

# Lee Kong Chian Research Fellowship

**Curious about the National Library's Lee Kong Chian Fellowship? Find out what our fellow, Ms Chin Hsuen Wei, has to say about the fellowship and how her research has benefitted from this opportunity.**

**NL: What spurred you to study Malayan Literature for your Phd?**

**Hsuen Wei:** At the very beginning, it was the awareness of my identity that elicited my research interest in Malayan history and culture, including literature. When I was about to graduate from National Taiwan University and head home from Taiwan, I had a chat with one of my professors about continuing study. She suggested that I could contribute to the land of my birth and would be living in if I were to further my studies. I was suddenly reminded of who I am through how people see me: I am Chinese, but not in China. This basically deposits my research interest in overseas Chinese history, culture and literature. Furthermore, the shifting academic paradigms over the decades confirm my resolution. Following the novel theoretical framework continuously generated in academia, for instance, Sinophone Studies, new research materials, perspectives and methodology have been applied to study world literature, including Singapore, Malaysia and/or Southeast Asia literature. Literature study now takes on a multifaceted approach, intersecting the fields of language, culture, history, ethnic studies, and area studies. Such an interdisciplinary approach extends the discourses, resources, communities, recognition and space of researching Malayan literature.

**NL: Could you share with us your personal research interest?**

**Hsuen Wei:** Besides literature, I am also interested in medical social history, material studies, print culture, and Hakka Studies. I am keen to explore the various forms of relationship between people with different identities, understanding how they communicate, express and construct their selves in everyday life experiences over time through different mediums, technologies, and institutions.

**NL: Could you tell us about your current research?**

**Hsuen Wei:** My current research seeks to reconstruct the consumption life and its revolution in early Singapore through the study of advertisements, one of the visual practices most common and familiar to the masses. Based on this principal research concern, I attempt to investigate whether there is any difference among consumers of multilingual and multiracial groups. After all, language and culture are the crucial vehicles upon which advertisement presents itself, circulates, and appeals. The behaviour of consumption reveals the social status and cultural identity of communities. This is a project involving the expertise of several fields comprising cultural and history studies as well as business and cultural history.



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**NL: How has the National Library, Singapore's collection helped you in your research?**

**Hsuen Wei:** The NewspaperSG and PublicationSG collections contain the essential primary texts for my research. These collections are rich and hold old multilingual newspapers and magazines not found elsewhere. I also access secondary sources found in the Rare Book Collection. As the books in this collection are mostly donated, the only inconvenience is the lack of a ready comprehensive catalogue and one must have some idea of what sort of materials to consult in advance before approaching the powerful online searching machines. Another invaluable resource is the professional staff at the Reference Library. They are competent and more than happy to advice on the accessible materials pertinent to my research topic or similar materials. Talking with them is an enlightened and productive experience as their sharing and assistance helps to save time and effort in obtaining even more useful and substantial materials.

**NL: Would you recommend this fellowship to your peers and why?**

**Hsuen Wei:** I would recommend the LCKRF to my peers or any serious researchers who are willing to devote themselves to producing local knowledge through discovery and research that draws on diverse materials. One condition of the fellowship is to share the research with communities within and outside academia. This is meaningful as it helps to popularize local knowledge and cultivates public interest in the heritage of the land.

**NL: What kind of impact do you hope your Fellowship will bring?**

**Hsuen Wei:** The National Library, Singapore creates an ideal knowledge space for Fellows, which facilitates the accomplishment of a variety of research. Such a knowledge practice of promoting academic research can be more widely spread as it reciprocally allows the library to be even more conscious of the value of varied materials and encourages material acquisition and collection expansion. I hope that the joining of Fellows with sundry academic backgrounds and research interests will help to: broaden the collection of the National Library, Singapore; enliven its research atmosphere; and enhance its standing as a local knowledge institution whose knowledge communities are extensive, robust and dynamic, similar to the National Taiwan Library, which not only excels at public service but is also a reputable academic hub.