the Chinese or the Dayaks. Behind their backs, the Chinese miners would secretly call the Malay Sultan “Zei Tou,” which means “Head of Thieves.”

That wasn't very nice, but there's no smoke without fire.

You see, in the first place, it was the Sultans who invited the Chinese over to mine for gold, because they had superior mining techniques. Yet, at the same time, they levied such heavy taxes on the Chinese miners that it became just plain exploitative. And—there's more—the Sultanates would sometimes incite trouble between the Dayaks and the Chinese, so that when the Chinese needed help, they had no one to turn to but the Sultans, and when they did, they would have to bring gifts along with them as well.

So perhaps that was how that Sultan came to be saddled with such unflattering nicknames. Zei Tou.

### **The Dayaks**

The Dayaks were indigenous to the land, so they were there first. So how did it come about that the Malays who came after them, would be ruling the land? Although their numbers exceeded the Malays, they were not united as a whole. Traditionally, they would live their entire lives within their own tribes, in deep, forested areas,



independent and separate from all other tribes.

Now, although there were countless tribes of Dayaks, and all of them were different, they had their own cultures and their own laws; one practice that appeared to be universal among them, was headhunting.

You can see in this picture, a small community of Dayaks in their longhouse, and hanging above them... their trophies. For them, more heads equate to more power.

### **Shared Ancestries**

But, in spite of this gruesome practice, the Chinese actually believed that the Dayaks and them share similar ancestral roots. That's freaky, isn't it?

This belief didn't come from nowhere. In fact, it can be traced to several legends.

In this particular one, we have the First Emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang Di, who some of you will know to be obsessed with immortality. So legend has it, that in his lifetime, he launched international expeditions across the seas to obtain drugs of Immortality. Approximately 4000 of those who were sent on these expeditions never

returned. My point is, these legends contribute to the belief that the Chinese who got left behind on these expeditions, somehow became the ancestors of the Dayaks. So that's the connection between the Dayaks and the Chinese.

But I was still intrigued by the Dayak's practice of headhunting. I looked further and this was what I found. At one time, long ago in China, soldiers who went to battle were paid according to how many heads they collected. And this was during... the Qin Dynasty as well. After that dynasty, according to Wikipedia, headhunting ceased to be practiced in China.



### **The Chinese**

We can imagine the work of Chinese miners to be highly physically demanding. Now look at this picture of our Chinese miners. They lived economically. They tried their best to spend less and save more. A typical workday for them would begin at 4am. And I remember reading somewhere that they slept only two hours everyday, from 11pm till 1am. Now, this lifestyle and work were considered too demanding for the locals, even for the Dayaks. Only the Chinese could endure this. But what's

the logic behind that, you might ask?

You see, most of these Chinese miners came from very poor backgrounds, and when they came to Borneo, it was for one single purpose—to earn money. So that when they have earned “enough,” they could return for a better life, back home in China. Inspired by success stories in their hometowns, the influx of the Chinese continued until the 1820s. That was when the Chinese population hit 60,000. That made them a formidable force in West Borneo.

By that time, according to statistics, the ratio of men to women, was 10:1. That was for the Chinese population. But counted inside, were also Dayak women.



### **Chinese and Dayak Marriages**

This picture is but one of many, a Dayak wife of a Chinese merchant. Most of the Chinese men came to Borneo alone, and they would spend years there. During that time, it was normal for them to seek female companionship. But why the Dayaks?

There can be two reasons.

One. As mentioned earlier, the Chinese saw the Dayaks as sharing similar ancestral roots, so they naturally felt closer to that race.

Or Two. That by marriage, they could ally with the Dayaks, and by doing so, they could form a stronger force against the Malays. And in fact, that worked, because the Sultanates would gradually find it more difficult to get Dayaks to attack the Chinese. And on the Dayak side, whenever one of their women married a Chinese, her entire tribe would come under the protection of her husband's Kongsu. So the benefits were mutual.

