T. Beng

Breaking tradition; Women stars of Bangsawan theatre

In: Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, Performing Arts in Southeast Asia 151 (1995),
no: 4, Leiden, 602-616

This PDF-file was downloaded from <http://www.kitlv-journals.nl>

TAN SOOI BENG

Breaking Tradition

Women Stars of *Bangsawan* Theatre

Women pop and rock artists such as Sheila Majid, Aishah, and Ella are well-known personalities in Malaysia today.¹ They have careers in the entertainment industry and have won many awards, produced solo albums, and represented Malaysia in various festivals overseas. While the lives and achievements of these women are reported daily in local newspapers and magazines, there has been a dearth of information concerning Malay women performers who came to prominence in cultural life for the first time through the popular form of Malay opera called *bangsawan* in the early twentieth century. These women were also professionals, were prominent household names in their time, and won numerous awards.

This article focuses on how the lives of women *bangsawan* performers specifically differed from the lives of ordinary women of their time and to what extent they gained a measure of autonomy. Based on personal interviews and early-twentieth-century newspaper reports, I discuss how *bangsawan* women were recruited, how they acquired proficiency in their art forms, how they were viewed by the religious and socially conservative sectors of Malayan society, and their relationship with male co-performers.

Stars in commercial theatre

Bangsawan was the first popular urban commercial theatre form in Malaysia. It was one of the new cultural forms that emerged in response to rapid social, economic, and political changes caused by British colonial expansion into Malaya in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The first indigenous theatre form in Malaya to be modelled along Western lines, *bangsawan* engendered the development of the first Malay orchestra and the first Malay popular music in the country. As commercial theatre, *bangsawan* was heterogeneous, innovative, and constantly adapting to new situations and new audiences (Tan 1993). Unlike traditional theatre, which was performed to propitiate spirits, the function of *bangsawan* was to entertain, and to make money for its proprietors and performers. Performances were publicized through advertisements in newspapers and leaflets.

¹ I would like to thank Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang, and the Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology in Leiden, for grants which enabled me to present this paper at the workshop on 'Performing Arts in Southeast Asia', Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology, Leiden, 6-10 June 1994.

Being commercial theatre, *bangsawan* depicted its performers not just as actors and actresses but as stars (*bintang*), that is, as professionals who worked as entertainers. Unlike performers of the traditional theatre, who usually had other sources of income such as farming, acting was a full-time occupation for the *bangsawan* stars. It was the stars that established a company's reputation.

Through *bangsawan*, women performers became stars. The heroine (*sri panggung*) was a key member of the troupe; she was one of its stars. Outstanding stars won awards. The *Straits Echo* (9 November 1932) reported that 'Mr. Lim Choon Sim [...] awarded a gold medal to Miss Jacoba [of the Rose Opera] for being the best Kerncong singer he had ever come across. Miss Jacoba was also given a medal by the management of the park.'

Popular *bangsawan* artists such as Miss Tijah, Miss Salmah, Miss Maimoon, Miss Norlia, and Miss Jacoba were sought after by recording companies such as His Master's Voice, Beka, Columbia, Pathe, Odeon, and Parlophone. Recordings of their songs were advertised in local newspapers. These stars became household names. They were not simply wives or mothers of someone but were seen as having individual personalities of their own.

Through *bangsawan*, women were afforded the unprecedented opportunity for self-expression in public.² In contrast, in Malay village society of the early twentieth century, the female child was brought up to be a good daughter, wife, and mother.

This orientation was reinforced through formal education teaching girls sewing, basketry, matting, weaving, cooking, and dressmaking (Manderson 1980:103-5). A young woman's movements outside the home were limited. She had to assist in the cooking and washing, take care of her younger brothers and sisters, and help in the rice fields (Manderson 1980:15-6). Although women *bangsawan* performers still cooked, sewed, and took care of the children during the day, their activities were not at all limited to household chores and raising children. As veteran actress Menah Yem put it, 'During the day, I cooked, washed clothes, and took care of the children. At night, I was free to work (*cari duit*).'

Recruitment of stars

Bangsawan stars were recruited at a young age. For instance, the Kinta Opera Co. boasted of its Miss Echon, a 'nine-year-old actress' who sang English songs (*Straits Echo*, 3 January 1925), while Genani Star Opera had its 'Baby Star Miss Nani' (*Straits Echo*, 7 November 1925).

² Although women danced the leading roles in *makyong* theatre, this was an exception. In outlook *makyong* actresses were not entrepreneurial. *Makyong* was a regional art form and was often performed for spiritual purposes (Ghulam 1976:51, 92-3).

Jula Juli Bintang Tiga on a swan

What attracted young girls to join a *bangsawan* troupe? The stories related to me told of motives not greatly different from those of young women aspiring to be actresses in the film world of today. All who joined *bangsawan* were tempted by the touring companies' promise of glamour, stardom, and fame. Many came from poor or broken homes; they saw *bangsawan* as a way to earn a living (*cari makan*).

Ainon Chik, a 77-year-old³ veteran *sri panggung*, recalled that she followed her sister and brother-in-law in joining Genani Star Opera after the death of both her parents in Singapore. The sisters had no relatives to turn to. Ainon's mother was a Sarawakian Chinese, while her father was a Bugis who had migrated to Sarawak. Ainon's parents eloped to Singapore because her grandparents did not approve of the mixed marriage. Ainon was eight years old when her parents died. 'My brother-in-law could earn twice as much as an electrician and stage hand in *bangsawan* than as an electrician in a private firm,' she said.

Menah Yem, a well-known dancer and *sri panggung* of her time, started performing in *bangsawan* at the age of nine, more than eighty years ago. Menah Yem's mother joined the City Opera (owned by Ong Peng Hock) after she separated from her husband. So Menah grew up with *bangsawan* performers as her larger family. She sang in the chorus and replaced other, more experienced child actors when they fell ill.

The 57-year-old Saniah, also known as Sri Kandi on the *bangsawan* stage, claimed she was left to fend for herself at the tender age of seven. Both her parents were *bangsawan* performers and she was sent as a baby to her grandmother in Perak. After her grandmother passed away, Saniah was taken in by the Wayang Bintang Timor. She played children's parts in the plays and sang as a chorus girl during the extra turns.

Other performers grew up in the midst of *bangsawan* activity. Their parents were performers or proprietors of famous *bangsawan* companies. Minah Alias, a former heroine in her late sixties, comes from a family of actors and performers. Her grandfather was a shadow puppeteer in Java. Her father, Nani bin Haji Omar, started off as a *dalang* and an actor in the *wayang wong (orang)*, but joined the opera upon the invitation of a Chinese opera owner. Nani soon became a hero and a star in *bangsawan* and was sought after by women of all ethnic backgrounds. Minah's mother, Catharine de Brish, a foreigner, was one of these women. After watching Nani's performance, Catharine de Brish fell in love with him, attending his performances every night, making eyes at Nani, and throwing flowers to him after the performance. When Catharine's brother forbade her to see Nani, she fell ill. Nani and Catharine finally got married and she joined *bangsawan*. It was inevitable that Minah, coming from such a family, would take up acting as well.

³ Ages of personalities referred to are as at the time of writing in 1995.

Chorus girls giving an extra turn

At an early age, girls who joined *bangsawan* were already different from others of the same age who lived in the protected environment of the village. They were trained to become stars. Coming from poor broken homes or families of *bangsawan* performers, they were already earning a living and learning to be financially independent at the age of seven or eight. They also began to develop their own personalities at a tender age.

Learning to be stars: the socialization process

The apprentice learnt that to make it in the world of *bangsawan*, she had to win recognition as a star. If she succeeded, the rewards were substantial. Stars earned more money, and were often presented with gifts or large tips by wealthy admirers. It was commonly reported that individuals in the audience would fall in love with the performers and shower gifts on them. 'Lovesick youths' were known to 'pass their photographs up to their favourite actress' and to throw 'a good deal of money [...] to her on stage' (*Malacca Guardian*, 9 May 1932). If the performers were good, special honorary titles were bestowed upon them. Menah Yem was known as the 'Queen of Dance'; Aion Chik, the 'Greta Garbo of Malaya'; and Purita Clarino, the 'Jazz Queen'.

Initially newcomers played small, undemanding roles. Young children were given children's parts or other minor roles. Minah Alias clearly remembered her less-than-spectacular debut as an actress:

'It was a performance staged by Genani Star Opera, owned by Tan Kam Choon and managed by my father, Nani. I was eight years old and was very excited when I was called upon to replace Aion Chik, who was sick. I was to be a "jungle child" in the play "Ginufifa". To my dismay, the leaves with which I was covered were full of ants. I was feeling so itchy that I forgot my part. Instead of pulling the antelope's tail, I pulled his horns. The head came off and I fell.' (*Star*, 15 December 1984.)