Marriages between Chinese and Dayaks became common. This was especially so during the early years when the Chinese population was still expanding.

Even the founder of the republic, Luo FangBo, had a Dayak wife. In the Lan Fang Chronicles, she was described as being the perfect example of Confucian virtue. She was also mentioned as being an immense help in the establishment of the republic.

So having a Dayak wife was seen as something desirable. But that was for those who could afford it.

This is a picture of one of those weddings. The price of a Dayak wife in those days, was between one to four taels of gold. For the Chinese miners who had upgraded themselves to become merchants, they could have more

than one wife. For the poorer ones, well... they had options too.

They could put their money together, and share one wife. Yes. Hard to believe, but true! But what's even more bizarre, is that these Dayak wives had privileges that were unheard of in any other culture. For instance, she was allowed to have lovers outside of her marriage, and if she had earned enough money, she could actually buy back her freedom. Although there were instances of marriages between Dayaks and Malays, do note that during this period, there were no records whatsoever, of any marriages between Chinese and Malays.



### **Hitachi: Children of Chinese and Dayaks**

So along with the Chinese men and Dayak women, we have a new generation of half-bloods. They were called “Petompang” in Dutch, “Bantangfan” (半唐番) in Chinese, and nowadays in Bahasa, “Hitam Tapi Cina,” which means “Black but Chinese.” In short, they were called “Hitachi.”

These Hitachi were educated the Chinese way, but being half-bloods at a time when it wasn't fashionable, it did not do any good for their social standing. They were often

treated as second-class citizens.

That is, until the time of war.

While Chinese men, in the eyes of the Dutch, were often portrayed as cowards, these Hitachi children would often grow up to be men known for their courage and fighting skills, and this made them very valuable in times of war.



### **The Dutch**

While they were officially the ones in charge of the region, they functioned more as caretakers and observers. They did not live among the other three races, and their presence among them had always been somewhat passive. It wasn't until the 1850s that the Dutch began to exert their authority.

### **All Races in Harmony**

This photograph was taken in the 1880s with the Sultan of Sambas, for his wedding anniversary. About a hundred

years had gone by since the founding of the republic. Up till then, there had been constant squabbling, plotting and wars among the different racial groups represented in this photograph.

If they had such a thing as Racial Harmony Day, this might be a good illustration of it.



### III. The Last President

In this photograph you have a little boy, dressed as an emperor, riding a white rabbit in a staged temple ritual. This little boy is the grandson of Liu Asheng, the last President of Lan Fang Republic.

After the Luo FangBo, Liu Asheng was the most important president. He stood out not only as the president who served the longest—a total of 32 years, but also as the president who introduced changes that altered the structure of his democratic government.

For instance, during a four-year break in his term, he actually bypassed the election system, which had been in place since the founding of the republic, and appointed

his own son as the succeeding president. Sources also say that he gave his wife an important appointment in his governing administration.

This information, of course, was taken from outside of the Lan Fang Chronicles which, you know, portrayed their presidents as... heroes with divine powers.

And there's more. Recently, some documents have surfaced that revealed a conspiracy between Liu and a Kongsu in the north against the Dutch. Yet, according to the Chronicles, at that time Liu was working with the Dutch to maintain peace in the region, for six years.