If the young recruits showed ability, they were allowed to sing or dance in the extra turns. Minah Alias was praised for her efforts in the turns at a performance in 1925 (*Times of Malaya*, 13 October 1925):

'Miss Nani [Minah Alias], the four-year-old daughter of the stage director [Nani], was the first to give an extra turn. Her song and dance were charmingly performed. Later she gave another turn during which she forgot a part of the words but achieved a triumph with her winsome smile.'

Aion Chik also started her career performing as a singer and dancer in the extra turns. She recalled singing songs like 'I wanna go where you go' and 'You were meant for me'. She also acted children's parts in such stories as 'Musalma' and 'Jambatan Patah'.

To make a name for themselves, apprentices had to persevere, observe, learn from the wings every night, and strive to become stars. They had to

diversify their interests and familiarize themselves with all the roles, songs, and dances. According to Aion Chik, she used to sit at one side and observe the more experienced performers. During the day, she studied Malay, Western, Chinese, Hindustani, and Arabic songs, Malay dance and *kuntau* (Chinese art of self-defence using sticks), and *adat istiadat* (rituals) of the Malay court from the other performers. 'We also watched Hindustani movies, observed and imitated the dancing and singing,' Saniah added.

Minah Alias and Saniah made clear that *bangsawan* roles were committed to memory, there being no scripts to study. Before any new or major play was performed, the director would call all the actors and actresses together, narrate the story to the cast, and then assign roles. It was left to the performers to improvise the dialogue and the accompanying actions, relying only on their ingenuity (*kebijaksanaan*). Through these improvisations, women performers learnt to be more articulate. Women actresses also earned their reputation through 'excellent stage-craft, lovely songs, and clever dialogues' (*Straits Echo*, 24 May 1934).

Strict discipline was the rule. Typically, after lunch the apprentices would practise dancing and singing with the leading actors and actresses till about 5 o'clock. After a short rest, a bath, and a meal, they would prepare for the evening's performance.

Some of the more fortunate or promising ones were sent to Indonesia for their apprenticeship. Minah Alias, for example, lived in Java and studied dance, music, and acting with the famous Miss Riboet for ten years. The training was demanding and rigorous. Waking up at five in the morning to jog, she also was required to attend to some household chores. At 1 o'clock, the practice sessions began at which Minah Alias learnt Balinese dances, folk dances, and dances of the *kraton* (palace). At night, she performed with the Miss Riboet Orient Opera.

For the child apprentice, formal schooling was an irregular matter. As the troupes were always on the move, there was scarcely any opportunity for the children to register at school. It was pointless, anyway, for in a matter of weeks they would move to another town.

Female apprentices were indeed different from ordinary village girls who helped in the house and sometimes went to school. Instead, *bangsawan* apprentices spent their days practising singing and dancing and learnt how to act different women's roles. At night, they were called upon to dress up, sing, and act. They went through a different socialization process from ordinary girls. *Bangsawan* was both school and life for those who came to it as children and young women.

Bangsawan women were in a sense freed from the constraints imposed on the daily life of other Malay women, but they were confined by a new set of rules. Besides attending to household chores, they had to adhere to strict discipline and rigorous training. Nonetheless, *bangsawan* women had more avenues for self-expression than village women. They were

constantly learning new songs, new languages, improvising new dances, mixing with other ethnic groups, and travelling throughout the peninsula and neighbouring countries. All this opened their minds.

Maintaining star status: adaptability and creativity

It was no easy matter to maintain star status in *bangsawan* theatre. Stars were forced into competition and rivalry. Minah Alias remembered her mother telling her, 'If you want to be good, you must have the ambition to be better than your friends.'

In order to compete, stars had to keep up with the changing tastes of audiences. Menah Yem, known to her admirers as the 'Queen of Dance', learnt the latest vaudeville dances from dancers who were brought over from the Philippines, and she and her Filipino dance partner, Henry, would study dances like the rumba and samba by watching screenings of foreign films, later including these in their acts. Demonstrating the rumba to me, Menah Yem remembered with pride that she and her partner were up-to-date in their knowledge of dances, executing them faithfully. 'As a result, we were so popular that if we did not appear at least three times in a performance, the audience would shout *pendek-panjang, pendek-panjang* (short-tall, short-tall).' (This referred to the fact that Henry, her partner, was tall and she was short.)

Performers who had acquired star status felt that they owed it to themselves to constantly improve their skills in singing, dancing, and the art of self-defence. Minah Alias recalled studying *kuntau* from a Chinese opera actress even after becoming a star, and, in return, she taught *silat* to the opera actress.

As professional actresses, *bangsawan* performers had to learn to forget themselves on stage. Performers had to cry during sad scenes, Menah Yem said, and if real tears did not flow, they had to dab oil on their faces. Menah Yem herself was particularly convincing in the role of a wicked step-mother: 'Once, someone in the audience became so worked up when I beat my step-daughter with a broom and broke a plate on her head that she shouted, "Are you an animal?"'

Women performers had to learn songs and dances of different ethnic origins in order to offer an interesting and appealing heterogeneity of entertainment to their heterogeneous audiences. The following advertisement illustrates the variety of songs and dances presented at just one night's performance. New songs were continually introduced.

'The Kinta Opera Co.:

Miss Meda, our famous Prima Donna, will sing Che Mamat War Wear and Arab song (Yamallah)

Miss Anong, our beautiful actress the Nightingale of the Opera World, will sing nightly the popular Bercherai Kasih and the latest Egyptian song and dance.

Mak Menah Yem singing

Miss Soadah will sing Mak Enang Sayang and the latest best songs. Miss Rowna will sing new Slendang Mayang and the latest Siamese dance.

Our famous actresses, Miss Meda, Miss Chik, and Miss Itam, will dance the latest (Japanese) Kapary dance.

Our latest Spanish dance with handling umbrellas and the latest Gambus, Miss Meda, Miss Anong, Miss Soadah and Miss Itam' (*Straits Echo*, 27 January 1925).

Women in *bangsawan* also had to fascinate the audience with novelty acts and different spectacular scenic effects and settings for each performance. Actresses were reported to make 'torn-up paper turn into flames' and produce 'silk handkerchiefs from their empty fingers' (*Straits Echo*, 8 October 1906). On one occasion Dean's Opera staged a 'wonderful display of feats and strength' by a famous Indian stage and film actress, Miss Anarkali. She 'support[ed] a big stone on her chest and allow[ed] another stone to be broken on top' (*Straits Echo*, 26 November 1932). Nooran Opera showed 'a woman floating in the air' during one of its performances (*Straits Echo*, 21 July 1933).

Unlike other women of their time, in order to maintain star status, *bangsawan* women were competitive. They tried to be better than other actresses by constantly exposing themselves to new dances and songs of various ethnic origins, learning these dances and songs quickly, developing their stage roles, improvising dialogues, and introducing novelty acts and tricks into their performances.

Unlike village women, *bangsawan* actresses acquired knowledge of a wider world as they constantly interacted with performers of different nationalities such as Filipinos, Indonesians, Eurasians, Chinese, Indians, and Arabs who were also employed in *bangsawan* troupes. Malay women also watched foreign films and theatrical performances constantly, so that they could learn and adapt their dances, songs, novelty acts, and tricks.

Exposure to foreign performers and performances helped *bangsawan* women to be more multi-racial in their approach. As they actively learnt from performers of other ethnic backgrounds and were more appreciative of non-Malay cultures, they promoted the interaction of foreign and indigenous music and dance in *bangsawan*.

Prejudices offstage

Women in *bangsawan* were viewed by some sectors of Malayan society, especially the religious and socially conservative sectors, as women of loose morals. They bore the stigma of women who dressed up and paraded on stage to be ogled by men, who worked at night, and who seemed to be changing spouses ever so often. Many village elders accused *bangsawan* women of impiety, of not praying, and of not reading the Koran.

Because of frequent scandals, prejudices against actresses remained in certain circles. According to the veteran actor Pak Suki, his wife Saadiah (a

bangsawan heroine) gained a measure of notoriety by running away with a member of the audience. At Batu Pahat, one important local official apparently adored Saadiah so much that he wanted to see her on stage all the time. 'When I appeared, he tried to chase me off the stage and took a shot at me with his pistol,' Suki said. Suki had to flee to Singapore where he joined the Genani Star Opera.

Another performer, Miss Jahara, was taken to court as she did not return jewellery and costumes which she had borrowed from Wayang Comedy India Ratoe before she joined Wayang Kassim. It was reported that Miss Jahara

'was charged at the instance of Syed Ali with criminal Breach of Trust in respect of one American gold coin with silver chain attached and two gowns amounting altogether to \$35.60. [...] The defendant was employed in the company at the salary of \$40 a month. Upon joining she received an advance of \$120 which she agreed to pay off by monthly instalments of \$6.' (*Straits Echo*, 4 December 1906.)