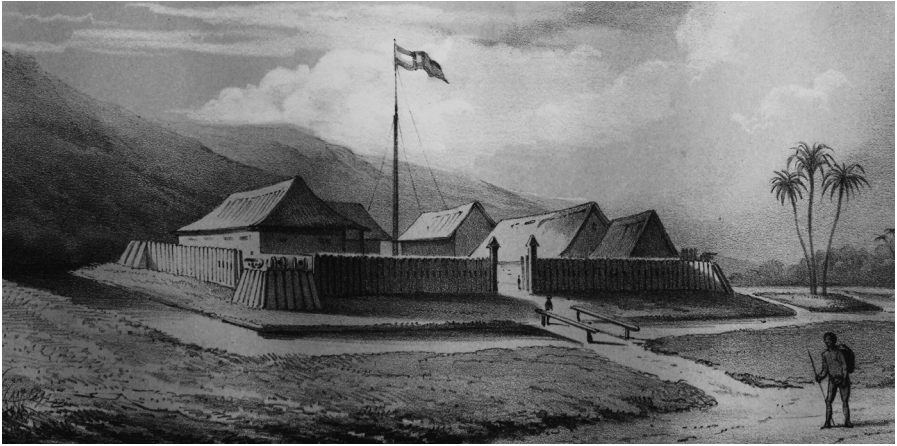
After Liu Asheng passed away in 1884, which was the same year the republic collapsed, his widow assisted the Dutch in the takeover.

#### **1884: The End of the Lan Fang Republic**

Although 1884 is the official year that the Lan Fang Republic collapsed, in the material I had gathered, it was mentioned that the republic actually went on for two more years, under the reign of Liu Asheng's son-in-law, this boy's father. And who also happens to be the author of the Lan Fang Chronicles.

Whether it was 1884 or 1886, that is something I cannot verify now.

But what we do know for a fact, is that this little boy, his name is Ye Ming Hui, never grew up to become President.



### MEMOIR OF THE VISITORS

WITH EXCERPTS FROM  
J.HACCOÛ, E.DOTY  
AND W.POHLMAN

*"It was on the night of September 28 and 29 that we were continually disturbed in our sleep by the incessant salvos of rejoicing fired by the Chinese of Mandor; the feast was to be celebrated in the presence of Captain Nipo, who intended to enter the fraternity or to unite with the people at Mandor. The day before some five to six hundred Dayaks from the surrounding localities had arrived, and the same night a crowd of Chinese from Senaman, Guniet, Mamee and elsewhere, who spent the night at the gambling house at Mandor, wasting their money.*

*I put on my cloak and walked into the Kampong. My eyes beheld a strange scene and truly worthy of the brush of the immortal Rembrandt. The entire Kampong was lit up like a garish fire, on all sides there were huge lamps burning or pans with oil in which [floated] five or six wicks; in front of nearly all the houses they had erected their gambling tables, but most of these were especially close to the kongsi house, where by the light of an incredible number of the aforementioned lamps some two hundred Chinese were playing at various tables, uttering the most ghastly cries, and displaying as many different characteristics to the eye of the observant spectator.*

*I have, however, no matter how hard I tried, never been able to gauge their game of cards.*

*From there I entered the kongsi house, where the major [H.A. Henrici] and Van Ende were also present. I forced my way through the crowd and found myself a small spot close to the Dabogong.*

*Three or four tables with piles of roast geese, chickens, or ducks, of which several were painted completely red and others had been mangled in different monstrous ways, stood at different distances from the Dabogong.*

*The captains of the surrounding localities and the heads of the Chinese at Mandor, all swathed in cloaks and wearing on their heads round and upwardly tapering bonnets made of bamboo openwork, walked around the tables in procession, and offered a piece of the larded chicken or duck to the Dabogong each time they passed in front of the main altar. The dishes from which pieces had been taken were all returned to the kitchen, where the fare, cut up into small pieces, was prepared for breakfast.*

*The procession lasted for about one hour. Then they all gathered together inside a building of the kongsi house. And it was here, as Captain Nipo later told me, that the heads pricked each other in the arm, caught the blood that flowed in small cups and each had to take a small taste from this, by which the fraternity and the oath of mutual loyalty and friendship was established. I was not able to see this, as no European was allowed to be present at this ceremony.*

*We returned to our house and slept a few more hours. However, we were woken up as early as six o'clock in the morning in order to be present at the remainder of the festivities. From all sides people poured into the kongsi house and seated themselves in circles on the floor. Soon large mats were brought, and one would have to see for oneself the enormous amount of dishes that were brought in, and one would be even more astounded by the sheer animal greed to which a man can surrender himself, as I*