To what extent women performers were loose women and impious Muslims is not clear. The performers themselves claimed that these social stereotypes were not true. In fact, they adhered to strict discipline. Women stars had to be aware of their conduct and personal behaviour on stage and off. Their personal freedom was limited by the many rules they had to follow. Performers could not go in and out of the house they shared without the permission of the manager. They were not allowed to gamble or drink liquor (Edrus 1960:65). They could not meet men backstage. Saniah asserted that they prayed five times a day. 'There was a religious teacher living with us. Our children studied the Koran when they were not acting. Those who were good entered Koran reading competitions.'

The point I wish to make here is that *bangsawan* women created controversy because they were different from other women. The misconduct of actresses was more noticeable than that of women in other professions. To a certain extent, their lives were public property and their shortcomings were put on public display.

Community integration: interdependence of women and men performers

Mutual help and fellow-feeling were strong among female and male performers because they were away from their families back in the village. Having to make long and sometimes hazardous journeys by sea also brought them close to each other. Among themselves a camaraderie was fostered as they were dependent on one another for survival.

Not surprisingly, therefore, *bangsawan* performers came to regard their own troupe as a substitute family. Living in a *rumah kongsi* (shared house), they cooked and ate together and shared food, water, and facilities. They addressed each other as *mak* (mother), *pak* (father), *kak* (sister), *abang* (brother), or *adik* (younger brother or sister), as they would in

their village. They gave each other nicknames which captured the individual's particular characteristics. Menah Yem was nicknamed 'Menah Ketok' (Short Menah) because she was short. Alias Manan was called 'Cikgu' (Teacher) because he used to teach the children in the troupe to read.

New recruits were adopted as *anak angkat* (adopted children). The practice of adoptive parenthood ensured that the children were taken care of; this was important because many of the recruits were young and living away from their immediate families and village for the first time. Aion Chik recalled fondly that her adopted father (who happened to be Minah Alias's real father) treated her like his own daughter. Very often, the manager/director was both teacher and father to the children.

The performers comforted each other in times of trouble, especially when there were deaths. The death rate among babies was particularly high. This was because there was often no proper medication available, especially during long tours overseas. In addition, it was common for women to perform right till the day they gave birth – with deleterious consequences for the health of their babies. Aion Chik, for instance, had sixteen children, eight of whom died in infancy. Saniah had twelve children, four of whom died.

Male performers also helped women actresses who were harassed by Japanese officials during the Japanese occupation of the Malay Peninsula in 1942. For instance, while Minah Alias was performing with the Grand Nooran Opera, she was saved from the advances of a Japanese official by another *bangsawan* performer, Alias Manan. Ever since that incident, Alias walked with a limp as his leg was injured during the struggle with the Japanese official. Minah and Alias were married in 1942.

Performers endured hardships together. Living conditions were makeshift. 'When the rain came, the roof would leak, the stage would leak, we had to run hither and thither. Still, we were satisfied with our lives,' Minah Alias and Aion Chik said. For Menah Yem, the memories of her early years are fond ones. It was, she recalled, 'enjoyable' (*seronok*), a time when she was happy. 'We were like one big happy family.'

Women performers could always rely on the *bangsawan* community for emotional and financial support should the men in their lives desert them or die. Among themselves there was no prejudice against divorcees. In fact, women themselves were in a position to initiate divorce or separation. According to Aion Chik, if a relationship soured the couple usually separated by mutual agreement.

Unlike other women of the times, *bangsawan* women had a community of performers to turn to in times of trouble. Members of this community took care of each other. A camaraderie developed. The troupe became a substitute family for members who were away from their real families.

It must be stressed that although camaraderie existed, male–female relationships among the members of the troupe were not necessarily equal.

Women still performed the housework and took care of the children in the *rumah kongsi*. Their movement outside the *rumah kongsi* was restricted.

Conclusion

The stories of their lives show that *bangsawan* women broke from tradition and foregrounded themselves in early-twentieth-century Malayan society. It can be claimed that *bangsawan* women had a career as we understand it today. Women stars were professionals who worked solely as entertainers; were known for the specific roles in which they specialized; were constantly learning new songs and dances of different ethnic origins; were entrepreneurial and competitive in their outlook; and were sensitive to the changing tastes of employers and audiences.

Bangsawan women created an alternative lifestyle. They were no longer associated with daily life in the village. They had a different routine: household chores in the morning, dancing and singing practices in the afternoon, and performances at night. Although they were looked upon with suspicion by some, they were licensed to act in ways normally prohibited for women, such as parading on stage and allowing men to cast amorous glances and whistle at them. Women in *bangsawan* travelled constantly, and learnt from and mixed with performers of different ethnic origins. Through exposure to foreign cultures, they gained knowledge of a wider world and promoted the interaction of various cultures in *bangsawan*.

Did *bangsawan* women gain some measure of autonomy? It cannot be denied that women performers still operated within a male-controlled framework. *Bangsawan* directors/managers who were mainly men chose and conceptualized the plays. Women were still responsible for child care, cooking, and cleaning in the *rumah kongsi*. They were not free to go in and out of the *rumah kongsi* without the permission of the director/manager.

Nevertheless, women performers enjoyed a degree of autonomy within the *bangsawan* community. Even though plays were conceptualized by male directors, women performers participated in the process of putting together productions. Women were called upon to improvise dialogues in plays, to organize make-up and costumes, to choreograph dances, to sing, and to train less experienced dancers and singers.

Women in *bangsawan* also developed personalities of their own and were known by their own stage names rather than as wives of village men. They were identified by the specific roles in which they specialized. Honorary titles such as Queen of Dance or Jazz Queen were given to some. Others were known for their ability to perform tricks of illusion on stage.

Women performers had a greater measure of choice and control over their own lives compared to other village women. They had a choice to work outside the family home. Many performed in *bangsawan* because they gained satisfaction from acting and from the limelight they received. They had the opportunity to develop skills in singing and dancing and

liked the challenge of expanding their knowledge and competing with other performers. Glamorous star actresses commanded the adulation of audiences as well as high performance fees.

Additionally, women in *bangsawan* could choose their own marriage partners. *Bangsawan* actresses often married fellow *bangsawan* actors or musicians. Marriage to performers gave legitimacy to a career as a performer and allowed women to continue performing after marriage.

Women performers were also in a position to initiate divorce or separation if their marriages did not work out. Earning their own wage enabled them to support themselves and their children financially. Unlike village women, they were not totally dependent on their husbands for money to run the household.

Bangsawan women were also adept at changing with the times, and in so doing they continued to maintain their autonomy and control over their own lives. During the Japanese occupation of Malaya, women performers adapted to new circumstances. They learnt new Japanese songs and dances, assumed Japanese names, and performed for the Japanese to earn food and obtain medicine.

As *bangsawan* declined in the 1950s, *bangsawan* performers turned to the film industry. *Bangsawan* actresses became heroines in films, while *bangsawan* dancers were employed as choreographers. Performers who could not make it in the film industry turned to other forms of entertainment, such as dancing and singing in a *joget moden* troupe.

REFERENCES

- Edrus, A.H., 1960, *Persuratan melayu; Drama dan perkembangan Bahasa Melayu*, Singapore: Qalam Printers.
 Ghulam Sarwar, 1976, *Kelantan Mak Yong dance theatre; A study of performance structure*. [PhD thesis, University of Hawaii.]
 Manderson, Lenore, 1980, *Women, politics and change; The Kaum Ibu UMNO Malaysia, 1945-1972*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
 Tan Sooi Beng, 1993, *Bangsawan; A social and stylistic history of popular Malay opera*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.

NEWSPAPERS

- Malacca Guardian* 1932
Straits Echo 1906, 1925, 1932, 1933, 1934
Star 1984
Times of Malaya 1925

INTERVIEWS

- Mak Ainon Chik (born c. 1918, *bangsawan* heroine, also known as 'Greta Garbo of Malaya'), Kuala Lumpur, 15 April 1986, 26 June 1986.
 Mak Menah Yem (born c. 1915, *bangsawan* heroine, also known as 'Queen of Dance', married to the deceased proprietor of the Grand Nooran Opera, Pak Yem), Kuala Lumpur, 16 April 1986.

Mak Minah Alias (born c. 1921, *bangsawan* heroine, married to Pak Alias), Penang, 27 July 1986.

Mak Saniah or Sri Kandi (born 1938, *bangsawan* heroine), Kuala Lumpur, 21 February 1986.