*have witnessed here.*

*I will therefore pass over in silence the gluttony of the Chinese, as this will seem to be too utterly incredible to many, and soon I left in disgust a place at which I had seen man so much debased. Not far from the kongsi house itself, a shed had been erected. Here a number of Dayaks had assembled who, standing together in several groups, awaited the time at which Chinese would have ended their meal, and they on their turn could feast on the leavings. Which is another proof of the changes of fortune and the uncertainties of this world.*

*The Dayak, the original inhabitant of Borneo, the rightful owner of these rich lands, is overruled by the gold-thirsty Chinese, and is not allowed to reap the fruits yielded by the fertile hereditary lands of his forebears.”*



This is an unfinished manuscript relating the travels, which the author undertook in 1830 under the guidance of Major H.A. Henrici, military commander in South Borneo. These dates correspond to the twelfth and the thirteenth day of the eighth lunar month of that year, that is to say, the second festival of the Chinese deity Guan Gong.

This was an important date for the renewal of alliances, and the moment when the newly arrived immigrants enter the kongsis. Leaders were also elected on this day.

All this was a mystery to Haccoû, who noted what he saw.

Eight years later, two American missionaries—Pohlman and Doty visited Montrado and Mandor. Being less commercially oriented, they had more of an eye for their surroundings. The missionaries stressed what they termed “the happy condition of Montrado.”

When they visited Mandor, they found Chinese coolies to carry their luggage and “faithful and willing Dayaks” to act as guides. Their principal source of concern came from “the deceitfulness and double dealing of the Malay guides and coolies.”

It took them three days to reach Mandor, and they were well-received thanks to a letter of introduction from the headman of Montrado. The next day (22 November 1838), they were taken on a tour of the place:

*“After breakfast, we were furnished with two guides, who conduced us through the village, and to two mines now in operation; one of them is very large, employing 150 men. Mandor lies on a branch of the Kapaus river, about seventy miles from the sea.*

*It is situated in a more mountainous region than any place we have seen, excepting Sambas, and everything around us presents a different aspect.*

*There is one principal street, about a quarter of a mile in length, with others running parallel and some at right angles. The houses are in good order, and well built. Most of them are constructed of wood, and covered with shingles.*

*The streets are unusually wide for a Chinese village, and remarkably neat and clean. We were somewhat surprised at the small number of inhabitants. Compared with Montrado, we were reminded of the deserted towns in America, during the prevalence of the cholera. Instead of being literally crammed, as is generally the case, so that one can scarcely move without treading on his neighbour, the dwellings are larger than usual, and few, if any, inhabit each.*

*A satisfactory explanation of this is given us in the fact that most of the mines are exhausted, and the people are resorting to other places where their toil will meet with a surer reward.*

*It is now about sixty years since Mandor was founded. The Kap-tai (District Mayor) informed us that there are 2000 persons in the village, and about 4000 residing within his jurisdiction.*

*Three village schools are sustained. The Chinese here are the same as those at other places. They call themselves Canton men, but speak the Kheh (Hakka) dialect."*

## CHOY KA FAI

### BIOGRAPHY

- 1979 Born in Singapore. Choy Ka Fai an artist, performance maker and speculative designer. He is inspired by the histories and theorizations that together contain the uncertainties of the future. His research springs from a desire to understand the conditioning of the human body, its intangible memories and the forces shaping its expressions. These factors converge into complex articulations at the intersection of art, design and technology.
- 2002–2004 *Diploma in Multimedia Art*, Lasalle College of the Arts, Singapore
- 2003- 2009 *Kill Your Television (KYTV) Artist Collective*, Singapore
- 2007 - 2009 *Associate Artistic Director*, TheatreWorks Singapore
- 2009 - 2011 *Master of Art, Design Interactions*, Royal College of Art, London, UK
- 2014 - 2015 *International Studio Program*, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany

### PERFORMANCE WORKS & SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2014 *The Choreography of Things: Trailer Show*, Arebyte Gallery, London, UK  
*Notion: Dance Fiction*, December Dance, Bruges, Belgium  
*Notion: Dance Fiction*, Danse Festival Barents, Hammerfest, Norway  
*Notion: Dance Fiction*, Platform Media Festival, Moscow, Russia  
*Soft Machine Trailer Exhibition*, Esplanade Visual Art Space, Singapore  
*Soft Machine: Indonesia*, Indonesia Dance Festival, Jakarta, Indonesia.  
*Soft Machine: Indonesia*, Critical Path, Sydney, Australia  
*Soft Machine: Indonesia*, Parasite, Shaw Creative Center, Hong Kong  
*Soft Machine: Indonesia*, In-Out Dance Festival, Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso
- 2013 *Notion: Dance Fiction*, 25<sup>th</sup> Tanz Im August, Berlin, Germany  
*Notion: Dance Fiction*, 18<sup>th</sup> Exodos Festival, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
*Cortex*, 4<sup>th</sup> Digital Art Performance Prize, Taipei, Taiwan  
*Soft Machine: India*, Attakkalari Biennale, Bangalore, India
- 2012 *Soft Machine: Japan*, Kyoto Experiment, Kyoto Art Center, Japan  
*Soft Machine: Japan*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Kobe Asia Contemporary Dance Festival, Japan  
*Notion: Dance Fiction*, Kyoto Experiment, Kyoto Art Center, Japan  
*Notion: Dance Fiction*, Esplanade Dans Festival, Singapore  
*Lan Fang Chronicles 2*, Singapore Arts Festival, Ying Foh Kuan, Singapore  
*Prospectus For A Future Body*, Future Perfect, Gillman Barrack, Singapore
- 2011 *Notion: Dance Fiction*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Inshadow Festival, Lisbon, Portugal  
*Notion: Dance Fiction*, Festival Tokyo Tokyo, Japan  
*Notion: Dance Fiction*, Move Me Festival, STUK, Leuven, Belgium
- 2010 *Lan Fang Chronicles 1*, Singapore Art Museum@8Q, Singapore
- 2009 *Revolution-Per-Minute*, TheatreWorks Main Season, 72-13, Singapore
- 2008 *Reservoir*, TheatreWorks Main Season, 72-13, Singapore  
*DanceDanceDance*, TheatreWorks Main Season, 72-13, Singapore
- 2007 *Drift Net*, TheatreWorks Main Season, 72-13, Singapore
- 2006 *Not For Exhibition Purpose*, 8<sup>th</sup> Taipei Art Festival, Taiwan
- 2005 *Not Available On Print Date*, Esplanade Theatre Studio Season, Singapore  
*Not Available On Print Date*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Fukuoka Asian Art Triennial, Japan
- 2004 *Design For Death*, Esplanade Theatre Studio Season, Singapore
- 2003 *Design For Death*, 7<sup>th</sup> Seoul Fringe Festival, South Korea
- 2014 *Design and Violence*, Online Project, Museum of Moderne Art, New York USA  
*5<sup>th</sup> Tokyo art Meeting*, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Japan  
*Networked Bodies Festival*, Waterman Art Center, London, UK  
*Modern Love*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, Singapore

### SHOWINGS & GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 3<sup>rd</sup> *Kobe Asia Contemporary Dance Festival*, Art Area B1, Osaka, Japan
- 2013 *Ghost: The Body At the Turn of The Century*, Sculpture Square, Singapore  
*In The Curve of The Wanton Sea*, Esplanade Theatre Studio  
Season, Singapore
- 2012 *Electric Futures*, King Cross Filling Station, London, UK  
*Hacked@La Rinascente*, Milan Design Week, Milan, Italy  
*14<sup>th</sup> Japan Media Art Festival*, National Art Centre Tokyo, Japan
- 2011 *Curious Mind*, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel  
*The Show*, Royal College of Art, London, UK
- 2010 *Celeste Prize: Finalist Exhibition*, Invisible Dog, New York, USA  
*Alpha-Ville: Festival of Post-digital Culture*, White Chapel Gallery, London, UK  
*Mode: Demo*, Geneva International Conference Centre, Switzerland  
*Window to the World*, Hiroshima Museum of Contemporary Arts, Japan
- 2009 *2<sup>nd</sup> Asia Art Biennale*, National Taiwan Gallery of Fine Arts,  
Taichung, Taiwan  
*At Home Abroad*, Singapore Art Museum@8Q, Singapore
- 2008 *The Poetic of Space*, Khokhlovskaya Manufactory, Moscow, Russia  
*8<sup>th</sup> Coke Fat Festival*, Bangkok, Thailand  
*9<sup>th</sup> Indonesian Dance Festival*, Jakarta, Indonesia
- 2005 *Space and Shadow*, Haus Der Kulture Der Welt, Berlin, Germany  
*Omong Kosong Series*, Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta, Indonesia  
*Insomnia Season*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, UK
- 2004 *Insomnia48*, The Art House, Singapore

PERMANENT  
COLLECTIONS

*Singapore Art Museum*

**IMPRINT**

LAN FANG  
CHRONICLES:  
A PROJECT BY  
CHOY KA FAI

This project had collaborated with:

Jeff Chen, Robin Loon, Ng Yi Sheng, Yak Aik Wee, Zizi Azah, Lok Meng Chu, Nora Samosir, Serene Chen, Najib Soiman, Yak Aik Wee, Patricia Toh, Bright Ong, Rizman Putra, Mohd Fared Jainal, Stefen Chow, Vivian Lee, Charles Lim, Zulkifli Mahmud, Juliana Ong, Andy Lim "stage live" and Alt Studio.

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TEXT

A Timeline of Lan Fang Chronicles

Compiled by Choy Ka Fai

Rhapsody on My Travels to Gold Mountain

Written by Luo FangBo  
Translation excerpted from Yuan Bingling, *Chinese Democracies, a Study of the Kongsis of West Borneo* (1776–1884)

The De Groot Collection

Written by Ng Yi-Sheng  
For the installation performance of Lan Fang Chronicles at the Singapore Art Festival 2012

I Am The Archivist And This Is My Room.

Written by Yak Aik Wee  
For the installation performance of Lan Fang Chronicles at the Singapore Art Festival 2012

Memoir of the Visitors

With excerpts from *Fragments of a journey on the West Coast of Borneo in 1980*, J.Haccoû *Tour of Borneo in 1938*, E.Doty and W.Pohlman

IMAGE

Unknown Cartographer, Lan Fang Republic Map, 1961/2014  
 Choy Ka Fai, Luo FangBo as a Chinese Warrior, 2009; P4  
 Choy Ka Fai, The Degroot Collection—Speculative Artifacts 2012; P8  
 UnKnown Artist, Deer Hunting on the Island of Borneo, 1865; P14  
 Unknown Photographer, Sultan of Kalimantan, 1895; P15  
 Herfst-Nieuwenhuis Collection, Dayak Longhouse, 1896; P17  
 Unknown Photographer, Chinese Miners in Borneo, 1890; P18  
 Woodbury & Page/Java, Dayak Woman and Hitachi Children, 1870; P21  
 Unknown photographer, Dayak Man and Woman, 1890; P19  
 Herfst-Nieuwenhuis Collection, 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sultan of Sambas  
 1891: P15  
 Woodbury & Page/Batavia, Chinese Children in Makassar 1880; P21  
 Unknown Artist, Fort Te Sambas, 1823; P25  
 Herfst-Nieuwenhuis Collection, Kapoeas River in Borneo, 1900; P27

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